Teaching at the Top of the World
An Autobiographical Inquiry

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to the required standards

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For YoAnne,
My kindred spirit

Abstract

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2001

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This autobiographical narrative relates the experiences of one person who was a teaching principal in a small, K-12 school in an isolated Inuit community in Canada's High Arctic during the 4-year period of 1995-1999. It is the telling of a story followed by a critical examination and analysis of the lived experience that is presented in this thesis.

After a brief discussion on the research methodology used, this narrative is divided into three main sections. Part 1 is the personal account of the author's arrival and subsequent experiences as a teacher, principal and community member in Ausuittuq, Nunavut. A detailed description of the community and full school program is offered. Part 2 explores the varied strategies and teaching methodologies implemented at Aqiatusuk School over the 4-year period. The reasons for choosing these particular strategies and interventions are discussed. Attention is given to the themes of language and culture, artistic expression, and school-community partnerships. The implications for successful teaching in this unique, cross-cultural environment are explored. An analysis of the school program within the Inuit cultural context is given throughout the chapters of Part 2. Part 3 serves as the "conclusions" section to the thesis. It summarizes some possible answers to the question of what factors promote student success in a

small, K-12 Inuit community school. Some of the challenges faced by northern educators are also explored. Included are further discussions on the implications for successful teaching, as introduced in Part 2. An exploration of the author's beliefs and values as they pertain to education is offered in light of her experiences in the North. Throughout Part 3, the scope of the thesis is broadened and an attempt is made to suggest ways in which northern teaching philosophies and methods may be beneficial to other schools, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, throughout the globe.

Preface

For years I have wanted to tell the story of my experiences teaching Inuit in Canada's Arctic. I envisioned a very personal story. I imagined the first line to read something like, "Let me tell you about my school." Now that I have completed my narrative, I am filled with conflicting emotions. I am relieved that the hard work is over, yet I am also sad because the work is done. I feel a certain amount of pride in accomplishment yet I also know that there is so much more to say. The writing of this story became my life for many months. I rose each morning knowing that I would be visiting old friends and familiar places with every word that made the page. I became completely immersed in the world of my writing. In a sense, I was as close to my students and their families throughout the writing of this thesis as I was when I actually lived within the community in the High Arctic. I have lost count of the number of times I wished I could simply hop on a plane and visit those very special people I was writing about. And now I must let these pages go, so that others may read the story that I have been longing to tell for so long.

Following the Overview and Research Methodology section, this autobiographical inquiry is separated into three distinct parts. Each part is full of personal details of teaching and of life in a small northern community. As I began the writing all those months ago, I believed that each successive part of the thesis would become easier. In fact, it became more difficult. Part 1, the personal account of my arrival and subsequent 4 years of teaching and of being a school principal in Ausuittuq, was a pleasure to write. I relived each moment as the words were put to paper. Although it was more difficult and time-consuming, the discussion of the emerging themes in Part

2 presented few problems. It was the critical reflection and analysis of my experiences in Part 3 that posed the most difficulty. In hindsight this seems perfectly logical, yet at the outset I honestly thought that the more I wrote, the easier it would get. Needless to say, it is now complete.

After going through the pages of this narrative, I would hope that readers have a fairly realistic picture of teaching Inuit students in an isolated northern community. I talk about the highs and lows, the successes and challenges, but mostly I talk about the students and their lives. I hope that the reader comes to understand that in order to be a successful northern teacher, you must enter into the lives of your students in very significant ways. I have attempted to paint as true a picture as possible, although one completely from my own personal perspective.

Now, let me tell you about my school.

Acknowledgements

Many people assisted in the writing of this thesis. First and foremost, I thank YoAnne, my constant companion of over 17 years. We traveled north together in 1989 and experienced a decade of living and teaching in extraordinary circumstances. Together, we experienced the awe and wonder of the land and its people. We shared in all of the successes and challenges I speak of within the pages of this text. We laughed and cried, we encouraged each another in difficult times. Her support over the last 2 years in particular as I undertook my Master of Education degree is greatly appreciated. YoAnne's contribution to this thesis is immeasurable.

I am in debt to all of the Inuit, young and old, that I have had the privilege to meet over the past 10 years. The kindness and warmth of friendship that I experienced from so many people along the way is truly remarkable. I learned so much from so many individuals. I thank the elders who helped me understand their world through their wisdom and unique perspective—Rynee, Abraham, Annie, Tookilkee, and Martha in particular. I benefited from the insights of many others over the years. Thank you to Seeglook, Jaypatee, Anne, Leah, and Meeka. I owe much to my teaching colleagues—Mary, Mimi, Jane, Peepeelee, Minnie, Andrea, Tammy, Krista, Cory, Vincent, Stephen, and Harry—I am in debt to them all for making my job that much easier.

Although I would like to, I cannot possibly name all of my students in the North. Yet, they are the reason I stayed in the Arctic as long as I did. Each and every one of them contributed to my understanding of what teaching and learning is all about. I would however like to acknowledge two of my former students, Russell and Gail, who truly impressed and inspired me. They continue to do so.

This thesis would not be possible without the help of the local District Education Authority (DEA) and the then Baffin Divisional Education Council (BDEC). Thanks to Larry, Lydia, Liza, and Marty for providing support and leadership as DEA Chairpersons over the years. I would also like to acknowledge Cathy, Steve, and Greg at the BDEC for their invaluable direction.

Fiona is one of those people who keeps popping up in my life. She was a Supervisor of Schools in the Baffin when I first moved to the North. We kept in touch over the years, even after she moved to Nunavut Arctic College and then the Department of Education in Yellowknife. And, in a strange twist of fate, Fiona is now my thesis advisor at UPEI. Fiona is also a friend. Thank you for your patience and tremendous support as I struggled through the writing of this story.

Anne-Louise is a very special person to me. She is not only my mentor, she is a dear friend. Anne-Louise helped me to find my voice and to be a better writer. Without her support and encouragement, I doubt that this story would have been told in any interesting way at all.

Finally, I thank my parents for a wonderful upbringing and for the opportunities they have provided for me in my life. Without their love and confidence in my abilities, I would not have been able to live the life I feel I have been so privileged to lead. Thanks Mum and Dad, the adventure continues!

Teaching at the Top of the World
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Overview and Research Methodology

Overview

This autobiographical narrative relates to my experience of teaching in a small, K-12 school in an isolated Inuit community. I want the information presented to unfold as a story, a written narrative, of the development of this school throughout the 4-year period (1995-1999) in which I was a teacher and then a teaching principal. This narrative is written from a first person perspective, from the perspective of a non-Inuit woman living amongst mostly Inuit people, and one who taught many Inuit children over a period of 10 years within the Baffin region of Canada's Eastern Arctic. My own interpretation and critical examination of the experience I lived as a teacher and principal in Ausuittuq, and my own understanding of those pedagogical experiences are what I hope to relate in this interpretive narrative. I believe northern educators, Inuit and non-Inuit alike, need to tell and share their stories. They need to see what happens in other isolated communities similar to their own. They need to know what works, what doesn't, and what may be possible. Although I tell this story from my own particular perspective, my own lived experience, it is one that I believe is of interest to other northern educators, as well as any teacher of Aboriginal children, or any other minority cultural group, anywhere in the world.

I have divided this thesis into three sections. Part 1 is a personal account of my arrival and subsequent experiences as a teacher, principal and community member in Ausuittuq, Nunavut. Part 2 explores the strategies and teaching methodologies implemented at Aqiatusuk School over a 4 year period. The reasons for choosing these particular strategies and interventions are discussed. The implications for successful

teaching in this unique, cross-cultural environment are also explored. An analysis of the school program within the Inuit cultural context is given throughout the chapters of Part 2. Part 3 serves as a broad "conclusions" section to the thesis. It summarizes some possible answers to the question of what factors promote student success in a small, K-12 Inuit community school. Included are further discussions on the implications for successful teaching, as introduced in Part 2. An exploration of my own beliefs and values as they pertain to education is offered in light of my experiences in the North. Throughout Part 3, I expand the scope of this thesis and attempt to suggest ways in which northern teaching philosophies and methods may be beneficial to other schools throughout the globe.

Significance of Study

This is a significant study for many reasons. With few exceptions, very little research has been carried out in educational settings within the Inuit context, therefore, any research in education in Nunavut can be considered exploratory. I was extremely thankful for the few writings by Nunavut educators that I was able to access, in particular Joanne Tompkins (1998) and Fiona O'Donoghue (1998). I believe that more northern educators need to be provided with opportunities to share their experiences by telling their school stories. Many will benefit, most importantly, the students in northern schools. Our stories provide narratives that others can read and our learning provides insight into best practices in teaching and learning in the North.

This research is related to current social issues facing many Aboriginal communities across the continent. Exponential social change has contributed to many social difficulties. Loss of pride in cultural heritage, loss of language and loss of control

over their lives have all added to the social decline of many communities. Any research that delves into the factors that promote success within the Inuit educational setting will be welcomed by leaders in Aboriginal communities throughout the world. This research is also related to a current political reality. The newest of Canada's three territories, Nunavut, represents political achievement for the Inuit of the eastern Arctic. Self-government, as a result of an 85% Inuit majority in Nunavut, means that the public school programs will need to be keenly aware of what supports a successful experience for students in Nunavut schools. There is a heightened desire for success as a new society is built—high school graduates are desperately needed. Further programs will need to be developed to ensure success in the school curriculum.

This research could add to and further develop knowledge of culturally-relevant pedagogy and curriculum. Any best practices I identify, reflect upon and then analyze will be contributions to scholarship. This research will expand knowledge and provide an extension of understanding in many areas. The findings of this study will enable researchers to generalize to other Aboriginal, and even non-Aboriginal cultural groups. Perhaps a similar model for schooling in other parts of the country, or the world at large, might be found to be effective.

Research Methodology

My approach to research begins from the assumption that individuals construct their own reality within any given situation and time. These realities are subjective; they are socially and experientially constructed. Qualitative research is based on a naturalistic philosophy, which assumes that multiple realities are socially constructed through

individual and collective definitions of the given situation (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Even though a wide variety of qualitative research genres exist, Marshall & Rossman outline what they call common considerations and procedures for its conduct. They state that qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions. Marshall & Rossman go on to say that this interest takes qualitative researchers into natural settings rather than laboratories and fosters pragmatism in using multiple methods for exploring the topic of interest. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding a social phenomenon from the participants' perspectives—it allows the researcher to immerse herself in the situation. As an active member of the school and community, I was intimately involved in the phenomenon of which I write about in this paper. To a great extent I entered into the lives of my students and their families. Qualitative methods, and narrative inquiry in particular, allow for an emergent design as the research develops. I appreciate the way qualitative research allows for this flexibility.

My chosen genre of qualitative research, that of an autobiographical inquiry, relies on personal experience methods, the use of journals (in various forms), and the effective use of narrative. My research unfolds as a personal narrative drawn on lived experience. It is my own experience, my *personal practical knowledge* as a teacher of Inuit students, that serves as my main source of data. Connelly & Clandinin (1988) describe personal practical knowledge as a term that captures the idea of experience in a way that allows one to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is found in the person's past experience, in the person's

present mind and body, and in the person's future plans and actions. They add that personal practical knowledge is *seen* in our teaching practices. I find that the telling of a story is an interesting methodology in my particular case for many reasons, the main one being that Inuit culture itself draws on a very strong oral tradition of storytelling.

The personal interpretation of my lived experience and my own understanding of those pedagogical experiences, are what I attempt to relate in this autobiographical inquiry. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) believe that all research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) agree that many researchers now accept that they are not disinterested but are deeply invested in their studies, personally and profoundly. They add that who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does. Bullough & Pinnegar advance the idea of self-study research, autobiographical narrative being one form of self-study, as representing a trend away from modernism and its assumptions about legitimate knowledge and knowledge production toward broadening what counts as research. They concede that self-study as an area of research in teacher education is in its infancy. "Its endurability as a movement is grounded in the trustworthiness and meaningfulness of the findings both for informing practice to improve teacher education and also for moving the research conversation in teacher education forward... In self-studies conclusions are hard won, elusive, are generally more tentative than not. The aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). In interpreting my self-study, I provide a critique of the educational context, as well as the ongoing involvement of southern educators in Nunavut schools. In offering this critique and examining my own

involvement in the system, I hope to provide an example of southern educator involvement that contributed to the achievement of academic success, as well as helped in the development of strong cultural identity within Inuit students.

My research questions centre on the possibilities for delivering effective, high quality programs that are relevant and meaningful to Inuit students within the present day cultural context. What are the factors that would make a small K-12 Inuit school successful? How do we define *success*—does success have different meanings for a student, a parent, a community member, or a school official? Is it reasonable to expect that small, isolated Inuit communities scattered across Canada's Arctic landscape can offer comprehensive K-12 programs within their schools? In this autobiographical narrative, I examine and analyze specific factors in my own teaching experience that may contribute to the answering of these questions.

Limitations

This research is a personal narrative and subsequent analysis of personal and professional experiences, gathered over a specific period of time, by an educator in Inuit communities throughout the Canadian Arctic. The examination of this narrative is from the perspective of a non-Inuit woman who has worked, lived and adjusted reasonably well within an Inuit cultural environment. This study is very specific to my own personal experiences as a teacher and principal in Nunavut schools. Although qualitative studies are not statistically generalizable, the findings of this particular research provide a rich description of the successes and challenges of one long-term Nunavut teacher. I believe that the findings are transferable to other situations. It is my hope that this

inquiry will not only add to the current understanding of successful schools within the Inuit context, it will also add to the knowledge base of similarly situated Aboriginal or minority-culture schools throughout the country. I would argue that this research be applied to any small community school in many other parts of the globe.

Collecting, Managing, and Analyzing Data

I examine some of the factors that promote success for Inuit students in a small K-12 school. I reflect extensively on my time spent at Aqiatusuk School over the 4 year period described and critically analyze the educational environment that developed over that same period. My experience with Inuit children and Inuit culture extends beyond my time spent in Ausuittuq alone—having lived and taught in the Arctic for a decade, I also draw on reflections of experience in other northern communities.

I realized even before arriving in Ausuittuq, that I had the opportunity to be involved in something extraordinary. Knowing that I would eventually want to tell this story, I documented my time in the school and community in as much detail as I could. I kept a visual journal as my primary data—one that I knew would be of great benefit in recalling details over a long period of time. I took numerous photographs of children and adults involved in school and community activities. Videotaped classroom activities and community events added to the documentation of my visual journal. These photographic slides and videotapes were used throughout the time I spent in Ausuittuq to supplement teachers' lessons, as well as for community social evenings. The images themselves became part of the community and school program. Students and parents quickly became accustomed to seeing cameras off in the distance. Copies of the videotaped

activities were left at the school to serve as possible materials for any future teaching lessons. My role as a researcher in the school was very subtle in that, in the eyes of the people of Ausuittuq, I was seen primarily as an interested teacher, principal and community member.

In order to ensure a comprehensive narrative, I relied heavily on my visual journal to trigger memories of time spent with students in Ausuittuq. The images are of the community and of different classroom settings with various instructors within the school. Using the 1000 or more photographic slides and 30-plus hours of videotape, I was able to write a fairly detailed narrative of my experience. Images in my visual journal were viewed as many times as was necessary to describe the activities in writing, in much the same way as participant observation field notes are developed in other qualitative studies. In order to recollect as accurately as possible, I was able to re-live my experiences through the repeated viewing of these images. The written text of some of these select visuals was coded, and then categories, themes and patterns were generated through inductive analysis of the text. The reflections and issues that I chose to focus on were then critically analyzed. To supplement this data, I also undertook a document analysis, utilizing a variety of School, Board and Departmental level reports and papers to help guide my writing. The document analysis added significantly to the overall interpretation and helped to place my story within the larger Baffin schools and Nunavut context.

Personal writings (hand-written journals and letters) produced over the 4-year period added to the richness and detail of my recollections. The story that I present has

allowed me to reflect upon the myriad experiences lived as an active member of the school and community in Ausuittuq.

Trustworthiness

Personal practical knowledge is especially important in this type of research. I draw my qualifications in this regard from the fact that I have spent nearly 10 years working and living within an educational context in the cross-cultural setting of Inuit communities. In-depth descriptions of the setting, the students, staff and community members, the school program, the social context and the patterns of interactions amongst and between all participants help to ensure that this research is credible. The boundaries of the research have already been explicitly stated. The information-rich case presented provides for thick description of phenomena presented as data. The site selection and researcher's role in the study is further described in detail within the chapters of Part 1.

Reciprocity and Ethical Considerations

This research is an autobiographical narrative inquiry supported by document analysis, therefore, there was minimal impact on all persons involved. Names of people have been changed to prevent the identification of individuals. Written descriptions of photographs or videotape were also altered sufficiently to ensure the anonymity of the participants. No visuals are reproduced in this document.

In my opinion, numerous, truly innovative practices are being implemented in many northern classrooms. These communities are isolated in so many ways, and they

lack the opportunity to share their creative, often educationally progressive ideas with others. It is my intention to make this thesis available to as many northern educators as possible. I believe that the Inuit people in the communities I write about would be proud to know that their stories are being told, albeit from my own non-Inuit perspective. Perhaps in sharing the critical reflections of my experiences, something that I say may trigger a thought in the context of someone else's. For this reason, I have attempted to keep the language of the study clear, concise and understandable to non-researchers. It is my hope to have this thesis translated into Inuktitut (the language of Inuit) so that as many Northerners as possible may have access to the work, and in due time, add their own stories to the small, yet growing pool of educational research from Inuit schools.

Introduction to Part 1

The first part of this thesis is a personal account of my arrival in the community of Ausuittuq in the fall of 1995, and an overview of how the new secondary program was eventually integrated into the already existing K-9 program at Aqiatusuk School. I try to paint a dynamic and realistic picture of life in this Arctic school.

Chapter 1 serves as a detailed site description for this study. It also serves to introduce my role as a teacher and principal at Aqiatusuk School, and eventually as an active community member both inside and outside of the school. All names of students, their families and community members have been changed to protect their identity. I have chosen to mimic the accepted every day usage of first names only, regardless of age or social status. Almost all people in the north go by first names, except perhaps some elders who may prefer to use a surname only. Even in the vast majority of schools in the Baffin region, students call their teachers by their given name. This is not interpreted as disrespectful—it is in fact more culturally appropriate within Inuit communities. Likewise, location names such as Baffin Island, Ellesmere Island, Pangnirtung, and Devon Island are also shortened in every day speech to Baffin, Ellesmere, Pang, and Devon. I have used these familiar terms throughout this thesis.

In chapter 2, I offer a detailed description of the school and I begin to explore the overall school program throughout the seasons. I attempt to incorporate Inuit cultural information at many points along the way so that the reader may more completely understand and appreciate the context of this school within an isolated Inuit community.

Although this thesis looks at factors that promote student success at all levels in a K-12 Inuit community school, my teaching assignment, even after becoming principal

at Aqiatusuk School, centred on the new senior secondary class. In chapter 3, I introduce the then new grade 10 class and describe the high school program that developed over the next 4 years. Particular attention is given to the strategies that successfully integrated the senior students and program with the program already in place for the K-9 students.

Chapter 1 Getting There

It was the beginning of a new adventure. The view out the small oval windows of the twin otter was breath taking. I felt as if I were part of a television nature documentary—I had to keep reminding myself this was real. Although we were flying northeastward directly over Jones Sound, thousands of metres in the air, the mountains of Ellesmere Island to the north and Devon Island to the south seemed deceivingly close. I imagined climbing them, hiking across them. I was truly excited. The mountains were very obviously rugged in nature, yet there was also a suggestion of smoothness in their texture—an illusion produced over the great distance between the land and my seat on that small airplane. The land itself was a soft, charcoal gray and tan colour, striped with dark vertical trenches and spotted with patches of brilliant white. The tops of the mountains far off in the distance were completely capped with snow or ice. The mountains closest to the sea seemed flat-topped from our vantage high in the sky, with numerous crevasses sinking downward towards the ocean. The cliffs soared upwards from the water on both sides of the sound. Every now and then a long finger of the sea would cut into the mass of rock, forming a fiord that stretched out past our field of view. From the sky, the deep blue water punctuated with bright white polygons of floating ice resembled an unfinished mosaic waiting to be maneuvered in place. Sometimes the ice was so tightly packed, very little blue showed through. Other times the cobalt expanse of sea was only slightly dotted with a few white specks. I spent a lot of time looking down at the bits of ice, trying to appreciate the scale of size. Were they as small as a house or as big as a football field? It was impossible to tell. Perhaps one of those specks was a polar bear? I scanned the sea with great hope. From this distance, would I be able to see

a pod of beluga whales swimming just under the surface of the frigid, Arctic water? Every bit of ice became a possible bear or whale.

The weather could not have been more cooperative, an unusual occurrence for that time of the season, I would soon learn. The sky was as blue as it could be, with no hint of cloud anywhere. The only obstacles to my vision were the wings, propellers and wheels of the plane and the dirt on the outside of the windows. The sharpness of the image of the landscape was surprising—I imagined the clearest, crispest of air that surrounded us. The almost deafening sound of the twin engines only added to the overall experience. Imagine, I had to fly into my new home in a small propeller plane! There were only three other passengers on the flight from Resolute Bay that mid August day in 1995. Sitting to my right and marveling at everything for the first time with me was my longtime friend and companion YoAnne. She too had taken on a teaching assignment in this isolated High Arctic Inuit community on the south shore of Ellesmere Island. Two residents of that community were returning home, a young tanned hunter with a broad white smile, and a stocky, quiet elderly man with thick dark-rimmed glasses. Of course, my canine companion of 10 years, a Newfoundlander-Chow mix, was on that flight as well—he spent most of the time sleeping in his kennel on the floor. Packed tightly around Figgy Duff's cage was all of the flight cargo and luggage. It was strapped in place in the front section of the plane, directly between us and the cockpit.

It had been a long day of travel for the three of us. YoAnne, the dog and I had left Moncton, New Brunswick at 7 o'clock in the morning, heading east to Ottawa. After an hour's wait, and a change of airline, we flew another 3 hours or so north to Iqaluit, Baffin Island. There we waited and changed planes again before continuing on for the 2-

hour trip to the mining community of Nanisivik, at the north end of the island. We picked up more passengers and then made our way northwest to Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island. As with most dog owners who travel by air, we were always concerned that the dog would make each successive flight with us. Of course he did, but not without much worrying on our part.

We worried about other things too. Had all of our personal effects arrived in our new community already or would we have to wait for weeks before seeing our clothes, books, music and everything else of importance to us? We had brought enough gear with us in our luggage to live with, just in case. At least YoAnne and I knew the ropes—we had lived and taught in two other Baffin communities in the previous 6 years. We had a good idea of what to expect, but one of the accepted tenets of living in the Arctic is to expect the unexpected, to plan for everything possible. So, we had packed a frying pan, a saucepan, a coffee pot, and lots of soup, juice and rice. We knew we would be able to buy a few food items at the local cooperative but the variety, generally, was limited. And of course, who could afford it? Northern food prices are shocking. We certainly would not starve. We had enough clothes with us to last 2 or 3 weeks if necessary. I remembered having to wait 6 weeks for personal effects to arrive in Pangnirtung in the late eighties and prayed that we would not have to endure that again. It is difficult enough moving into a completely new environment—having your precious personal belongings with you helps a great deal. We had packed up our things in June and we were optimistic in hoping that 2 months was enough time for our belongings to arrive in Ausuittuq. The one item we desperately needed to arrive was our chest freezer. If the annual sealift carrying our frozen, dried and canned goods for the next 10 months

arrived in the community before our freezer did we would be in trouble! Where would we put all of our meat, vegetables and frozen juice, not to mention the chocolate eclairs, treats ordered to help get us through the dark period? We kept our fingers crossed.

Having repeated this trip into the Arctic several times already in previous Augusts, YoAnne and I felt like old hands traveling north each summer. But Ausuittuq was different. It is one of the northernmost communities in the world. Many people are curious about this small, isolated Inuit community, yet very few ever get the chance to see it firsthand. We were thrilled. We both loved the North, its land and its people in particular. And now, we had the opportunity to not just visit but to live and teach in Ausuittuq. It was a dream come true. We had turned down the opportunity to teach in Ausuittuq 6 years earlier so that we could teach in Pangnirtung instead. "Pang" is a much larger community with more teachers for collegial support—an important factor to consider for that first critical year of teaching in the remote Arctic. To be able to finally work at the school in Ausuittuq was something neither of us was willing to pass up. We had been teaching at Arnaqjuaq School in Hall Beach on the Melville Peninsula for the past year. YoAnne was the Program Support Teacher, an in-school consultant of sorts, and I was the Assistant Principal, who also taught all subjects to a split grade 10-11 class. We enjoyed the community very much, the people were very warm and welcoming. Although Hall Beach was not an easy teaching assignment, we truly felt connected to the students of the school and had intended to stay on for at least another year. It was, however, late in the winter that we caught wind of the need for teachers in Ausuittuq. The High Arctic school was beginning a senior secondary program and they needed someone to teach all subjects to their first ever high school class. There was no

doubt in my mind I had to be that person. And as luck would have it, the junior high class, a multilevel group of grades 6 through 9 students also required a teacher. So, both YoAnne and I headed further north again the following year.

The jet landed in Resolute Bay early in the afternoon. We knew that we had at least a couple of hours to wait before boarding Kenn Borek Air's bright orange-red and white twin otter bound for Ausuittuq. We took advantage of the time to stretch our legs and walk Figgy Duff outside of the small airport terminal building. Those few hours in Resolute helped us to ready ourselves for the last leg of the trip. Underfoot was nothing but rock and gravel. There was no evidence at all of any vegetation growing within sight of the airport. The air was cool and crisp yet no snow was to be seen. The land seemed stark and bare. People were very friendly, as in common in Arctic locales, and those in the know were more than willing to share their limited knowledge of Ausuittuq. Someone inside the airport directed us to a poster on the wall near the luggage belt. It was a silhouetted mountain against a light blue sky with a few buildings in the foreground. Ausuittuq, apparently. The man seemed bewildered at the fact that we were moving there. We thought it simply beautiful. We were even more anxious to arrive in our newly adopted home. The workers at the airport let us know that the weather was fine and the plane would be taking off at the usual time. As we boarded the plane, we knew that in one and a half hours we would be home. It's funny, we thought of Ausuittuq as home before we even arrived there. We sensed we would be happy there.

The first half of the flight out of Resolute takes passengers over the southeast corner of Cornwallis Island before crossing the channel to Devon Island. On those precious days where visibility is excellent, the ice cap that almost completely covers

Devon Island looks like a thick layer of smooth whipped cream covering the undulating tops of the mountains. There are no communities on Devon Island yet Inuit travel there to hunt and fish. It is a remarkable place. As the flight path of the twin otter continues to the other side of the island, and veers further eastward, you find yourself looking down at Jones Sound, the body of water separating Devon and Ellesmere Islands.

The young man behind me in the plane spoke English quite well and volunteered much information over my shoulder throughout the trip into Ausuittuq. Oolootie worked as an outfitter for hunters mainly in the spring and knew the land very well. The closer to Ausuittuq we got the more excited his comments became. He pointed here and there and named bits of land and water for us. In winter, he had snowmobiled back and forth between home and Resolute Bay many times. I found this to be incredible, although I am aware of the extraordinary distances Inuit travel without any apparent means of navigation. It is still remarkable to my non-Inuit mind set that someone can travel hundreds of kilometers by snowmobile without a map. Oolootie suddenly pointed down through the window at a tiny speck of white in the blue and told me that it was a boat. It took me a while to focus on the white wake behind the almost indiscernible watercraft. It was miniscule against the vast landscape of the sea and the mountains and the sky. I thought of the keen vision he must have to be able to see things in this open space. Without his help I would have assumed that white bit to be ice. As we neared Ausuittuq, the elder at the back of the plane began speaking to us as well. He had been quiet most of the way but we knew he was listening. He would smile at us periodically when our eyes met. With Oolootie's assistance, much of what Paniqpakutuk said was translated for us—he had been at a funeral of a dear friend in Resolute Bay and was very glad to be

heading home. He understood a lot of English but struggled when attempting to speak it. He too pointed out various landmarks, identifying them with their Inuktitut names. Throughout our 4-year stay in Ausuittuq we spoke with Oolootie and Paniqpakutuk on many occasions. We got to know them well. Unbeknownst to us at the time, Paniqpakutuk was a cultural instructor at our new school. It was nice that they were our first introductions to the people of the community.

I kept glancing at the view that I could steal through the cockpit window. I wanted to see the town off in the distance. It seemed to take forever to get there. Unfortunately, looking at my watch did not speed up time. We had begun our descent 30 minutes earlier and seemed to be gliding low over the water. The engines had quieted a bit. The tops of the mountains on the Ellesmere shore were now at eye level. The sea was like a mirror all around. Massive ice cakes floated silently on the water's surface. Paniqpakutuk spotted town first—he pointed through the left side windows of the plane and I quickly moved over to that side of the aircraft to catch a glimpse of the community far off in the distance, against a stunning backdrop of steep sided mountains. There were very few buildings, the town looked so tiny. As the plane continued in its descent, an imposing *qarqaq* was pointed out to us, the 500-metre mountain at the entrance of the fiord near the community. It was 9 kilometers from the old town site, across the fiord from the town's present location. Some pack ice had already made its way into the bay in front of the community. The plane seemed to be traveling closer and closer towards the mountain behind the tiny group of buildings. Just as I was beginning to wonder when exactly we would turn away from the mountain, the plane banked sharply to the left, turning a full 90 degrees. The engines roared loudly, visibly upsetting the dog, who

up until now had been perfectly calm. Through the right side windows of the plane, there was no sky or water to be seen, just yellow-ochre hued mountain. If our window was open, I would have sworn that you could have touched the bare rock with your hand. To the left, down through the windows, we could see the townsite below us. A large, pinkish building near a small pond dominated the centre of town; a mustard-coloured, domed structure sat at the backend of town; what I guessed was the school and gymnasium hugged the shoreline; and scattered about were many small houses. Then before we knew it, all we could see was the gravel airstrip directly ahead.

As we came in for the landing, we could see many people of all ages gathered in a group at the start of the airstrip. There was no terminal building in Ausuittuq while I lived there, people stood outside in whatever weather presented itself as they waited for the plane to arrive. We knew that there would be many people at the airstrip—there always is, especially at the end of the summer when the new teachers arrive. As with all communities, by the time school is about to begin in the fall, children are more than ready to get back into the routine of being students, often not so much for the academic side of school, more so for the social side. In many small Inuit communities like Ausuittuq, after children have had their fill of camping, boating and berry picking, there is little else to do during the long days of summer. Even though most families spend a lot of time out on the land in the summer months, many must also return back to town for their work. Children have less to do in town—they'd much prefer to be out camping. Most communities offer limited or no summer programs for kids and many lack the resources of a recreation centre or staff to keep youth happily occupied during their school holiday. There is always a sense of excited anticipation as the community awaits

the southern teachers arriving on the plane to start off the next school year. It is not uncommon for the entire community to stand at the airstrip on the day of the teachers' arrival. And this year Ausuittuq was beginning a high school program—this alone was cause for celebration. Of course, all schools have local, Inuit staff as well as the southerners that return or are hired each year, but the arrival of the teachers on the plane always seems to signal the start of the new school year. The air has already cooled down after the summer heat and the fall season has begun.

As the twin otter came to a stop, the plane was swarmed by people on the outside, eager to see who was getting off. I had already taken Figgy Duff out of his kennel and attached a leash to his collar. Experience told me to keep a tight rein on my pet as most Inuit are frightened of white people's dogs. An Inuk once told me that many Inuit believe white man's dogs are more trained and will protect their owners more so than a husky dog. They have a healthy respect for our dogs, especially black-coloured, large ones like Figgy Duff. I was ready to let people get to know my dog before letting him run free for walks outside of town. We could hear the cheerful chatter of people outside of the plane even before the co-pilot left the cockpit to open the side door. Paniqpakutuk descended the ladder steps first and was greeted with lots of hugs and handshakes from apparent family members and friends. Oolootie was next, followed by YoAnne, then me with the dog. There was an air of excitement as we took that last step out of the plane. We looked around at everyone, and everyone looked at us. We were smiling from ear to ear. It was nice to feel the gravel under our feet after sitting for such a long time. The air was so fresh. Here we were on a plateau between the mountain cliffs and the sea, at the top of the world. YoAnne ventured further into the crowd, as I had the

dog on a very tight leash close by my side. Some brave children were edging closer and closer to the dog, which I found unusual. Luckily, Figgy Duff was the gentlest soul of a dog and he did not show any signs of aggressiveness. Soon other children were daring to pet him as well as the courageous ones at the beginning. We knew we were in a special place. Seeing the children approaching the dog without fear or consequence, the adults then came to shake our hands. Over the years, I have never tired of this ritual at the airstrip. No matter who steps off the plane, after even a short time away, everyone shakes your hand to welcome you back home. In this case we were being welcomed into the community for the first time. "Are you the new teachers?" we were asked repeatedly. "Yes", we answered enthusiastically, "What's your name?" Students are always so pleased to see their teachers, knowing that they will soon be back in school with their friends getting into the routines of school life. School truly is the hub of a small northern community. With a population of approximately 150 people, with 60 or so students in the school each and every day, the importance of the school within this Arctic hamlet cannot be over emphasized.

Several quiet, older students caught my attention off in the distance. They were walking near the perimeter of the moving group of people now escorting us towards the hamlet van. These teenagers appeared more shy and reserved than did the younger children who had approached us earlier. "Hum," I thought to myself, "These must be my students, the new high school class." I smiled at them, across the crowd...I was anxious to begin teaching.

We were introduced to so many people that day at the airstrip, all of whom we came to know very well over the next 4 years. In every other year after that first one, we

would arrive in the third week of August with a thin layer of snow covering the land, or at least a dusting of white on the nearby mountainside. One particular year had enough snow on the ground to allow snowmobiles at the airstrip upon our arrival. Regardless of the weather, we were always greeted warmly by many children and community members. What a wonderful way to begin a new school year!

Settling In

YoAnne was helped into the Hamlet's suburban van with all of our luggage and I began walking down the road into town with the dog on his leash. He needed a walk after his very sedentary day. I was directed to the pink building in the middle of town, only 5 minutes away—the one I had so clearly seen from the air only moments ago. I could easily see it from where I stood on the edge of the airstrip. It felt good to walk and to breathe fresh, cool air. A number of children followed me down along the road, being cautious around the dog, yet curious all the same. We chatted back and forth a little, but for the most part, we just walked and smiled at each other.

Because of a housing shortage for teachers in the community, we were to begin our stay in Ausuittuq living in an apartment at the Health Centre, that pink building near the pond. The apartment was supposed to be available to itinerant health care specialists who visited the community from time to time—a doctor, dentist, psychologist, or perhaps a substitute nurse for when the community's one and only nurse went on holiday. Some sort of an arrangement had been made between the school board and health board so that YoAnne and I could have a place to live. Housing shortages for both Inuit and non-Inuit exist in nearly every northern community—Ausuittuq is certainly not

the exception. We were quite pleased with our living arrangements—the school was visible from our south-facing window, just a 2-minute walk around the edge of the pond to its front steps; the Cooperative store, that mustard coloured building we had seen as we landed, was directly across the road, behind us. The store also housed the all-important post office, our link to the rest of the world —it was perfect.

Although I was not privy to the wheeling and dealing that must have gone on to procure the Health Centre apartment for "teachers", I am sure that this unique arrangement was made possible because the community was about to receive its first ever high school class. Ausuittuq was one of the last communities in the Baffin region to have a senior secondary component added to the school program. Community high schools were still relatively new to the Baffin at the time of my first arrival in Pangnirtung in the late eighties. The Department of Education had committed to providing each community, regardless of size, the opportunity to offer a full K-12 program. It was hoped that community high schools would help to reduce the problem of lower than average graduation rates of northern students. Before community high schools were developed, most young Inuit had to leave their homes to attend a school in a far away place. Most students simply didn't go. Many of those that did, got terribly homesick and dropped out after a few weeks. Students in Ausuittuq, for the most part, did not continue in school after grade 9. In the year that I arrived in Ausuittuq, there was only one student attending high school, far away in Pond Inlet, 450 kilometres as the raven flies, on North Baffin. Anyone else in town of high school age was either working at one of the few jobs available to them within the community or they were waiting for grade 10 to begin so they could continue their education without leaving home.

In the south, we take education for granted. There is never any question as to whether or not our children go to high school within a walk or bus ride from our homes. I know that as a child, I was probably not emotionally ready to leave home at the tender age of 15. It seems cruel to expect young children to leave the comfort and safety of their families and community to gain an education. The addition of the high school program was truly a momentous occasion for the people of Ausuittuq. As a teacher, I was very happy and proud to be able to help start a grade 10 program in this remote northern community. I considered it an absolute privilege to be there.

When I turned the corner with the dog, YoAnne was already at the foot of the steps of the apartment with all of our unloaded bags beside her on the gravel. The children who had been walking with me said goodbye and then immediately ran across the road to the store. Ame, the driver of the Hamlet van, picked up a couple of suitcases and began mounting the long, steep steps to our apartment door at the back of the Health Centre. Ame went about his business silently. Over the years, I had learned to expect this quietness from Inuit. People speak to you when they know you and only then when there is something worthwhile to say. Energy is not wasted on idle chatter. Ame waited for us to open our door with the key we had been given earlier and then he stepped into a small hallway, jam-packed with various sized boxes. He smiled ever so slightly and remarked in a matter-of-fact tone that he had "brought lots of boxes up those stairs in the last couple weeks." Apparently our personal effects were streaming in regularly with each flight from Resolute Bay. Needless to say, we were relieved that some of our personal belongings were already here. Life was good indeed. After a couple of trips up the stairs and a thank you to Ame, we closed the door of our new home behind us and

instantly went about checking to see which boxes were here and which ones were still to come. We had been told that the sealift ship was expected in 2 weeks or so. The fact that our freezer had yet to arrive did not really worry us so much anymore. We sensed it would come in time.

Although we were extremely tired, we were too excited to relax and rest—we wanted to take in as much as we possibly could before collapsing with exhaustion on our first night in the High Arctic. As it was not yet the end of August, it did not actually get dark at night so it was possible to putter around for hours and still be able to glance at the goings-on in the streets outside our windows. During the light period of the year, even quite young children can be seen playing in the streets very late into the wee hours of the morning. With the pond outside our front window, we often watched kids happily playing with wooden boats at the water's edge. Our apartment was nicer than we had expected. It was a two-bedroom, open living space, with a loft accessible by one of those folding ladders that comes down from the ceiling. From the loft I could lean over a short railing and look down into both the living room and kitchen. I chose the loft as my personal workspace. I would eventually set up my worktable and all of my art materials, including the easel I carry around with me wherever I go. The artist in me couldn't help but feel inspired in such a natural studio, with a most spectacular view.

I can't remember how late we stayed up that first night, but I'm sure we must have done a fair bit of unpacking before collapsing with fatigue. We estimated about half of our belongings had arrived—Ame would have quite a few more trips up those stairs with more of our boxes. The following day we spent a lot of time exploring the community, walking the dog, and meeting people. I remembered moving to Pangnirtung

and Hall Beach and doing the exact same thing—walking about town and smiling until my face hurt. It is so important to get out into the community and meet people. We are not expected to talk to everyone we met but we are expected to nod and smile a lot and to explore every nook and cranny of the community. If I could give one piece of advice to a newcomer to the north, it would be to simply keep your mouth shut and observe as much as possible. There is so much to see and to learn from the moment we step off the plane. Most Inuit respect people who can quietly observe and take in their surroundings without talking all the time. I have learned this over the years and I actually became good at maintaining silence. It is most definitely an acquired talent because keeping quiet certainly does not come naturally to me. As we wandered about town, children ran to greet us again. Some we recognized from the airstrip, some we didn't. We knew that it was important for us, especially in such a small community, to remember faces as quickly as possible so that we could start learning names as well. Inuktitut names and their proper pronunciations challenge southerners at the best of times. At least we had the benefit of living in two other communities—we knew the Kilabuks, Akpalialuks, and Metuqs in Pangnirtung, and the Curleys, Akearoks and Irqittuqs in Hall Beach. We would soon become familiar with the Pijaminis, Akeeagoks, and Kiguktaks of Ausuittuq. As a new teacher, I always made a point to learn my students' names within a day or two. I would ask for help in the pronunciation if needed, and then simply risk it. Students like hearing their teacher trying to speak Inuktitut and possibly making a funny mistake. Most of all they appreciated being called by their proper names. It seems to me that a large part of effective teaching involves attention to the really small details like learning names quickly and other such things.

So we set out on our first full day in our new community to meet people and to get our bearings. We wanted to find out where all of the important places were and how to find anything we needed. For a small hamlet of only 150 people or so, there is still a lot to discover. YoAnne and I walked many kilometres back and forth along the sand and pebbled shoreline, up and down the gravel streets and across the boulder-strewn field between the town and the base of the mountains. There may be 40 or so houses in town as well as several municipal buildings spread throughout the community. Lots to explore.

The Ausuittuq Inuit Cooperative, referred to simply as the "Co-op" by community members, is the only store in town and is the social centre of the community. If you are looking for someone, and they are not at home, they are most likely at the Co-op. The building is a dome-roofed metal structure near the backend of town next to all of the oil and gas silos. Inside, it resembles an old general store and offers the same kinds of goods available in many southern small retail outlets, although at a much higher cost. The Co-op also serves as the local agent for Kenn Borek Air and meets each plane as it lands, often to pick up valuable food supplies that have been airlifted in from Ottawa, Montreal or Yellowknife. Not all food arrives in town on the sealift. The Co-op runs a rustic hotel operation for the trickle of government employees and business people that come into town regularly, as well as for visitors in the growing sport hunter and ecotourism industries. This 2-story, pale yellow, box-shaped hotel sits on the shore road next to the community gymnasium. Locals can often be seen through the windows of the dining area, sitting at a table chatting with someone over coffee. Located on the edge of a rugged, mountainous island, overlooking an expansive sound, and facing the glaciers

of a far off island, I would wager that the Ausuittuq Hotel has the best view in all of the Arctic.

Situated between the Co-op and the pond is the Health Centre. It was constructed in the early nineties and is quite a handsome building. Aside from the unusual yet pleasing pink colour, it is what I call an architectural gift to the community. Unlike the many northern buildings that are box-like and completely uninteresting to look at, the Ausuittuq Health Centre has two wings—one short and one long—on either side of a many-windowed circular boardroom. It is airy and bright and very comfortable for people to visit. There is a nurse-in-charge, a local community health representative, and various support staff that take care of the health needs of the community. Cathy, the nurse-in-charge, was also our neighbour—our Health Centre apartments shared a common wall. Next to the Health Centre sits a dilapidated trailer with various add-ons, that houses the Hunters and Trappers Organization, the Government Liaison and Renewable Resources offices and, at that time, the Nunavut Arctic College office. The trailer is what remains of the original Ausuittuq Health Centre.

The relatively new gray and red-trimmed Hamlet building is located next door to the Co-op. The elected Mayor and Council make all municipal decisions here, in the small boardroom at the back. Various offices are scattered throughout the "Hamlet", as the building itself is generally referred to, including the small room that acts as the community FM radio station. The CBC allows communities to use part of its airspace on a regular basis. The community radio broadcasts are listened to by all, young and old. Every single bit of community information is passed on via the local airwaves. I have heard announcements like, "...would Hannah, wherever you are, please call your mother

at home when you can," or "...everyone come to Jimmy's for birthday cake and ice cream." A number of people take turns hosting radio shows at designated times throughout the day and week. The most popular shows are the call-ins where anyone can speak on air for any number of reasons. And of course, Saturday night radio bingo is a huge success. Don't try to phone anyone at home when the bingo game is on! I must admit I resisted bingo for 3 years, yet in my final year at the school, both YoAnne and I did finally play a few games—we even won a game each. It made us wonder why we didn't play earlier.

The Hamlet is responsible for all municipal services and most of the maintenance of the vehicles and machinery takes place in the Hamlet garage, right in the middle of town, next to the school. Electricity for lights, oil for heat, regular water deliveries and septic services, road repair, and airstrip maintenance all need to be kept up year round. The Housing Association ensures that everyone has a place to live and takes care of all of the homes in town, including constant maintenance of furnaces and water pumps. They too have a garage and warehouse. The mechanics and maintenance men of the community are very important people—they manage to keep the hamlet running safely and smoothly. It is easy to sometimes forget how isolated you truly are in a fly-in, Arctic community closer to North Greenland than to anywhere else in your own country.

YoAnne has a sweatshirt with a picture of a saluting polar bear wearing a red tunic. The logo reads, "The Ausuittuq RCMP, Canada's Northernmost RCMP Detachment". I smile because just about every single thing in Ausuittuq is "northernmost". The RCMP detachment is a blue and white trailer halfway between the

landing strip and the school, on the road that leads from the airstrip into town. One officer polices the community, and when holiday time comes up there may or may not be a replacement sent in. The community has very little crime— the odd occurrence of vandalism and a few break-ins, some alcohol-related incidents—the police officer spends a lot of time actively participating in community events. I spent two or three Christmases driving around town with the RCMP officer and the nurse in the police truck, acting as judges for the ice and snow sculpture competition. We were the only ones in town without any family affiliations so we were seen to be completely impartial.

A small, plain white structure, with a tall spire sits at the bottom of a road, near the east end of town. Two or three night's a week, at 7 o'clock, the bell rings to signify that someone has gone inside the church, warmed up the cold interior by lighting the oil stove, and is ready to greet people at the door. There is no anointed minister for this Anglican Church. Jaco, a very quiet man even by Inuit standards, is the lay preacher. He is devout in his dedication to the church, and serves as the religious leader of the community. When Jaco is not available, Leetia, his wife, steps up, or perhaps Moses or Neevee, or anyone else willing to lead the congregation in prayer. As with most important jobs in the community, there is always someone ready to help out. YoAnne and I eagerly stepped inside the church on that first tour of the town. We were curious to see what it looked like. We had been in the igloo-shaped church in Iqaluit and were impressed with how northern the décor was. We were not disappointed with the church in Ausuittuq either. The altar was adorned with intricately patterned sewn sealskins. On the walls around the front of the church were embroidered tapestries depicting traditional Inuit scenes. A narwhal tusk and various other artifacts were placed

throughout the altar area. The seating area of the church was simple—eight or so wooden benches on either side of the aisle. There was a comforting feel to the church as soon as you stepped inside.

As with all northern communities, there are many modern day conveniences that some southerners may be surprised to see. Peoples' homes look very familiar, as they closely resemble those in the south. Although the vehicles of choice in the north are generally snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles, there are a few half-ton trucks parked at various locations in town. Most of them belong to the municipality or the various agencies in town. While I lived in Ausuittuq, there were no cars at all. Two or three large satellite dishes planted at strategic spots throughout town tell you that telephone and television are alive and well in the community. If you call anyone in any northern community, you notice a small delay in the conversation over the line. This is a result of the satellite phone system in place. Every now and then, when a blizzard blew into town, the phone dish would get moved or damaged and we would be without phones temporarily. If the problem could not be fixed locally, we'd have to wait for someone to fly in when the storm was over. Every household has at least one television set. Ausuittuq received cable during my first autumn in town. Every house received free service for a month before deciding whether or not to keep it—I don't think anyone said no after that first month, including myself.

Computer technology has arrived in the High Arctic as well. During my time in Ausuittuq, the Internet was only accessible through a gateway via the school's bulletin board system, however, e-mail communication to points throughout the world was possible. The school is still very well equipped with computers, printers, digital cameras

and a scanner. All of the town's agencies are wired and some individual families own their own computers as well. Many hunters now own a computerized, global positioning system (GPS) to aid in navigation, although the old dependable citizens' band, "CB", radio is still the standard for communication out on the land.

At any given time there may be as many as seven or eight non-Inuit residents in town. All Inuit in Ausuittuq speak Inuktitut, as their first language. Most adults in Ausuittuq also speak some English. Very few residents, save some elders, are unilingual Inuktitut speakers. Children learn English in school, as well as through television. Ausuittuq is still very much a traditional Inuit community, in the sense that almost all families rely significantly on food obtained from traditional land activities such as hunting and fishing. Family camping is still the single-most loved activity of the year for most community residents. All families spend a great deal of time throughout the year out on the land. No family is without a snowmobile, sled, canvas tent and basic camping gear. Many men in particular hold part time jobs in the community, which allows them to spend considerable time on the land in various seasons as needed. Part-time employment may include working for the Hamlet, the Housing Association, the Hunters and Trappers Association, the Co-op, the Health Centre, or the School.

As we wandered through town on our first day's exploration, we learned many things. Inuit culture seemed to be alive and well in Ausuittuq. Inuktitut was heard spoken everywhere we walked. Stretched sealskins on wooden frames, strategically placed near the sides of houses or sheds, sat drying in the sun. Boats tied to large boulders near the shore were in varying degrees of being packed or unpacked—many more were already on the waters of the fiord or further off in the distance on Jones

Sound. Snowmobiles and sleds laid about uncovered near every house, almost in wait for the inevitable snow. Community life also looked familiar to our southern sensitivities. Small children riding bicycles up and down dirt roads, gleefully aiming for the biggest puddles; people walking and talking together as they either headed to the Co-op or back towards their homes, with arms outstretched carrying heavy plastic bags laden with groceries. We thoroughly enjoyed discovering our new community on that first day. Of course, at that time we did not know many of the details I have described here, we learned about our community gradually over the years. And Ausuittuq did become "home" for all of those 4 years.

Chapter 2 The School at the Top of the World

YoAnne and I knew that once we began teaching at the school our time would not really be our own—we'd be so busy planning each day's lessons that we would not likely have time to do a lot of other things. For this reason, we had planned to arrive in Ausuittuq nearly 2 weeks before school started so that we could first spend time unpacking our things, moving in, meeting people and hiking a little around the community. After working in Hall Beach and Pangnirtung, we accepted and understood that northern teachers have virtually no time for themselves outside the realm of school. We arrived a full 3 weeks before starting school in Pangnirtung and wanted to orient ourselves as best we could in Ausuittuq as well. Our routine became one of daily walks around town, hiking in the nearby river valley and up the closest hills at the foot of the mountains, and most importantly chatting to all of the people and excited children that we met along the way. We had met Harry, the principal—he had flown in a few days after we had arrived. Harry was returning for his second year in Ausuittuq. I had met him in Rankin Inlet earlier that summer, in July, during my first summer session of the Principal Certification Program. He and his wife, Myrna, originally from Prince Edward Island, had already spent the last 3 years in Iqaluit, the soon-to-be new capital of Nunavut. We had also met Oolassie, the elementary teacher, and Hannah, the primary teacher. Both had young families in town—Oolassie grew up in Ausuittuq and Hannah, originally from Pangnirtung, had married an Inuk from Ausuittuq and had lived in the community for several years. We'd also had the chance to meet Meeka, the school office manager, and Ida, the janitor. We were told that Paniqpakutuk, the elder we had met on the flight from Resolute Bay, often worked as a cultural instructor in the school, as did

Zipporah, Hannah's mother-in-law. As it turned out, Meeka and Oolassie are sisters, and Paniqpakutuk is their father; Ida is the wife of the then District Education Authority (DEA) chairperson. It was interesting to us that there were so many family connections even within the school. It took us a little while to grasp both the significance and implications of living in such a small, insular community. You think you know what it would be like to live somewhere with such a small population but you find out that only experience will really give you a true picture. Family politics became one of many considerations in our school planning over the years. At any rate, by the time school began we felt as if we had been in Ausuittuq much longer than the mere 2 weeks we had actually spent in town.

Aqiatusuk School sits on a raised section of gravel between the pond and the dirt road that closely follows the shoreline between the airstrip and the far end of town. The building faces south, with the front steps offering a spectacular view of Jones Sound and Devon Island far off in the distance. It is a tan coloured structure with royal blue metal trim. The design of the school is a simple one—a rectangular box with classrooms on the north and east sides, the washrooms, kitchen, office, and various other rooms on the south side. An L-shaped hallway separates the classrooms from the other rooms of the school. There is no school gym but there is an agreement between the Hamlet and the school that allows students access to the community gymnasium during the day. Students enter the back door of the community gymnasium by exiting the school through a side door and walking across a 12 metre metal ramp. The school was built in 1991 to replace a terribly rundown structure, and has managed to stay in remarkably good condition over the years. The old school can still be seen in two separate pieces

along the shore road, near the water. Nowadays, kids play in the condemned remains of that old building.

The first time I walked into Aqiatusuk School, I was struck with its neatness and compact nature. Everything needed by a school was here, but in a very small space. I thought how tidy everything seemed to be—the janitor had obviously already completed the summer cleaning tasks. A glass display case in the front part of the hall highlighted student-made carvings and duffel socks, as well as some locally important artifacts. The bulletin boards were empty, waiting to be filled up once again with the new school year's items. The school was the perfect size for a small community. Right away, it felt comfortable to me. I was anxious to begin. Schools are very different places when there are no students around—they are unnaturally quiet. I imagined my first day of school when all of the students would excitedly enter the hallway, chatting away to their friends, anxious to meet their teachers and to begin the new school year.

New Beginnings

New beginnings are always cause for celebration. There is an attempt to celebrate the start of a new school year in a grand fashion each autumn. Celebration is a key component to many, northern school programs throughout the year—not only were we marking the start of a new school year, we were beginning the first year of the most northern high school in North America. The entire community was abuzz.

Bright and early on that first day of school, students began filing through the front doors into the hallway. Everyone was directed to the largest room in the school, my future classroom. About 50 students, aged 6 to 20 years old, found a piece of the

floor or a desk and chair to sit at as we all entered the new high school classroom. I had pushed all of the desks, chairs and tables to the periphery so that we could fit everyone in the room. Teachers hurried last minute students from the hall into the classroom as they themselves filed in one by one. Some students, we were told, were not yet in school because they were still out on the land camping with their families. They would arrive back in town gradually over the next few weeks. This was always to be expected in any Arctic community. The summer season is short enough, if the weather is good into September then people take advantage of it and stay out on the land as long as they can. Harry, our principal, began with a welcome in English followed by the Inuktitut translation given by Oolassie. The new kindergarten students only spoke Inuktitut and most of the primary students spoke very little English. Every school assembly had to be given in both languages. Students were very quick to quiet down; after all, they were soon to find out who their classmates were and who their homeroom teachers would be. Of course many of them already knew who they would be placed with—in Ausuittuq, if you are in kindergarten, grade 1, 2 or 3 you always have Hannah as your teacher; if you are in grade 4, 5, or 6, then Oolassie is your teacher. Many of the children YoAnne and I had met during our previous outings in town had asked which grades each of us would be teaching, so most students knew who their teacher was. But, it was the beginning of a different school year and there were new teachers to be added to the mix, so it was still new and exciting! After speaking for a while informally of the notable events during their summer holidays, students were officially introduced to both YoAnne and I. Harry offered only minimal information, as we would soon have our students to ourselves for the entire morning. We smiled at the captive group as they listened intently to Harry's

and Oolassie's every word. Our objective that morning was to get the students into their homerooms as quickly as possible so that they could begin to settle into their new surroundings. Harry handed over the floor to the teachers, each with their student list in hand. Students listened carefully for their names as the teachers took turns calling out students belonging in their homerooms. Hannah began with her group. It was heartwarming to watch the older grade 1 and 2 students help the very obviously disoriented new kindergarten students. They didn't understand all of this quiet, structured talk and lining up. As each class was called out, the teacher and students would form a single file line at the door and then promptly leave my room for their own classroom. Hannah's and Oolassie's groups had both left. YoAnne called out the names on her list of junior high students, and off they went, excitedly, next door. The only students left in the room were mine—this was it, the beginning of the first high school program in Ausuittuq.

In front of me sat 17 students, the largest class in the school. Some students had just finished grade 9 the year before; some had been out of school a full year; others had left school 2 and 3 years previously. Not all students had completed grade 9 but due to their age and years out of school they were to continue their education starting with grade 10. I cannot imagine what was going through each of their minds that first day, although I am sure the excitement and worried anxiety of beginning high school was foremost in their thoughts. There was a wide range of ages in the group, from 16 to 20 years of age, and more boys than girls. Some of them were already together as boyfriend and girlfriend. One of the girls had a young daughter, who I saw enter kindergarten in my last year at the school.

What beautiful faces! I cannot help but remember those first few days with such fond emotion—I watched these young people grow and develop into adults. I shared in births and deaths, the joys and sometimes the despair of their lives. Not one of us, myself included, knew what the next few years would bring. On that first day in grade 10, however, I needed to share some information about myself, get to know some of the details of their lives, learn a bit about their schooling backgrounds, and give them an indication as to what to expect over the next weeks and months. There I was, facing a group of nervous and silent Inuit students. I sensed that they needed reassuring right away. "Congratulations!" I exclaimed with a wide smile. "You are the new grade 10 class at Aqiatusuk School." I explained I was their teacher for most of their subjects and that we would all work together in this classroom each day. I went on to say I had taught high school in Pangnirtung and Hall Beach as well. A few eyebrows lifted, indicating that they seemed pleased to know I had northern experience. I tried to throw in a few Inuktitut words here and there throughout my introduction, each time eliciting a smile from someone in the crowd. I described some of my personal background— I had been a biologist before becoming a teacher and I had lived in a number of interesting places. I loved the outdoors—camping, hiking, kayaking, skiing— and I especially enjoyed art and music. I tried to give the students an idea of what kind of person I was. The lack of overt reaction at this point to my presentation did not bother me at all. I knew from experience it took time for Inuit students to speak up and participate orally with new teachers in school. This did not mean that they were not paying attention and listening to every single word. I knew they were watching and taking in everything. I have come to understand that Inuit possess highly attuned skills of observation. While in the north, I

learned a great deal from Inuit about the power of silence and of nonverbal communication. Inuit always watch first. I was well aware of this. I understood that the first few days would be quiet. I needed to be patient.

Not wanting to seem self-centred, I quickly turned the topic of conversation away from me and began describing the high school program. This is what they really wanted to know most of all. None of these students had any high school experience, and most of their parents and many older relatives had no experience with schooling above grade 9 either. I explained that many of the courses would be the same as those they were used to except that a wider variety of subjects would be offered. I spent time describing the expected workload, homework requirements, and the responsibilities of individuals to keep up with the work. I talked a lot about the importance of attendance. My main focus that morning, however, was to convey the idea that becoming a high school student was a remarkable achievement, and that they should be very proud to be able to continue their studies in their own community. They could all look forward to graduating with a high school diploma. They were the leaders of the future in Nunavut. This was a big deal! I described a little about the details of the credit system, and about the daily routines of high school, about regular tests and exams, but I punctuated my speech periodically with reminders of the special nature of this moment in their lives. These students were special—they were the first Ausuittuq residents to begin high school within the community. They were to become role models for every single student in the school behind them. I wanted to emphasize these facts over and over again. In my mind, the students needed to be told that it was completely natural to be nervous, but that they should also feel great pride in being able to sit in that classroom and to

understand that they were at the beginning of the next stage of their lives. I often reverted to what became known as the "pep talk" throughout my time at Aqiatusuk School, especially in those early years. As teachers, we often forget how difficult it is to be a student—I believe students need to be reminded regularly of their achievements, to look at the "big picture" and to see where they are heading.

Students slowly began to very quietly ask questions, *how many credits is one course...how many do we need...how many years will it take?* I answered as simply as possible, I did not want to overwhelm them on their first day. Every now and then I would catch one of them looking at a friend, smiling at each other. Sometimes, one or two would explain something to someone else in Inuktitut, then eagerly look towards me for more information. This was good—they were beginning to get comfortable. I asked them about their experiences in school so far, about kinds of teachers ("no names please") they liked or didn't like in the past, and why they felt that way. I explained that I liked to be outside a lot and would try whenever possible to have class outdoors. This generated wide smiles and chatter—I hastened to add that we did need to do a lot of regular "reading and writing" work in school but that we would take any opportunity we had to cover some of that work outside. Students nodded their heads approvingly. Probably the most significant words I had to say that first morning was that I promised to stay with them until the first students graduated with a high school certificate. The room was quiet for a few seconds before one brave soul inquired, "What if it takes a long time?" I immediately replied that I was sure that some of them could finish in 3 or 4 years. Without realizing it at the time I had said two critically important things to that group of students. First, I had shown confidence in them, believing that they could

graduate. And secondly, perhaps most importantly, I had promised to stick it out with them for as long as it took to see an Ausuittuq graduate. These students had grown accustomed to seeing teachers leave each year, only to have to get to know another group of new teachers the following year. The idea of having the same teacher for all of their high school years was almost unfathomable, yet here someone was promising just that. I had not planned to state this intention that day, it simply jumped out of my mouth before I could think—I suppose my subconscious knew that I would stay in Ausuittuq until Aqiatusuk School produced its first high school graduates.

As more and more specific questions began to arise from the group in front of me, I told them that there would be lots of time to learn all of the details they wanted to know. I would help them as best as I could, but that we needed to arrange our desks and chairs and the rest of the room before we could go any further. We had talked for over an hour, long enough for our first meeting. I left it up to the students to decide how they wanted their room arranged and who would sit beside whom. I moved aside and let them talk amongst themselves as they noisily moved furniture around the room. It only took a few minutes to get everything the way they wanted. As soon as the desks were in place they all sat down at their new seats and waited. They seemed eager to begin. I could see we had gotten off to a good start.

Considering the cross-cultural setting of non-Inuit teachers in an Inuit community, I learned it is very important to introduce students and community members to new teachers in a non-threatening, comfortable environment. For many Inuit, this means outside, not in the stuffy confines of a southern-styled school. To start school off with children sitting at desks for a full day of indoor lessons would be extremely

difficult for both the students and the new teachers. It is hard for students to suddenly become indoor creatures after a long summer of freedom and outdoor activity. So, on our first school day in Ausuittuq, after meeting our students in the classroom for the morning, we spent the entire afternoon at a community picnic.

We hiked from the school up towards the airstrip with all of the students, carrying boxes of hotdogs, juice, tea, biscuits as well as all of the Coleman stoves, kettles, foam cups and plastic forks needed for everyone in town. Parents had joined us at the school to help students carry everything. People were very excited—everyone, young and old, always enjoys picnics. Harry and Meeka had made bilingual announcements on the radio to let everyone know where and when the picnic would be held, and most of the local places of work were allowing their employees to take time off during the afternoon to attend the festivity. Members of the DEA, locally elected school officials, were on hand to welcome the teachers to the community and to start off the celebration. Very quickly, scrap wood that had been collected in town from crates and discarded piles of construction materials was thrown onto a heap and soon a roaring campfire was ready for roasting hotdogs on sticks. Coleman stoves were set up and water from the river boiled for tea. Everyone milled around the fire and began chatting with each other in Inuktitut. YoAnne and I purposely strolled between groups of parents and children to smile and say hello. We spoke what little Inuktitut we could, but switched into English fairly quickly. We would get better, we told everyone. As soon as everyone had their fill of hotdogs, and juice or tea, the soccer balls and frisbees were brought out and children scattered over the rocky plateau to play and burn off energy. Some parents and other community members joined in on the games; most stayed near

the fire to chat with friends. It was a glorious afternoon. The sun was shining and the gentlest breeze swept over the land. Even though this particular memory is years past, I remember staring at the deep blue sky above the mountains near the river valley. I don't think I've ever seen blue sky like that anywhere else.

Four years isn't a long time to an adult, but to a child 4 years is an eternity. Children grow and change incredibly during that amount of time. I've thought back to that first morning in my classroom at Aqiatusuk School, and at the afternoon picnic—many times—remembering so many faces and voices, and I marvel at how their lives developed over the years and at how quickly some of those children became young adults. Over the years some teaching staff left, some left and returned, others joined us. In my second year I became principal of Aqiatusuk School and inevitably the grade 10 class grew to become grade 11 and then grade 12. In my last year at Aqiatusuk School that original grade 10 classroom had become the grade 10-11-12 classroom, a colourful, group of wonderful students. I am proud to know that I was an important part of their growing up.

The Cycle of the School Seasons

Each season brings with it certain school activities. Inuit culture is very much linked to the natural environment. Inuit are connected in very real ways to the land and to the seasonal changes that occur throughout the year. As much as is possible, school programming needs to accommodate and reflect this reliance and connection to the natural world. The natural cycle of the seasons may be reflected to a greater extent in the programs of individual Inuit schools.

After teaching in two other Arctic communities, I became convinced that whatever the important parts of the academic curriculum needing to be covered were, they should be done in the period of time between September and December, especially at the senior high level. Students are most keen on the day to day rhythm of school during this time. Attendance is usually best during first term. And as much as we seem to think that January to April is a good time for covering a lot of academics, time flies by far too quickly after the Christmas break. Before you know it, spring is here and then a lot more land-based teaching and outdoor activities begin. Although many student land trips happen in the fall before the colder weather sets in, there is much more of a focus in that early time of the school year on regular academic class work.

In the communities in which I taught, a lot of time is spent at the beginning of the school year for all-important rapport and team building activities. Activities planned for the first few days of school are also designed to involve as many community members as possible. As an example, community picnics not unlike the one I've described here in Ausuittuq probably occur in most Nunavut communities within the first few days of school. During the last 3 years of my stay in Ausuittuq, an annual scavenger hunt also took place each first week back at school. It became a popular school tradition. Students worked in teams of multi-aged peers, K to grade 12, trying to gather as many items on a list as possible. The purpose of the "hunt" was to have students work together to accomplish a goal and to orient students and new school staff to their community, from varying perspectives. Students were sent to the far reaches of the community to collect items such as various sized and coloured rocks, nails, license plate numbers, animal bones, and so on. Students were also asked to collect signatures

from all current DEA members—this meant they needed to first find out who was on the council and then search them out. This enabled students to have a formal connection with the DEA from the very start of the school year. Likewise, students were asked to gather signatures of Hamlet Councilors. Various tidbits of information about teachers (birth dates, favourite foods, and eye colour) were also requested. Other items to be searched out included: bandaids (from the Health Centre); weather information (from the Airport Authority); various municipal facts, such as the number of litres in the town's water storage silo; the polar bear quota for the year (from the Hunters and Trappers Organization). All items included in the hunt encouraged students to learn about their community and to interact with a wide array of people. More importantly, the scavenger hunt was a fun, non-threatening school event where students could actively participate with their friends.

Many teachers coming from the south believe they must start right into the teaching of the curriculum as quickly as possible, particularly with senior secondary students. I discovered that in a second-language, cross-cultural setting it is much more important to first get to know one another and have a bit of fun. I observed that teachers who spend time at the beginning of the year involving themselves and their students in fun activities, designed to teach themselves about each other, were much more likely to be successful in encouraging these same students to take risks in their learning early on in the classroom. I found that participating in hands-on classroom activities requiring little use of English helps establish the new teacher as being someone who appreciates the difficulties of learning in a second language. Most seasoned northern teachers also agree that a sincere interest in learning about Inuit culture and Inuktitut language goes a

long way in developing teacher credibility and respect with their students. It is critical for a teacher to show a willingness to learn from their students. If the curriculum is not exactly followed during those first couple of weeks of school, it is not the end of the world—there are more immediate important tasks at hand. This is a difficult lesson for a lot of teachers to learn. We are conditioned through previous teaching experiences and teacher education programs to use the curriculum as our reference point for everything we do as educators in the classroom. I have been described as a teacher with a strong program orientation but the extent to which I rely on the details of the curriculum truly varies greatly from class to class, year to year.

Like most other schools in Canada, Arctic schools celebrate all major Christian traditions associated with the calendar year—Thanksgiving, Hallowe'en, Christmas, and Easter. Almost all students in the small communities scattered across Nunavut are Inuit whose families worship in Christian churches. Although students learn about multiculturalism and the wide range of world religions, many of the actual school celebrations still very much conform to the Christian calendar. The routines of the school year centre on nature's seasons as well as the advancing and passing of these holidays. After the first few settling-in weeks, students very quickly begin thinking about Thanksgiving. It seems odd yet brightly coloured cutout drawings of turkeys and pumpkins adorn even Arctic classroom and hallway walls. Parents organize huge family meals, enjoying turkey and pumpkin pie as much as caribou, muskox, seal and "Inuit ice cream", a mixture of berries and sweetened caribou suet. Not long after Thanksgiving, the cutouts on the walls change to bats, witches and ghosts in preparation for Hallowe'en. I have never seen Hallowe'en celebrated to the extent it is in the north—

everyone, young and old, gets into the ghoulish spirit. Even the elders go out trick or treating, usually in the first big blizzard of the season. The objective in this tradition of visiting houses is to costume yourself in such a way that no one recognizes you. Children derive huge amounts of pleasure if you cannot guess who they are as they stand at your door with candy sacks opened wide. In the evening, games are played and competitions held for the entire community in the gymnasium. One strange tradition that many Inuit communities have adopted at Hallowe'en is one of cross-dressing—many of the girls and woman dress as men; the boys and men dress as women. People are very creative in their outfits and completely uninhibited, the boys in particular, considering the subject matter. Reels of laughter are heard throughout the gym during the evening competition for "best dressed as the opposite sex". One year, a grade 9 student won first place. Joanasie was one of the most quiet, shy boys in the school, yet he donned a blonde wig, halter-top, tight skirt and stockings for the community to gaze upon. He was tall, slim, and gorgeous! My impression of Joanasie at that moment completely changed. I wasn't aware of his wonderful sense of humour, nor of his courage as a young adolescent to act silly knowing that he would be the focus of great laughter. Joanasie showed a confidence in himself I had not seen in the school. I was reminded that I might never truly know these students, unless I spent time with them outside of school, as they went about their real lives.

Hallowe'en is significant in Ausuittuq for another reason—it marks the last days of the sun for nearly three and a half months. Sometime near October 31, the sun dips down below the horizon and does not reappear until the second week of February. There is a perpetual sunset sky for weeks in mid October through mid November, and at the

other end of the dark season, a persistent sunrise. For the 2 months in between, day-to-day life carries on in complete darkness. You literally cannot see the keyhole in your door when you go home for lunch each day. Many people have asked me how I coped with the darkness. I always tell them that it is overrated—it is not nearly as terrible as most people imagine. I try to conjure up the feeling that one gets in the south in the evening hours, just before bedtime, a feeling of calm serenity. That is the only way I can describe the dark period. I do not dislike it at all. However, I am truly thankful when the light begins to return, and I might add, so are Inuit.

Christmas is the single most celebrated holiday in contemporary Inuit life. Schools begin decorating for the holiday season the day after Hallowe'en, and this constant decoration does not stop until the actual school holiday. As many communities plunge into the dark season well before Christmas, the display of colourful lights and decorations warm both our hearts and homes. Inuit have become devout Christians and take the birth of Christ as a solemn yet joyous occasion to celebrate. Christmas becomes the curriculum for a large portion of the months of November and December, more so in the early grades. In Ausuittuq, young children are especially excited at this time of year, knowing that since they live in the community closest to the North Pole, they are the first to be visited by the jolly, red-dressed man on Christmas Eve. This particular holiday season seems to cement together the school and community like no other, with the exception perhaps of the spring camping program. At Christmas, both the school, staff and students, and the community work together on so many projects—the Christmas Eve feast in the community hall, the stage preparations and presentation of the annual school concert, organization of the nightly games played in the gymnasium

throughout the Christmas break. The school itself is host to many of the community events of the season. During the 2-week school break, students as well as everyone else in the community, assume a completely reversed daytime-nighttime schedule. Beginning on December 25, every resident of the hamlet makes their way down to the gym for about 7 o'clock in the evening and plays games sometimes until 8 or 9 the following morning. Then they head home for a sleep and rise again in time for a quick meal, before heading off to the gymnasium for yet another night's festivity. This routine continues until after the New Year's Eve snowmobile parade through town. Some hunting competitions are held during the dark days of the Christmas season, as well as the competitions for ice carvings and Christmas light decorations. By the time school begins in the New Year, everyone is exhausted and it takes nearly 2 full weeks for everyone to get their daytime-nighttime schedules back on track. This has huge implications for the school program. Many students are at home, sleeping during the day—their parents cannot wake them up—or they are regularly very late for school. The lessons given at this time need to be self-contained so that as students begin to arrive more consistently, they can catch up easily and are not far behind. One Christmas season in particular had me playing games most nights with everyone else in town. My schedule too became "upside-down". That first week back in school in January was excruciatingly painful...I was so tired. I honestly and completely understood what the students were going through.

People assume that because Inuit have grown up in Ausuittuq that they are completely adapted to and happy with the long dark winter. Everyone, Inuit and non-Inuit alike, celebrates the rising of the sun. New Years in Ausuittuq is marked by a

change in the quality of light in the southern sky. It is still dark all day long, but there is a hint of the light soon to come within the next 5 weeks or so. I was asked one February, live on CBC television, to describe the feeling of seeing the sun rise for the first time in months, and to try to explain the colours in the sky as it was happening. There were no TV cameras to record the event; viewers only heard my voice speaking over a map of the High Arctic. The sky directly over Devon Island was a pastel fuchsia colour. It was magnificent. A lot of ice fog hovered over the ice cap, giving the lower sky an out-of-focus look. Just as I was beginning to think that the ice crystals would hide the sun's brief appearance, a sliver of brilliant yellow rose out of the fog. It was blinding in its intensity. It only lasted a few minutes and then began to sink once again below the horizon. How did it make me feel? the TV host asked. Uplifted, light in spirit, free, exhilarated. Everyone in town felt the same way and also understood that it was the beginning of the journey into the light period. Hunting, camping—a full life would resume again. For a couple of weeks at the school, students had been decorating the walls once again, this time with sunshine and bright rainbows. They had also been trying to guess the exact minute in the hour of the day that the sun would show itself. Each year a contest was held to see who could guess the correct time of the first sunrise. We had to have students write down their guesses before CBC radio announced the expected time of the sun's arrival—technology unfortunately has taken the mystique out of some of nature's mysteries. Even some of the local hunters were able to get the information from their GPS ahead of time.

Valentine's Day sees red hearts plastered all over the school. Even though the sun has returned for almost a week, it is still frigidly cold outside, and most activity is

indoors. Easter sees pastel-coloured eggs and rabbits adorning every crook and cranny of the building. Easter is also the time of year where the Hamlet organizes a feast and games down on the ice in front of the community. The weather has warmed up enough by then so that if you were properly dressed you would be able to spend several hours outside, even the young children. Dog sled races, snowmobiles pulling huge empty oil drums on *qamouti* (sleds), tug-o-war contests, ptarmigan and seal hunting competitions, and harpoon throwing are all offered, with much coveted prizes of sleeping bags, stoves, gasoline and the like. This is the first big community event since Christmas, and marks the true start of the spring season where most men, often with their families, begin to spend a lot of time camping and hunting out on the land. Outfitters had already been busy taking sport hunters on trips during the previous month, but by April even young families can enjoy extended camping outdoors. During my time in Ausuittuq, most Easter weekends enjoyed agreeable weather. Short of a full-blown blizzard, however, the games would not be hastily cancelled.

By mid April, 24 hour daylight is upon us. In order to sleep, most people have already placed aluminum foil on their bedroom windows to keep out the light. It is amazing the amount of energy that people get when it is constantly bright outside. During my first few years in the north, I would catch myself starting to vacuum the house or bake cookies well into the early hours of the morning. I simply did not want to go to bed. Children wander in the streets, playing with friends and visiting each other's houses throughout the entire night. I lost track of the number of evenings I forced myself to bed, listening to the sounds of children not far from my window. For me the light period was more difficult to adjust to than the dark period. It seems the sun returns faster

than your body can properly adjust. To this day, if the sun is visible in the sky, I wear polarized sunglasses. The sun, combined with the reflective properties of the snow and ice, produces a blinding white light, even when clouds move in. Sometimes the flat light produced through ice crystals or low lying cloud is harder on your eyes than the direct light of a clear day. For the time period between mid April and the end of the school year, it really does feel like one very long day. Everyone is in good spirit and wants to be outside.

As much as possible, land-based activities are offered at this time of year. It just makes sense. Different classes or groups of students spend entire days or half days out on the land. Snowmobiles and qamouti are rounded up, with stoves, tents, and the various supplies needed in case of encroaching bad weather. Outfitters, licensed guides, and volunteer parents are all involved in the land-based program of the school. While the school owns a small amount of outdoor equipment, most of the snowmobiles, qamouti and many of the other supplies needed for these trips are loaned to the school by community members. Parents always join students and staff in these activities. The older students generally go out first, until it is warm enough for the primary and elementary students to be able to withstand the cold for prolonged times. The trips may be as uncomplicated as walking out onto the sea ice towards a nearby iceberg for tea and bannock. Sometimes snowmobiles and qamouti take students up the fiord to look for animal tracks, or to sight some Arctic hare and ptarmigan. Traditional land skills are taught in Inuktitut to students by the guides, all of who are skilled Inuit hunters. Students participate in building snow shelters and igloos; they learn how to navigate according to snow drifting patterns; they are shown how to hunt for seals and ptarmigan—a small

group each year participates in a muskox hunt; students learn how to pack a qamouti and how to make bannock. There is never any lack of activities to do outside with any number of students.

The largest component of the land program is the annual spring camp. Weeks in advance a committee of parents, teachers and DEA members is formed to plan for the weeklong camping trip for all junior and senior high students. Any community member can join in on the camp; in fact, most of the younger students end up participating as well since their entire family goes out with the school. Shorter trips from the school are organized daily for those K - 6 students whose parents do not go to the camp. Each year the DEA consults the community through local call-in radio programs to decide where the camp will take place. The location is particularly important because it should be able to offer good fishing and hunting, as well as be a safe site for children generally. The community also likes the children to visit culturally significant areas. One year the camp was set up 25 kilometres from town, midway between Ausuittuq and a large cape to the south. A site on Devon Island was chosen the following year—a trip that took 16 hours by snowmobile to arrive at the camping location. One year, an inland site bordering a lake for ice fishing was chosen. Students were always very excited at this time of year. While most of them did camp regularly with their families, some did not—this was an opportunity for those students in particular to spend time on the land learning traditional skills.

Once out on the land, non-Inuit teachers usually take a back seat in these spring camp activities. It is a prime opportunity for teachers to allow the students to teach them. More often than not, the nonacademic students in their classrooms, the ones that do not

experience success often, absolutely shine and excel out on the land. While struggling in science, Adamee could handle his own dogteam; Markoosie was hopeless at mathematics but I trusted him with my life on the land. Spring camp provides teachers with the chance to discover other facets of students' characters, outside of the school environment. It is also a time of humility as students observe their teachers trying new things that may not necessarily come very easily. The tables are turned. I am always impressed with the patience and maturity that even young students exhibit while teaching others new skills. Once, while on a long distance day trip, we had stopped for tea and the guide had decided to hunt for a seal so that we could have fresh meat later on for our supper. As Akavak bent over a seal-breathing hole for what seemed like hours, 8-year old Lucy decided to teach me *ayarak*, Inuit string games. Ayarak are similar to what southerners know as "cat's cradle", yet much more intricate. Lucy wanted me to learn how to make a caribou walk over the tundra—a "moving" string pattern. I was hopeless. I never did get the hang of it. Lucy laughed and laughed—she could toss her hands up in the air, move her fingers almost imperceptibly and all of a sudden a caribou would be traveling from her right hand towards her left. It was me who eventually gave up, not Lucy.

Spring camp usually takes place in Ausuittuq during the third week of May. Any later than that and the snow and ice conditions could prove dangerous for travelling groups of young children. The time that remains in the school year is very difficult to fill—students would much prefer to stay outside. For the younger classes, teachers still go out from the school regularly for walks, or for exercise. Physical education at this time of year is generally either cross-country skiing or baseball, or any other such

outdoor pursuit. The senior students, however, need to keep focussed for a bit longer as they continue to earn credits towards their diploma. We managed to have final examinations prior to spring camp. It was always a challenge to do this, but it is unrealistic to think that academics can carry on after the camp. Therefore, short, intensive, high-interest 1-credit courses are offered to the junior and senior high students during the remaining 3 weeks or so of school. They choose from options such as silk-screen printing, jewelry-making, computer troubleshooting, traditional sewing, qamoutik building and so on.

Of course, no school year is complete without the final school assembly, where student awards are handed out and proud parents sit in the audience with videotape rolling. Once the tables and chairs are moved into the hallway for the summer cleaning and all of the classroom bulletin boards cleared, students anxiously look forward to those long school-free days of summer. Before you know it, the last day of school is upon us and we are all thinking once again how quickly the year has passed. Our thoughts begin to stray towards the upcoming school year. What will we repeat again next year? What will we do differently? How can we do better? And so goes the cycle of the school seasons in Ausuittuq.

Chapter 3 The New High School

I have such pleasant memories of the faces I see when I look back over my 4 years in Ausuittuq, particularly the time spent in the classroom with the senior high school students. We learned and experienced many things together in those years. I have already described in the previous chapter that critical first day of school for the grade 10s. Here I will continue to describe the classroom routines and specifics of the teaching and learning that occurred with this special group of students over the 4 years to follow.

One of the first activities we tackled together after that introductory day in the classroom was a personal writing exercise. Being the homeroom teacher of a grade 10 group of young adults, ranging in age from 16 to 20 years, as well as being their teacher for most subjects during the day, I felt I needed to learn about them as individuals as quickly as I could. I also needed to determine where each of them was at with their English language skills. One of the advantages of teaching the same group of students all day is that you can be as flexible as necessary with the schedule. Early in the year, senior schedules change often anyway, as timetables are adapted and improved upon. I allowed several full mornings for students to complete the task of this writing exercise. I knew that the time spent on this particular activity early in the term would pay off later on.

I asked students to write their life stories. Before panic set in I quickly went about showing them my own life history. I surprised the class by bringing out a long roll of paper instead of loose-leaf sheets. I had prepared a timeline, representing my life, on the long sheet of brown butcher's paper. I unrolled it and literally began telling my story starting in the year of my birth and working up through the years to my arrival in

Ausuittuq. I had marked in what I thought to be important events in my life—visiting the swans by the river in England, hill-walking as a pre-schooler in Scotland, emigrating to Canada with my family, framing my first drawing, entering University, walking transects for a bird survey, on safari in Africa, becoming a park naturalist, teaching in Pangnirtung, and so on. Needless to say, students were very interested in learning about the details of my life. I answered many questions. I consciously monitored how I was modeling the activity—after all, I expected the students to do the very same thing over the next few days. I explained that the information gathered by each student would later be written up as a story on the computer, printed out and put into book form. Each of their stories would be a chapter in the book entitled *Our Lives*. Already students were excited at the prospect of authoring their own stories. They could see that the timeline idea would help them to organize the details of their lives. The computers were new to the school, as a result of the program extension into senior secondary schooling, and had not yet even been set up in the classroom. Students were anxious to be the first to use them.

Students paired up quickly, cut long pieces of butcher's paper from the roll, claimed a space on the floor or at a nearby table, and immediately drew a long straight line with a ruler down the centre of each of their sheets. There was lots of chatter, mostly in Inuktitut, as students began talking about their early childhood. Sometimes, a voice would be heard over all the others exclaiming, "No! That was *after* you moved from Pond Inlet." or "Yes, that was the year I broke my arm." or "Remember when..." Students constantly asked each other for help in recollecting their own specific life events. Almost all of them had grown up with each other from birth and were able to

verify the times and confirm the details as they proceeded. This process took two or three morning sessions to complete. Each student had started their timeline with the year of their birth and then, with brightly coloured markers, added in events such as, "baby brother was born", "got sick with the chickenpox", "went camping at Avataaktuk", "killed my first seal", "built an igloo with my Dad", "moved into a new house", "grandfather died", "made caribou kamiks", and so on. Afterwards, students walked amongst all of the timelines displayed on the floor, encouraging each other and fondly remembering some of the shared memories identified by their friends. The next step was to write out their first draft of their life events on paper, adding or taking away as they thought best. In order to help students write more than a chronological listing of their life events, I encouraged them to also include the emotions they experienced throughout those events. Students went through the process of writing that first draft, proof-reading each other's work, and editing before writing the second and third drafts on the computers. Before the end of September, after a lot of hard work, three copies of *Our Lives* were printed, placed in green duotangs and placed on the bookmobile in the classroom. Instead of embarrassing students by asking them to read their finished stories aloud, I encouraged them to simply pick up one of the books whenever they had a free moment and read at their leisure. Students were very proud of themselves and did not object to having the stories on display for parent-teacher meetings and school open houses early in the fall. Throughout the year, younger students from other classes were "given permission" by my students to read the stories as well. Even well into their third year in high school, those same green duotangs were pulled off the shelf and browsed through, often eliciting broad smiles from the readers.

In engaging in this particular exercise, not only did I determine the levels of English skills of my new students, I quickly learned much about their individual lives as well as some important community events. Simeonie had been bitten by a fox as a young child and went through the horror of receiving rabies shots. Markoosie was adopted as a toddler in Iqaluit. Both Nunia and Josephie had moved to Ausuittuq from Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet. Laisa was pregnant with Josephie's baby. Some of my students' relatives had recently moved to Inukjuaq, in northern Quebec. I was pleasantly surprised by the variety of information discussed within the class throughout this activity. Writing is difficult for most students, especially those learning in a second language situation. Students learned that writing is a process, not simply an end product. More importantly they learned that autobiographical writing allowed them to comfortably disclose information about themselves and that taking risks in school could be a lot of fun. They learned first hand that their lives were important and of interest to others. After seeing the success of this activity I often asked students to document specific times in their lives and to write about them. Students always seemed willing to share their real life stories. With practice they eventually began to write more creative, fictional accounts as well.

I have mentioned that, as their teacher for most subjects in that first year of high school, I was able to integrate many subject areas into themes and project-based activities. I found that I became a teacher of language more than anything else (see Chapter 4, Language, Culture and Culturally-Relevant Curriculum). Every single lesson, regardless of the subject area, was preceded by an ESL (English as a Second Language) strategy. Students needed help navigating through the often-specialized vocabulary of

subjects like science and mathematics in particular, but also with the complex wording in social studies and with the English language generally. I remember asking a student to define what I thought to be a simple word, yet I was met with a blank stare. I learned that the word I was looking for was not the problem. The student did not know what I meant by *define.* I had a similar encounter with the word *occur*—the student actually knew the answer to the question I had posed, but could not answer right away as she did not understand the word *occur.* Even with a previous 4 years of ESL teaching in the North, when I arrived in that grade 10 classroom in Ausuittuq I found that I had to constantly remind myself that language is taught first and foremost, and only after that can attention be given to the subject content areas. Reviewing new vocabulary, playing with word puzzles, and engaging in active word games helped students to feel comfortable at the beginning of new units regardless of the specific subject. Group spelling competitions (for fun) and trivia games were activities that all my senior students enjoyed.

Many critics of small community high schools claim that students are not given the same choice in course selection afforded their larger community counterparts. To a large extent this is true. A small staff is limited in their ability to offer a wide variety of courses. At Aqiatusuk School almost all of the courses at the senior high level were general level courses. We simply did not have the staff to offer both general and academic level teaching. Individual teacher strengths change from year to year, depending on who stays and who leaves from one year to the next. Course schedules change every year to reflect the varying needs of the individual students in fulfilling the

requirements to graduate. Schedules in small northern schools are nothing if not creative.

During my 4 years at Aqiatusuk School, we managed to offer nearly 50 different courses to the senior students. In their first year of high school, students were offered the opportunity to earn over 35 credits, the recommended number of credits needed to enter grade 11. Along with English, General Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies, students were taught Northern Studies, Career and Life Management, Art and Physical Education. The assignments of the teaching staff in all small northern communities are somewhat eclectic. Often a hole in the schedule needs to be filled, and any member of the staff may be asked to teach any number of classes outside of their specialty. I taught all of the above subjects except for Social Studies— Harry, the principal for that first year, came in for those classes. He was also teaching some of the junior high courses. I taught ESL and Math to the grade 3-4-5 class three or four times a week so that Oolassie could teach my students Inuktitut Language. All in all, however, I spent the vast majority of my time in that first year with the grade 10 class. For 3 weeks before Christmas and another 3 weeks the following May, students were offered even more choices of courses. The "academics" were put on hold and 1-credit, CTS modules (Career and Technological Studies) were offered to the junior and senior high classes. The junior high students were included so that the numbers of students involved in the various courses were reasonable. They were allowed to "bank" credits until they themselves reached grade 10. It also gave the junior and senior high students an opportunity to interact with each other in high interest courses. Maintaining student interest during the few weeks before Christmas and at the end of the school year was

difficult, so these short 25-hour modules gave students a welcome change in their schedules as well as a chance to earn credits quickly. Using the strengths of the available staff, students chose amongst diverse modules such as Mining, 2-D Design, Keyboarding, Word Processing, Leadership, and Income Tax. Students also earned a credit for participating in the annual spring camp. Each year, more core courses at higher skill levels were offered to students, as well as elective credits and additional CTS modules. These modules were offered each year in ever increasing increments of difficulty. For example, students were given more and more responsibility and tasks at each spring camp, therefore they earned beginning, intermediate and advanced CTS credits for their work. Likewise, by their third year at the secondary level, some students could troubleshoot many computer problems and earned advanced credits in technology. Students also needed to earn a Community Service credit in order to graduate high school. This involved a minimum of 25 hours of work within the community. This was probably the easiest credit earned for many students as the community was always happy to have students work on projects at the various agencies in town (see Chapter 6 School-Community Partnerships).

In my second year in Ausuittuq, Harry and his wife left the North and I became the principal of Aqiatusuk School. I continued to teach the senior students Math, Science and Art. I also taught Health and Personal Development along with a number of CTS modules throughout the year. Stephen, previously teaching Inuit in northern Quebec, was hired to teach the senior students English, Social Studies and Physical Education as well as a number of other junior high and elementary classes. YoAnne continued mainly with Math and Science at the junior high level, but she also taught French to the senior

class. The community of Ausuittuq has an historical link to Inuit of northern Quebec and students showed great interest in learning French language. YoAnne's first language is French and since she had earned a double major in Science and French, she was more than happy to introduce this language to the students. Each year new teachers were hired with differing specialties and interests and the elective courses offered to the students reflected this diversity in staff backgrounds. When the school was awarded an extra half time teaching position, the school schedules became even more malleable. I was then also able to spend more needed time on my administrative duties. Stephen left the community after 1 year and was replaced by Vincent, who had previously taught in the western Arctic. Oolassie went on leave and was replaced by Krista. Krista's partner, Cory, also took a half time position teaching the junior high class. By this time, YoAnne had cut back to a half time position with the school and had kept her half time Nunavut Arctic College adult education job as well. She piloted a very popular peer-helping course, *Aulajaatut*, to the high school students that year. Vincent, Krista and Cory all left the community at the end of that year and in year 4 we were joined by Andrea and Tammy. Tammy came to us from a reserve school in Manitoba. She took the junior high class, but since she was a certified physical education teacher (our first at Aqiatusuk School), she also taught the gym classes for the senior students. Andrea had spent the previous year working at a girl's home in Nepal. She was to teach the senior humanities courses, but she also showed great interest in teaching art. Although it was difficult to "let go" of the art, I knew Andrea would be able to inject fresh, new ideas into the program. I never regretted passing the torch to Andrea as she did a superb job. I also believe that the students responded positively to this change. While there are many

advantages to teaching the same students the same subjects each year, a drawback is that students and teachers may become too accustomed to each other's ways—sometimes a change in the routines helps to maintain interest and enthusiasm.

I mention all of these staff changes to illustrate a point. Each year, new teachers arrived. Each year, there was a period of time in the fall where students and new teachers had to become acquainted. As a staff, we could not determine what elective courses or CTS modules would be offered each year until we got to know the personalities of our new staff members. Every year, new high school teachers had to learn about the then Northwest Territories (NWT) senior secondary program and credit system. Each successive year was different from the one previous. The only constants for the senior students from year to year were the local instructors, YoAnne and myself. As a result of these yearly changes, a lot of effort was put into helping the students become knowledgeable about the secondary school program and to encourage them to maintain their own records of achievement and credits earned. Of course, I maintained individual records in the office, but the students also kept their own records in their classroom, in a file that they had access to and could open at any time. I designed a graphic performance chart for students to keep track of their course credits. One hundred squares piled in the shape of an *inukshuk* (an Inuit stone cairn) on the page represented the 100 credits needed to graduate. Required courses were labeled, the remainder left blank for students to label themselves. As they earned credits, the appropriate squares were coloured in. During their first year, since all of the core courses were spread out over the entire year, only the CTS modules and elective squares were filled in before the

end of the year. But this was enough for the students to understand that in using the chart they would be able to visualize their path to graduation.

Any opportunity that arose where students themselves could take charge of their educational journey was explored. When choices had to be made regarding course offerings, for example, students were involved whenever possible. Senior students were always invited to school planning meetings with parents and community members. I remember consulting the high school class one spring just before the hiring for the next school year was about to commence. I asked them to tell me what kind of person they wanted me to hire. The list of attributes identified by the students resembled many of those "effective teacher" qualities described by seasoned educators. The students wanted someone who, "respected them and their culture, someone that liked the outdoors, did not shout and was not loud." They wanted someone who, "knew their subject area, was interesting and had high expectations for their students." They wanted someone, "who was patient". I had expected the students to direct me to hire someone who would be easy on them—I was impressed by the seriousness with which they considered my request for help. These students never ceased to amaze me with their genuine desire to do well and to earn their right to graduate with a high school diploma. I found that the more decisions I invited the students to make, the more serious they became about their schooling. As long as the students saw that their decisions were being sincerely considered, they were happy offering their opinions when asked.

Even with the periodic changes that often seemed to occur for one reason or another, the senior class managed to maintain a certain routine. I discovered routines are important for all students. A moderate amount of structure is not something students are

adverse to. High school classes began at 8:55 AM and ended at 4:20 PM, except in the fourth year where they ended at 4:05 PM. These hours may seem long, compared to southern schools, yet the students attended school for close to the same number of hours as would a southern student over the period of an academic year. The extended day allowed the school to close earlier in June so that families could take advantage of the excellent camping weather and 24-hour daylight at that time of year. Individual northern communities were allowed to determine the school year calendar dates, one year at a time, as long as the required annual hours of instruction were not compromised. Senior students shared two recesses, morning and afternoon, as well as an hour lunch each day with all of the other K – 9 students at school. In order to ensure that the appropriate amount of instructional time was being spent in each of their courses, schedules were drawn up and subject areas divided into single 45-minute periods or doubled up into 90-minute sessions. It was important to both the students and their teachers that there be a time framework in place to organize their days. These schedules were often manipulated to allow time for theme work, special interdisciplinary projects, cultural activities or even community work. As an example, senior students were excused each September for a day or two to help distribute the food and construction supplies that arrive on the ship for the annual sealift. Some of my male students were excused one spring for nearly a month so that they could help collect fresh water in the form of chipped iceberg pieces during a serious community water shortage. Parents wanted their children to develop strong civic responsibilities and anytime the school could contribute towards this goal, students were encouraged to do so. More importantly, students were not penalized for time spent away from school. Concepts, skills and attitudes acquired through

participating in civic activity were tracked and the students were given credit for much of their work.

While inside the school the seniors spent most of their day within their own classroom, for each subject except when they went to the gymnasium for physical education classes. Gym classes were usually scheduled at the same time as those of the junior high students so that team sports could be played. Whenever possible, multiage groupings within the school were encouraged, particularly for special events, so that boys and girls of various ages could intermingle and spend time with each other. I have observed many children of various ages socializing and playing with each other in Inuit communities than I have seen elsewhere. Multiage peer groups and family groupings are commonly used in northern schools. At Aqiatusuk School, buddy-reading groups that always included the high school class were set up every year. The primary students would be so excited when the seniors would come into their room for the activity—they would sometimes argue a little over which high school student would be their buddy for that half-hour period each week. Students took turns reading in Inuktitut and English, whichever language they wanted. There was such a range in language skills between the older and younger students, but not always the way you would expect. One or two of the grade 4 students could read Inuktitut better than a couple of the grade 10 and 11 students. However, this was never a point of embarrassment for the older student—he simply complimented the younger one and allowed her to read to him. The high school students often went into the younger classes to help out when needed, or to demonstrate an art activity or a science experiment. One Hallowe'en, the grade 10s practiced glow-in-the-dark, mildly explosive and smoke producing chemistry experiments for a week

before taking their show "on the road" to each of the other classrooms in the school. At the time, everyone was dressed up in costumes—the sight of long-haired monsters, vagabonds, and green witches teaching a chemistry class to groups of vampires, batmen, *amouti*-clad miniature mothers (an amoutik is a traditional parka for carrying a baby), and ballerinas is, needless to say, quite comical.

For the most part, the seniors were quite happy to stay in their own classroom, together as a group. They liked being the oldest students in the school and enjoyed the perks offered to them as seniors. So many of the high school students carried on adult lives outside of the school that it seemed reasonable to allow them certain freedoms and choices at school. The grade 10 through 12 students, for example, were the only ones allowed to smoke in the designated area outside. This was later extended to include the grade 9s as well, mostly due to the age of those specific students. The new computers were in the senior classroom, and the seniors were always given priority on these machines, even after school in the evenings if they chose. Likewise, because of different funding from the School Board for the secondary program, the high school class received specialized art resources and various other one-time-only supplies that added to the special nature of being a high school student.

In order to maintain reasonable attendance throughout the year, the senior high schedules were always being fine-tuned and adjusted so that students would be enticed to come to school regularly. Attendance is a chronic problem for most northern schools, especially at the senior level. Working for a living and receiving a paycheque is very attractive to young adults everywhere. Mandatory attendance in school only really came about in the NWT after the Education Act was changed in 1996. Even after that, there

was no real way to enforce daily school attendance. Many Inuit families still live a fairly traditional life, spending a lot of time on the land or being involved in traditional activities. Children travel with their parents for long periods of time and often help with more household duties than children of the same age in the south. Very young girls for example are expected to baby sit even younger siblings as parents take care of other home responsibilities. Many young boys are encouraged to learn hunting skills early on in their lives and miss school whenever an opportunity arises where they can go on the land. Older students often have children of their own, or part time jobs in the community, or an array of reasons to miss school. Educators must constantly remind students and their parents why school is important, especially a high school education. Most importantly, the students need to feel that their learning is meaningful, with purpose, and of use to them in their lives. Curriculum may need to be molded a little (or changed a lot) to meet the needs of the students in the individual communities.

While I taught in Ausuittuq, attendance at Aqiatusuk School, for the most part, was better than most of the other schools in the Baffin. In my monthly reports to the Board, very rarely did the overall school attendance dip below the 80% level. The primary and elementary classes almost always reported over 90% attendance. For years, long before I arrived, the community had supported the school fairly positively and sent their children to school on a regular basis. I worried, however, that like most high schools in the North, the attendance would begin to slip after the initial novelty wore off. Of course, there are always certain times in the year when attendance is extremely difficult to maintain regardless. I have already mentioned the September and May/June camping seasons where many families head out on the land for a variety of traditional

activities. The 2 weeks following the Christmas break are also poor attendance periods, due mostly to the complete turning upside down of day-night schedules as a result of the community games and celebrations. These periods of the year must be accommodated for at the school. In my experience, no amount of discussion will change this phenomenon. And why should it? The school schedule should reflect the cultural traditions of the community. It is the missing of school for other, less honourable reasons which teachers need to work towards changing. As a teacher, I tried to make my lessons interesting. As a principal I asked that all teachers try to make what was happening in their classes more interesting and more important than most activities outside of school so that students would choose to come to school instead. I did not expect teachers to become entertainers but I did hope that extra effort would be placed in meeting the needs of our very unique students.

Many strategies were attempted to entice the high school students to remain in school and to attend regularly, as well as to arrive on time. Physical education classes were scheduled for first period after lunch, or sometimes for first period in the morning. Art would be scheduled at the end of a morning or afternoon. We discovered that Language Arts and Mathematics were best offered in the mornings while students were more likely to be alert. Science was often given in the afternoons. These subjects were moved around in the schedule from one term to another, one year to the next. Variety seemed to be the key, rather than any magical formula for when to offer specific courses. We made sure that every single thing attempted by the students in all courses counted for something. Participation depended on attendance so points were awarded for participation. Monthly school assemblies recognized student attendance as well as

academic achievement. Month after month students were reminded that everything mattered. Sportsmanship, willingness to help, an ability to read and write. Eventually they bought into it, seeing that their teachers were consistently recognizing and celebrating success, and the students began to look forward to the assemblies, cheering for their peers. It also helped that we managed to offer small prizes for students at these assemblies.

Attendance for most of the grade 10 students that started out in the fall of 1995 continued in the same way for the 4 years I spent at Aqiatusuk School. One or two of them moved out of town, but others moved in to take their place. Two or three left before September concluded, yet all of those particular students eventually attended Arctic College for upgrading. Two boys consistently dropped out each year, usually after Christmas, only to return the following September to try again. One fellow, after turning 21 years of age, was encouraged to attend a particular program at Arctic College instead. After a couple of months, he did just that.

Half way through the grade 10 year, a decision was made to continue the grade 10 courses into the following year, finishing later at Christmas instead of June. Students needed more time to complete the requirements of their individual courses and since there were no grade 9 students in the school poised to enter high school the following year, scheduling would be relatively simple. The DEA and the parents of the students involved agreed that rather than rushing students through a specified program of studies, it was better to allow extra time so that they could complete as many of their courses as possible and successfully earn their credits to proceed into grade 11. By now students knew that not all of them would be automatically moved up into grade 11, as they had

experienced with their K-9 schooling. They realized that secondary school required individual subject promotion and that a minimal number of credits had to be earned in order to proceed into grade 11. Because of the time spent "catching up", mainly in English language and mathematical skills, none of the students were set to pass many of their courses by June of that first year. Students, therefore, seemed relieved when they were asked about the possibility of extending grade 10 up until Christmas of the following year. It seemed that a collective weight was lifted off their shoulders and they could concentrate more on learning the material at a slower pace, rather than rushing through it.

Grade 10 therefore continued that fall and three students were honoured in a grade 10 graduation assembly the following January. These were the first ever grade 10 graduates of Aqiatusuk School. To an outsider looking in, the ceremony could very well have been a grade 12 graduation, with all of the pomp and circumstance, camera flashes, nervousness, crying, wide smiles and obvious pride exhibited by all. Every high school student wore a mortar hat and gown, borrowed from another school in the Baffin. The community celebrated *all* students' hard work and achievements. The three who had earned the required credits to be considered grade 11 students were especially proud in their quiet way. They simply smiled from ear to ear. Even their peers looked towards them that evening with great pride and adoration.

When the routine of school continued, students spoke fondly of their "graduation" celebration. The fact that everyone was honoured was important. Students seemed to be more focused in their goal of graduating high school after that ceremony. Before school broke for summer, one more student had fulfilled the requirements for

grade 10. Many had begun grade 11 level courses and some were well on their way towards success in those subjects. While some students continued with their grade 10 courses, some continued on the following year with grade 11 courses. Course offerings and scheduling in general became much more complex at this time. Basically, each student's needs had to be considered individually first, and then courses were scheduled in wherever they could fit and when required. All of the combinations of grade 10 and 11 subjects had to be offered in the same classroom. As teachers, we were always offering more than one course at a time to the group. There were different expectations for assignments by the students registered in the various levels of Science or English, for example. We taught the entire group when possible, then split into smaller groups every now and then. Sometimes individual work was assigned, each student progressing at their own rate. Keeping records often became complicated but it was absolutely essential to track each student's progress so that credits could be awarded as soon as they were earned. For example, Josephie finished the requirements for his grade 10 science course in the middle of February one year. Instead of automatically going on to grade 11 science, Josephie decided that he could better spend the time in class working on his other subjects in which he was falling behind. He and Laisa were living in their own home and caring for their toddler son—there never seemed to be enough time for homework outside of school. Each student was given as much freedom as possible to direct his own path towards success. With students working at so many different levels, the classroom became even more busy and chaotic than before. A vision of New Zealand educator Sylvia Ashton-Warner's "volcanic prefab" comes to mind! Parts of the room had to be temporarily sectioned off for individual or small group work while the

teacher addressed another group from the blackboard. Somehow, it happened. It took a lot of hard work and commitment from the teachers involved. Everyone had to be creative and flexible to make the system work. The parents and the community were extremely open-minded to anything we wanted to try, as long as the students' well being were at the heart of those decisions.

One year later, in September 1998, a few students began grade 12 level courses. Ten of the original high school students in the first grade 10 class entered school for a fourth consecutive year and three others had moved up from junior high in previous years. There were thirteen students in high school in the fall of 1998. This was the first year where there was any possibility of graduates. By the end of the year, Aqiatusuk School had produced two grade 12 graduates.

For the most part, all of the high school students actively participated in the goings-on at the school. Not all students, however, performed well academically. A few of them had been socially promoted more than once during their elementary and junior high years. English language and mathematics skills were lacking in many of the new grade 10 students, but were abysmal for three or four of them. I also suspected solvent-abuse and fetal alcohol effects in one or two of the students that would greatly hinder their abilities to learn. These particular students faced the enormous challenge of not only performing well in the high school environment, but in trying to catch-up and then keep-up with their classmates. For some of my students this was simply not possible. All of my students were used to moving up as a group every year into each successive grade. The high school program, being based on individual subject promotion, was new to the students and took a while to understand.

The large range in abilities of the grade 10 class did not take long to surface. The more capable students were often paired up with the less capable ones but eventually different groupings within the classroom for the various subject areas had to be considered. In a sense, this was not a big issue—it had to be done eventually. I knew that as grade 11 and then grade 12 courses were added to the mix in the years to come, different ability groupings would become a necessity. Reality dictated that the entire high school program would take place in that one classroom, all grades at the same time, therefore students had to learn to accept that some of their friends would race on ahead and some would be left behind. Adamee, Peetah and Markoosie were three of the most pleasant young men to have as students in a high school classroom. They were kind, polite, almost always in good humour. They began grade 10 with everyone else, yet Adamee and Markoosie did not earn enough credits to be considered in grade 11 until my last year in the community. Both of these boys attended school regularly, in fact, Markoosie had one of the highest attendance records in the school. They had difficulty concentrating and needed to be helped along every step of the way. Mathematics in particular was extremely difficult for both of them. Homework was rarely completed. Adamee was, however, already a talented young artist in the community, and Markoosie was known as a very capable young man out on the land. Both boys persevered and kept coming back day after day, year after year. They saw many friends move on ahead. The day I informed them that they had completed the requirements for grade 10 their faces could not have expressed more pride and happiness. They were presented with their certificate at a school assembly and awarded a gift of a watch. We had presented every grade 10 graduate to date with the same watch—nine or ten so far. I honestly believe

that at that moment, Adamee and Markoosie saw that the 4 years they put into achieving grade 10 status was worth every single ounce of effort.

Peetah, unfortunately, was nowhere even close to entering grade 11 as I left Aqiatusuk School. Yet, like Markoosie and Adamee, he attended school every day and participated in all of the classroom activities. Peetah loved music and often brought in his CDs to share with his peers. We listened to a lot of music in class—often we would study the lyrics to songs for reading and writing lessons. When asked who their best friends were on a questionnaire in a personal development course, several of the students (boys and girls) identified Peetah as one of their closest friends. Peetah possessed qualities highly regarded by his peers. Although I am sure that Peetah would have liked to have performed better academically, I never sensed that he felt inadequate or "less than" his classmates. He enjoyed coming to school each day. Amongst many other problems, Peetah's complete inability to focus on school tasks contributed to his not moving up into the grade 11 level. I always marveled at how persistent Peetah, Adamee and Markoosie were, in that they never gave up and they never, ever, thought about dropping out of school.

Most students plodded along each year, gathering three and five credits for each course, and one credit every now and then for each of their CTS modules. Excitement was always in the air when the folders came out of the filing cabinet and students were allowed to colour in more squares of their "inukshuk". These files were updated two or three times a year, and only when every student in the class was able to colour in at least one square—with few exceptions, all students earned the CTS module credits. In this way, no matter how slowly for some, all students could see their achievements building.

Simeonie and Nunia

Simeonie and Nunia were boyfriend and girlfriend as they entered high school. Nunia had moved to Ausuittuq from another community to help out a relative with a young child. She and Simeonie began seeing each other and they quickly became inseparable. Nunia decided to stay. She was very quiet and shy, and had very few close friends in town. She lived with Simeonie and his family. Simeonie and Nunia arrived in school late in September that year. They had been camping with Simeonie's family at a fiord west of the community and found themselves stranded without gasoline for more than a week. They were waiting for help so they could get back to town and begin high school. When they eventually arrived back in town and showed up at school, they quickly settled into the rhythm of the class. It became evident early in the year that both Simeonie and Nunia were serious students. They showed up every day and attempted most of their homework assignments. They asked questions in class when they didn't understand something. They always sat together and helped each other out when needed. They faced many obstacles along the way that would have deterred many others. In that grade 10 year, Nunia became pregnant with Simeonie's child and missed 2 full months of school. In the North, it is required that mothers-to–be fly out of the community at their eighth month of pregnancy and spend the last month within the hospital community. Both Nunia and Simeonie went off to Yellowknife, but not before asking for schoolwork they could do while they were away. I prepared a large binder of reading and assignments for each of them, not truly expecting they would do much, if any, of it. After the birth of their son, Nunia spent another month at home with the newborn baby.

Throughout that time she completed all of the work I had given her and she was not one bit behind when she returned to class. Simeonie had also managed to stay on top of all of his schoolwork. Simeonie surprised many people. He had never really liked school, and prior to grade 10 he had spent a lot of time out on the land with his father instead of attending school. During an early parent-teacher interview, Lazarusie, Simeonie's father, half-jokingly (yet with obvious pride) commented that he was "jealous of the school" because his son now preferred doing his homework over joining him with his dog team or out on land trips. Simeonie's parents were both pleasantly surprised at the change in their son's attitude towards school.

The following year, Nunia became pregnant a second time, but in true form, she managed to keep up with her schoolwork, as did Simeonie. Even after eventually moving out of Simeonie's parent's home, into their own house, they continued on with their school. Not once did either of them tell me they were considering quitting school and going to work. It was never an option they wanted to pursue. I know that they sometimes struggled to keep food on the table and groceries in the refrigerator, but for whatever their reasons they kept working hard towards their high school diploma.

Simeonie and Nunia were those two grade 12 students in my fourth year in Ausuittuq. They spent much of that year studying alone since they were the only students registered in most of their courses. They spent a lot of time in a room with me near the office as we went over and over sample questions to prepare them for their departmental examinations in mathematics. Andrea did the same thing that year to help them prepare for the English departmental examination. No matter how well they did in grade 12 English and Math at Aqiatusuk School, they could still be prevented from

graduating if they performed poorly on those departmentals. Each one was worth 50% of their final course mark. Needless to say, both Simeonie and Nunia passed the examinations and became the first high school graduates at Aqiatusuk School. It was my great privilege to see these two people complete their high school education. I could not have been more proud if they were my own children. They showed many people, more than Simeonie and Nunia could possibly have imagined at the time, that small community high schools *could* work. Whether they realized it or not, these exemplary young people acted as inspiring role models to the youth in the community and lit the way for others to pursue a high school education. Two more students graduated with a senior secondary diploma the following year, and I have no doubt that many others will follow.

Introduction to Part 2

As I reflect on my experiences teaching in Inuit schools generally, and more specifically at Aqiatusuk School in Ausuittuq, I am continually lead to recurring strands that connect all of these experiences together. In the same way that the natural changes in the seasons affect the life of the school, certain themes also seem to be woven throughout the day to day school program. These themes emerge, more than anything else, as a result of the philosophies brought to the school by each staff member, student and concerned member of the community each and every day. The themes I identify may be viewed as the product of powerful mindsets that manifest themselves specifically in the attention given to language (both Inuktitut and English) and Inuit culture, the value of traditional knowledge and skills, the methods of communication within the school and community, and the developing of positive collegial relationships amongst school staff as well as healthy partnerships in the community.

Chapter 4 explores the theme of language, culture and culturally-relevant curriculum as it pertains to the ultimate success of students at Aqiatusuk School. The theme of artistic expression within the school program is discussed in chapter 5. A detailed account of substantive partnerships amongst the school, parents and community businesses and organizations follows in chapter 6. References to the literature regarding culturally-relevant curriculum, arts education and school-community partnerships are given throughout the chapters of Part 2. The implications for successful teaching in a small Inuit community school are discussed in relation to these identified themes.

Chapter 4

Language, Culture and Culturally-Relevant Curriculum

Every single child in Ausuittuq learns to speak Inuktitut at home before entering kindergarten. Inuktitut is the first language of all students at Aqiatusuk School. For most of these preschoolers, their grandparents are unilingual Inuktitut speakers, possessing very little knowledge of English language. Inuktitut is used in the home and within the community from the day they are born. Therefore, children spend most of their first 5 years of life completely immersed in the Inuktitut language. They learn about their cultural identity through the actions, behaviours and language that they observe and hear around them each and every day. Fortunately for these children, Aqiatusuk School has always been able to provide them with the majority of their schooling in their native language up to grades 5 or 6. Research suggests that reinforcing children's conceptual base in their first language throughout elementary school (and beyond) provides a foundation for long-term growth in English academic skills (Cummins, 1996). During first-language instruction children are not just developing skills in their first language, they are also developing a deeper conceptual and linguistic proficiency that is strongly related to the development of literacy in the second language.

In Ausuittuq, when youth enter junior high school, they are suddenly taught predominately in English by non-Inuit teachers. The main reason for this is simple. There still are not enough trained Inuit teachers in the profession and few Inuit educators feel comfortable or confident enough to teach older children. This is changing slowly, yet many schools still have the overwhelming majority of their Inuit staff placed in the primary and elementary grade levels. In effect then, at Aqiatusuk School, Inuit students

enter an English immersion program when they begin junior high school. In most other Arctic communities, this transition into English begins even earlier—at grade 2 or 3. I believe it to be a definite advantage for Inuit students in Ausuittuq to be educated by Inuit teachers, learning in their first language, throughout the first 6 years of their schooling.

At Aqiatusuk School, due to its small size, the differences in language development amongst the students are easily observed. Kindergarten students at the start of their year speak virtually no English whatsoever. They may utter the odd word here and there, words they may have heard on television or from older children and adults close to them, but they have no real understanding of English. Those same children will be able to follow simple English instructions by the end of that first year. This is remarkable in light of the fact that all teaching at the K–3 level is completely in Inuktitut—there is virtually no English in their daily structured schedule. The English that these students pick up is from the general goings on in school—the informal interactions with older students and with the non-Inuit teachers. There is also the inevitable acquisition of limited English that comes about within the community as a result of watching English language programming on television. As students progress through their early school years, the English they acquire increases in its complexity and by the time they enter grade 4 many are capable of communicating basic ideas, mostly in broken sentences, to their non-Inuit teachers. English words creep into their playground talk and in their various interactions outside of school. Students in the grade 4-5-6 class begin to see more English-speaking teachers on a regular basis. This is a deliberate tactic so that by the time they are about to enter grade 7 they are ready for the

difficult challenge of functioning in English for most of their day. Anyone who has seriously studied a second language understands the tremendous difficulties inherent in those first few days of full immersion. I had previously completed a 4-month French immersion program in New Brunswick and, therefore, had an idea of how difficult this sudden immersion in English may be for the students. More recently, in the spring before I arrived in Ausuittuq, I had also participated in a 3-week intensive Inuktitut course offered by Nunavut Arctic College. At the end of each day my head hurt—I had a full-blown headache by lunch hour most days. The amount of prolonged concentration required to focus on learning this completely new language was enormous. That 3-week Inuktitut course still ranks as one of the most difficult things I have ever attempted.

As students proceed through junior high school, skills in English advance slowly at first, but seem to greatly improve after the first few months. Three years later, these same students enter grade 10. Based on the time periods required to catch up academically with students who learn in their first language, researchers caution that we should not expect bilingual children to approach grade norms in English academic skills before the later grades (Cummins, 1996). Inuit students have an astounding task ahead of them when they enter high school. Before graduating, they need to cover the senior secondary school curriculum (designed in Alberta and adopted by the Northwest Territories and then Nunavut governments), earning 100 credits and, finally, writing standardized departmental examinations in at least grade 12 English and usually two or three other subjects. These exams are the same ones written by all other grade 12 students in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Alberta. The difference being that most of these other students speak English as their first language. According to the

NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment (1999), 90% of Inuit in Nunavut speak Inuktitut as their first language. Throughout their schooling lives, students go home at the end of each day to speak Inuktitut, not English. For them, English is the language of school only. Most Inuit students therefore experience great anxiety over and difficulty with the departmental English examination. Even by the time a young Inuk nears the end of grade 12, many English skills are still lacking. Cummins (1996) suggests that much standardized assessment is actually racist in its structure and works to disempower minority children. Until the Nunavut Department of Education makes a decision to abandon these types of assessments, or to develop their own, more northern-relevant ones, Inuit grade 12 students will continue to struggle through these examinations.

Before going north, I had no language teaching background whatsoever. I was aware that ESL teaching strategies existed but I had no formal training in teaching students who were learning in a second language. My background was an experiential environmental background, one that relied on as much activity and hands-on learning as possible. At that time, I did not realize that this particular bias would in fact serve me well in a second language situation. Nearly everything that I tried in my first few years in the Baffin was a result of what I may inadequately call common sense. I taught intuitively. And even though I did in fact learn many ESL techniques along the way, I still maintain that if empathy and logic prevail, many teachers can succeed with students in a second language environment. By the time I arrived in Ausuittuq, I still used my innate sense of what I understood to be the right thing to do in order to teach my students in English.

Intuition told me that attention to Inuktitut language and Inuit culture at all grade levels in the school, regardless of teacher competence in that language, was of great significance. I believed that a school that values Inuktitut language and Inuit culture, and conveys those ideals to its students, encourages a certain confidence and pride with those students. It seemed to me that students who were reasonably competent in their first language and proud of their cultural heritage would be more willing and able to learn in a second language. Effective pedagogy involves the finding of ways to use language, culture, and experiences of students meaningfully in their education (Nieto, 1996). While Inuktitut speaking teachers are able to maintain the cultural connections of their young students to their families and to the greater community, non-Inuktitut speaking teachers must rely on Inuit around them and a culturally-relevant school program with an emphasis on Inuktitut language to maintain these same connections. As comfortable and competent as I grew, living in an Inuit environment, I always understood that I could never assume to be capable of teaching Inuit culture to my students. I am simply not an Inuk. I could however foster an environment in which Inuit language and culture could freely express itself and thrive.

When I became a teaching principal at Aqiatusuk School in my second year in the community, it became my daunting responsibility to ensure that all students were provided with the best possible education. My own personal beliefs about language and culture obviously coloured the overall school programming. I made it my duty to encourage the use of Inuktitut language not only in my particular classroom but also in the school overall. In her Baffin school, over a period of 4 years, Tompkins (1998) also found that a conscious effort by staff to enhance the use and value of Inuktitut in the

school helped to significantly strengthen Inuit perspective, language and culture. In our school, bulletin boards and hallway displays always focussed on Inuktitut language first. Assemblies, school communications sent home, and radio announcements were given in Inuktitut, then, if necessary, English. Junior and senior high students received three to five periods of Inuktitut language instruction each week so that their school experience was not entirely in English. Every opportunity was taken to integrate Inuktitut language into the high school program. If someone, a guest speaker for example, could speak in both languages then they were asked to use Inuktitut. It really did not matter that the teacher could not understand—the teacher could be told about the main ideas presented to the class later in the day. The benefits to the students of hearing a community guest speaker in their classroom using Inuktitut are far more important.

When Peetah's father returned from a trip to Israel, he offered to come into the high school class to tell his son's classmates of his experiences. Solomonie had been invited to visit the Middle East as a result of his helping an Israeli television crew in Ausuittuq the year before. Solomonie nervously sat on a stool at the front of the class and began speaking in English. Immediately I asked Solomonie to please, if it was easier, speak in Inuktitut to the students. Although Solomonie speaks English very well, with a smile he quickly switched over to Inuktitut. His talk went very well—students paid close attention, showing great interest. They asked many questions as Solomonie produced photographs, newspaper articles and pictures, and various souvenirs of his trip. Students were able to express themselves in Inuktitut without difficulty or hesitation. It makes sense to me that the story of an Inuk in Israel should be told from the Inuk's perspective and in the Inuit language. In having Solomonie tell his story in Inuktitut,

students were implicitly told that Inuktitut was as valuable and as important as English in their high school lives. I sat at the back of many class sessions listening to Inuktitut being spoken to my students and always used the time as an opportunity to observe the interactions of my students with everyone else in the room.

In the year that I arrived in the Baffin in 1989, school board supervisors and consultants were travelling from school to school presenting workshops on Piniaqtavut. This was a new initiative, an integrated program, "...designed to meet the cultural, linguistic and academic needs of Baffin students" (BDBE, 1989). It provided culturally-relevant, interesting themes for students in kindergarten through grade 9. A whole language, theme-based approach to teaching and learning was encouraged. Whole language legitimizes the way native people generally perceive learning (Moore 2000, Kirkness, 1988). Learning should be based on the real world and real language must be part of it. Learning should not be fragmented; it should relate to living, in a holistic and relevant way.

In theme-based programs, students explore a concept through many lenses. Subject areas such as language arts, science, health, mathematics, and social studies are integrated into predetermined grade-appropriate themes. For example, at the grade 2 level, a recommended core unit entitled "Polar Bears" would not only encompass extensive reading and writing about polar bears, students would also learn about the biology of polar bears and their impact on Inuit society. Art projects would focus on the polar bear, as would a number of math activities. A well-defined theme-based program allows students to connect ideas, concepts, and experiences. Building bridges across content areas also gives students a context in which to apply their acquired skills

(Bergstrom & O'Brien, 2001). Tompkins lead the way in the Baffin with "theming and teaming" at her school. She remarks that theming provided their staff with a forum to look critically at how the program was put together, and it provided an opportunity to bring staff together to start teaming. She adds that teaming helped people to come out of their classrooms and see the bigger picture of the school program and the responsibility to contribute to the total school program (Tompkins, 1998). News of Tompkin's success with theme teaching and team collaborations spread throughout the region and many other schools attempted similar strategies. Even though it took a lot of time to produce teaching resources to support the individual thematic units, Inuit teachers embraced Piniaqtavut.

By the time I reached Ausuittuq in 1995, Piniaqtavut was fairly well established in all Baffin schools. I had seen the program in action first-hand in both Pangnirtung and Hall Beach and I truly believed in its merits. Students at all grade levels loved learning the Piniaqtavut themes—they were purposeful, interesting and meaningful to students living in the North. As a high school teacher I had still been involved mostly with the senior secondary curriculum, a southern-based curriculum far removed from the ideals of Piniaqtavut. For me, going to Ausuittuq was not only an opportunity to start up a brand new high school program, it was also a chance to connect that new senior high program more seamlessly to the already existing, more culturally-relevant, K – 9 Piniaqtavut program. I arrived at Aqiatusuk School with impeccable timing. The new K – 12 curriculum from the Inuit perspective, *Inuuqatigiit*, was about to be implemented in all Nunavut schools. Unlike Piniaqtavut, which is a program, Inuuqatigiit is a curriculum document. "The foundation for Inuuqatigiit comes from Inuit philosophy...It focuses on

the enhancement and enrichment of the language and culture of Inuit students. It also promotes integration of the Inuit perspective with the standard school curriculum" (GNWT, 1996).

The notion of cultural relevance moves beyond language to include other aspects of student and school culture. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), it transcends the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about in part, she adds, by not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted...or they may result from the staffing pattern in the school. As an example, the junior and senior high school teachers, the principal, and the vast majority of the visiting school board officials to Aqiatusuk School were all non-Inuit. The primary teachers, janitor and office staff were Inuit. Ladson-Billings writes that culturally-relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The implementation of Inuuqatigiit meant that even more senior secondary programs would be given much needed injections of Inuit culture. Good high school teachers throughout the north had been substituting northern, more culturally-relevant materials into the curriculum anyway, for them Inuuqatigiit was not a completely new concept. Holding the actual curriculum document in your hands, however, meant that many other teachers would be doing the same thing in their own high school classrooms. A more structured support network focussing on Inuit culture in the curriculum for senior high teachers was very welcome.

In the spring before I made the long trek to Ausuittuq, I had become involved in the new Nunavut High Schools Project (NHSP). As a member of the science committee,

I was involved in the integrating of academic and general level science curriculums. This was to aid new teachers in the north faced with the very real possibility of having to teach two different levels of science at the same time within one classroom. In adjusting the curriculum, attention to Inuuqatigiit was foremost on our minds. Eventually, the science committee went on to develop several culturally-relevant components to the curriculum, the *Science of the Qulliit* (seal oil lamp) and *Science of Igunaq* (aged meat), for example. I later became heavily involved in the NHSP art committee, where an Inuit art curriculum was to be developed that embraced all Inuit art forms. The NHSP's English and Social Studies committees eventually produced Humanities materials as well. All of this work served to support senior secondary teachers throughout the Baffin and Nunavut with relevant teaching ideas for their Inuit students more so than ever before.

Over the years, as I went about developing lessons for my students, and programming for the school, I made a sincere attempt to follow the Inuuqatigiit philosophy, integrating traditional Inuit values and beliefs with the school program so that each day is as meaningful as possible for students. I found that the entire staff at Aqiatusuk School shared the same conviction and worked very well together. When new non-Inuit teachers would arrive for yet another school year they were encouraged to teach culturally-relevant topics to their students and were given a lot of support from staff and community members. Non-Inuit teachers were encouraged to learn even a small amount of Inuktitut. Cummins (1996) states that teachers from outside the culture can communicate a great deal of respect to students and other teachers by learning some of the Aboriginal language from the children. He says that even simple gestures can

boost the status of the children's language and culture within the school setting and promote increased motivation to develop both English and Aboriginal language. All staff tried to be as accommodating as possible, working towards the goal of shared student success. We shared information at regular planning meetings and occasionally team-taught in each other's classrooms.

I remember having to teach Northern Studies to that first grade 10 class. At the time, the curriculum was very vague—basically you taught what you thought was best. We did a lot of mapping, northern history and governance, but by far the most interesting unit was that of the story of the High Arctic Exiles. I was warned that it might be a volatile topic. Ausuittuq is itself one of the several "exiled" communities—it was settled by people who, in the 1950s, were forced to leave their home in Arctic Quebec to serve as human flagpoles and assert Canadian sovereignty in the High Arctic. Only a few of the original exiles still live in the community, but many of their children and families continue to make Ausuittuq their home. Over the years, groups of people have moved into the community from other parts of the Baffin region, therefore, in present day Ausuittuq some families sympathize with the exiles and some do not. The story is complicated by the fact that in the mid 1990s the Federal Government awarded compensation to people for the tragedy yet there are many opinions in the community that range in agreement with those chosen to receive the compensation. At any rate, my grade 10 class was made up of children from all Ausuittuq families—I had to be impartial and let everyone have their say. Truth be known, at that time I knew very little about the details of the story. I learned about it with my students. Exploring the many sides of the High Arctic Exiles story turned out to be an amazing experience for me as

well as my students. I did not teach them anything, I only facilitated the daily lessons. The National Film Board had recently produced the documentary, *Broken Promises*, which told of the events from the perspective of the Inuit themselves—we watched this video together. Guest speakers from within the community came into the classroom and gave their own personal perspectives. Students were encouraged to write about their opinions on the topic and to join in on class discussions. They were polite and always showed respect for their classmates' points of view. Surprisingly, there was no political fall-out in the community as a result of the sensitive discussions at the school. I truly believe that the parents and other adults in town wanted their children to be able to hear all sides of the story and make up their minds on their own. Many sat back and observed from a distance. I don't think I could have chosen a more meaningful, relevant topic for grade 10 students at Aqiatusuk School. I was very happy with the way it turned out.

All teachers replaced parts of the curriculum at different times with their own units so that more meaningful learning could occur in their classrooms. YoAnne spent 3 weeks with her multilevel junior high class researching traditional Inuit games, making a few of the props required for those games, and then coordinating a school-wide Inuit games afternoon. All students and their parents were challenged at the high kick, airplane, mouth pull, bench reach, kneel jump and a variety of others. Two games, *ajagaak* and *nugluktuq* proved to be most popular. In ajagaak an 8-inch string is attached to any animal bone with one or more holes in it. The other end of the string is attached to a small bone tip. The object of the game is to hold the bone tip in one hand and swing the bone into the air trying to spear the bone with the bone tip. Often Inuktitut songs are chanted as the game is played and children cheer each other on as the bone is swung

repeatedly into the air. For nugluktuq, a spindle-shaped piece of caribou antler with holes drilled through it is hung from the ceiling at shoulder height. Players form a circle around it and, using spears narrow enough to fit into the drilled holes, each player tries to spear one of the holes. All players play at the same time. It can become quite chaotic, as students grow more and more excited as time passes. Action stops only when someone slides their spear into a hole. This counts as one point and then the play continues. Parents particularly enjoyed these two games. All students love games, but by involving them in so many aspects of this particular unit, YoAnne allowed the students to celebrate their heritage at the same time.

YoAnne and I were not the only non-Inuit teachers in Ausuittuq. Harry was in the community for 2 years before heading home to Prince Edward Island. Andrea, Tammy, Vincent, Cory, Krista, and Stephen came to Ausuittuq from Ontario, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland throughout the 4-year period that I lived there. Each one of them brought enthusiasm and new ideas to the school program. With the help of Oolassie, Hannah, Jeannie (who became the primary teacher when Hannah went on leave to complete her education degree), and so many other Inuit in town, all of we *qallunaat* (southerners) successfully integrated many culturally-relevant themes into our teaching. I can say in good conscience that the spirit of *Inuuqatigiit* was alive and well in Aqiatusuk School.

To help address the challenge of making *Inuuqatigiit* work, money is put aside in the budget each year for the hiring of local cultural instructors to deliver important traditional teaching in Inuktitut. Wherever possible, any third party funding that can be secured is also put towards traditional teachings. Hannah's mother-in-law, Zipporah,

worked at the school every year that I lived in Ausuittuq. She has taught countless children how to prepare seal and caribou skins for sewing and how to make duffel socks and mittens. As far as I know, Zipporah still teaches students two or three times a week. I have a Polaroid snapshot tacked to the wall directly in front of my work table at home—YoAnne and I stand on either side of a very short, round, elderly lady. We all wear dark sunglasses to shade our eyes from the bright sunlight. I have my left arm over the woman's shoulder and YoAnne is hunched over, leaning towards the woman, her face pressed against the woman's cheek. Zipporah had her granddaughter take this photo for us at the airstrip as we left town for the very last time. Jeannie snapped one off for Zipporah too. In the hallway at school, earlier in the week, this beautifully sweet lady had taken us aside, placed her hands on both of our arms and, struggling with her English words and smiling, she said, "Don't go...stay!" We were so touched by this simple gesture of friendship—we felt flattered that an elder would respect us in this way, telling us that she wished us to remain at the school. All we could do was smile back at her and give her a hug. Whenever I think of cultural inclusion in the school program I always first imagine Zipporah's smiling, round face.

Zipporah is especially good at working with sealskins. Often she would bring in several dried skins and have the very young students practice softening the pelts. Recently dried skins are extremely stiff and difficult to work with—they retain the flat, scalloped-edged shape that develops as they are stretched tightly over a wooden frame with sinew and left to dry in the Arctic air. Students would spend the better half of their weekly cultural skills classes to soften even one pelt. String is very loosely sewn around the edge of the skin and then pulled together like a purse string. By holding the string up

around shoulder height, you then step all over the skin, gradually softening it enough to be stitched into *kamiks* (boots) or mitts or any other required piece of clothing. What a sight to behold as eight young Inuit boys and girls stomp briskly over their sealskins, chatting and laughing excitedly as they proceed.

Paniqpakutuk, Oolassie and Meeka's father, the elder I had met on that first flight into town, had worked at the school for years but he stayed on as a cultural instructor only for that first year I was at Aqiatusuk School. Paniqpakutuk is a born teacher. He is knowledgeable in so many cultural traditions—he would tell personal hunting stories and legends, give demonstrations on how to cut up meat, and teach students how to carve in soapstone. Paniqpakutuk would sometimes act as a guide and go on the land with students of all ages. I remember Paniqpakutuk speaking to the junior high class about navigating by the stars in wintertime. He was speaking to the students in Inuktitut as he pointed out the various constellations on a massive glow-in-the-dark star chart that we had ordered for the school. Every now and then, he would ask a student to turn out the lights and the whole class would ooh and aah in wonder at the glowing stars before their eyes. The students learned all of the Inuktitut names for the constellations as well as the Inuit origins of the stories behind them. If a *qallunaaq* (southerner) had taught that particular lesson, the students would have learned about the Big Dipper and Cassiopeia instead of *Tukturjuit* (caribou) and *Ursuutaattiaq* (sealskin blubber container). One advantage of the long dark season in the High Arctic is that students can be taken out in the middle of the day to star watch, and that's exactly how Paniqpakutuk ended his session on navigating by the stars. Off the group went, clothed in parkas and heavy boots, to the shoreline in front of the school. For half an hour or so

all heads were cranked back searching out the constellations they had just learned about from a respected elder.

During another class with Paniqpakutuk, students in kindergarten through grade 9 were given a biology lesson through a partial walrus dissection. They had already participated in the ptarmigan dissection the day before and were told that after the walrus they would also do a seal and a fish. In his quiet, patient way, Paniqpakutuk commands respect—he always has the full attention of the young students with him. Traditionally, Inuit children were first encouraged to watch and observe adults at their tasks in order to learn—later they would practice doing those tasks as adults instructed them (GNWT, 1996). Paniqpakutuk's demonstrations would always follow the traditional ways of teaching children. I will describe this particular lesson in some detail to illustrate his teaching style.

Paniqpakutuk sits on the floor at the head of the class, next to a large disembodied walrus head. The head is so big it barely fits inside a large plastic green garbage bag. Brown butcher's paper is laid out under the plastic to save the junior high classroom rug from any bloody spills. Paniqpakutuk's tools, a long heavy knife, a smaller one and a large roasting fork from the school's kitchen, are laid out on the floor by his side. Forty students and three teachers are either sitting at desks or on the edge of tables, or stretched out on the floor as close as possible to the action. The students have seen walruses many times, some of them have already successfully hunted one with their families, but whenever an animal is brought into the school, great excitement follows.

Paniqpakutuk invites Jamie up to the front of the class right away. Jamie, a tall, well-built, grade 9 student, is already a skilled outdoorsman. He is asked to show the class how to change a walrus whisker into a ring. He quickly plucks out a thick, translucent whisker from the walrus head and with a smile he deftly manipulates the tapered hollow tube into a perfectly round ring. All the while, Paniqpakutuk is speaking in Inuktitut to the class. He makes a ring for himself and then allows 10 to 15 of the closer students to do the same thing. Much talking and laughing ensues as children try to make their own rings. Many are successful. As students finish with their whiskers, Paniqpakutuk takes his utility knife and very carefully slices into the skin of the walrus just below the nose. He speaks to the children constantly, asking questions and patiently waiting for responses as he continues with his work. The walrus has two 16-inch long creamy white tusks protruding from its upper jaw. Paniqpakutuk taps on the tusks then points to several carved ivory dogsled toggles indicating that they were made from the tusks of a walrus.

The whiskers and underlying flesh are sliced off the walrus head, revealing a lot of fatty, almost oily, material under the skin. As he continues, Paniqpakutuk asks students for the names of the various parts. They respond well, sometimes answering in unison. Using his larger knife, Paniqpakutuk cuts away the creamy white, firm blubbery parts of the head. Students are attentive as they listen to his words and watch his movements. He understands that they are learning and does not object when a number of them begin to join their whisker rings together in a chain as he speaks. Paniqpakutuk digs in deep and cuts out a large piece of cartilage from somewhere within the walrus head. Speaking to the group as he carves away at the lump in his hand, he soon produces

a perfectly round ball-shaped object. He asks Jonathan to throw the ball as hard as he can onto the floor. When Jonathan does this, the ball bounces hard off the floor, hits the ceiling and bounces again on the floor. The others are amazed—lots of oohs and aahs are heard from the crowd. There is considerable laughing as well. Paniqpakutuk has Eliyah carve another ball by himself. As he finishes Eliyah hands it over to Lucy who immediately bounces it hard off the floor. Eliyah ducks as Lucy winds up. Students laugh louder and louder. Over in the corner, Billy is concentrating on balancing a walrus whisker on his curled upper lip, trying to make a whisker into a moustache. He sees that he is being watched, then laughs with the group.

As all of this is going on, Paniqpakutuk begins to tell walrus stories. He is very animated in his story telling, smiling and gesturing often. Many students ask several questions throughout the storytelling. Without any instruction from Paniqpakutuk, all of the cartilage "superballs" have been placed in a plastic water-filled container at his side. He sharpens his knife and continues with the dissection. He cuts into the lip of the animal. Many students are very close to him on the floor—he does not ask them to move back. As he speaks, he points to various parts of the walrus with his knife, sometimes making a gentle, stabbing motion. Paniqpakutuk carefully dissects out one of the eyeballs of the walrus. He shows the intact eye to the group then cuts into it so that all of the juice runs out. He retrieves the lens of the eye to show the students. The students are quite expressive... ooh, aah.

Paniqpakutuk again asks for Eliyah's help. Eliyah places his hand inside the mouth of the walrus, apparently feeling around for something, but it takes too long for Eliyah to find what he is looking for. Paniqpakutuk steps in and helps. After a bit of a

struggle, the 10-inch long tongue of the walrus is revealed. Paniqpakutuk then cuts it out and shows the group. Students are genuinely surprised by the size of the tongue. Everyone sticks out their own tongue and laughs.

By this time, the students have sat and watched Paniqpakutuk's demonstration for close to an hour. YoAnne, the homeroom teacher, walks into the classroom carrying a plate and a big covered aluminum pot. She sets it on the floor beside Paniqpakutuk. The foil is removed to reveal big chunks of cooked, steaming walrus meat in a thick broth. Paniqpakutuk happily cuts up the chunks and distributes the food to students for tasting. Everyone is smiling and talking—many students exclaim, "Yum!" as they eat the walrus meat. An appropriate ending to an interesting, certainly meaningful, lesson.

Ooleepeeka, Paniqpakutuk's wife, Malaya, Napatchie, and countless others helped at one time or another in the traditional teachings at the school as well. For the weekly sessions with the cultural instructors, classes are scheduled so that the homeroom teacher stays with the group and participates in whatever the activity is at the time. This allows the teacher to take care of classroom management issues that may arise, leaving the local instructors to deal only with the teaching of the traditional activity. It seems unreasonable to expect that elders, not trained to be teachers, should be left to deal with misbehaviours or inattentiveness. Not surprisingly however, very few discipline problems occur during these classes. The activities students are involved in are not the only focus for the classes—the use of Inuktitut language during that time period is as important as the learning of a new skill. For the most part, instructors are unilingual Inuktitut speakers. They conduct all of their classes in Inuktitut and, deliberately or not, they teach the students new Inuktitut words constantly. The activities

encourage students to manipulate objects and learn specific traditional skills, all the while improving their Inuktitut language. When I taught in Hall Beach, some of the cultural skills classes were turned into a game where students were fined a nominal fee of five cents or so if an English word crept into the conversation. If an Inuktitut word was not known, the object or idea to be named was to be described in other Inuktitut words so that the group could discover the new word together. With my limited vocabulary, anytime I participated in this challenge I had to resort to charades—but I did learn more Inuktitut! Throughout the cultural activities, elders were encouraged to share their personal histories and stories with the children. Sometimes songs were sung and legends were told.

Inuit staff plan with the cultural instructors each week so that culturally-relevant information regarding the predetermined thematic units for the various classes is shared and integrated as much as possible throughout all grade levels. Cultural information that is generated with the Inuit staff and the elders is also shared with non-Inuit staff at other weekly theme planning sessions. Cultural instructors participate in all school events when they are in the school—special activities, games and assemblies for example. Whenever possible, other local resource people are hired to deliver lessons on traditional knowledge or skills. As is usual, they are encouraged to speak to students in Inuktitut. Just before the polar bear hunt was to begin one year, the Renewable Resource Officer came into the school and spoke to the junior and senior high classes about local polar bear quotas, and how they are determined. Another time, an elder discussed the traditional ways of predicting the weather. Seal hunting tactics, a very popular subject, was the topic of discussion on more than one occasion. The integrating of Inuit culture

and language into the program became an every day objective at Aqiatusuk School. The importance of having elders and other community members instructing students in traditional values and skills, in the Inuktitut language, at school on a regular basis cannot be over emphasized—there are immeasurable benefits to all the people of the community. Parent involvement is one way in which community values, lifestyles, and realities can affect the school. In an institution so often far removed from its community, Nieto (1996) believes that the entry of parents into the school also means that their language and culture, and the expectations they have for their children become a part of the dialogue and a part of the tension, made explicit, that exists between school and home.

I have come to understand that language is culture and culture is language—they cannot be separated. As Nieto points out, the language that children bring to school inevitably affects how and what they learn. So much of a person's culture is expressed in the use of certain words; and many words in one language cannot be translated into another. As an example, it would be very difficult to teach Inuit children all of the different types of snow and ice in any other language but Inuktitut—although most references differ in the exact numbers given, there are approximately 40 different Inuktitut words describing snow and up to another 100 for ice! By encouraging students of all ages to participate in activities facilitated by respected people of their community members, given in their own language, students develop invaluable knowledge as well as self-confidence and pride in their cultural heritage. Students learn how to use knowledge of the past to help them deal with the present day and to plan for their future.

At an important community meeting in the school during the fall of 1995, a parent commented that no matter how well a student succeeds in the modern school system, Inuit still need to learn traditional skills and to develop a healthy respect for living things and the environment. Inuit will always hunt and need to survive on the land. The parent went on to state that the Arctic land, water and sky would always be part of Inuit culture, far into the future, and that the school had to offer opportunities for their children to learn important land skills. People of the community were emphatic in letting the school know that the knowledge of the elders and of the traditionally skilled people in town must be passed on to students through regular interaction at the school, as well as at home and within the community.

The community was consulted regularly for activity ideas and anyone that was available to help teach an activity was quickly scheduled in. People were asked to let the school know which days they were available to instruct the students. The elders, with the help of all school staff, were allowed to organize most of their own activities, in school as well as out on the land, by themselves. They were given as much freedom as possible within the school environment. One year, Oolassie went to a Hunters and Trappers Organization meeting, armed with a list of student-generated activity ideas. She had gathered the ideas from her Inuktitut language classes with the junior and senior high school classes. At the end of the evening meeting, Oolassie left with a long list of men and woman who would take the students over the next few months for traditional activities. Community members hired to teach cultural skills were asked to provide as much of their own materials as they could. This included snowmobiles, qamouti, camp stoves and cups for land excursions, skins, knives, specialized carving tools and so on. A

conscious attempt was made to share community resources—often stone, ivory, scrap lumber, and plywood was donated to the students.

Over the years, students participated in a wide variety of culturally-relevant, land-based activities. They learned how to build snow shelters and igloos from Akavak and his son, Imooshie; Zipporah taught them how to light a *qulliq* (seal oil lamp), and maintain the flame. They learned how to pack a *qamoutik* (sled) from numerous hunters in town, and how to command dogs in a team from Moses and Lazarusie. Students were shown how to locate animals for the hunt as well as learning skinning techniques for ptarmigan, seal, caribou, polar bear and muskox. Students learned how to predict the weather and read the stars, and where to find fresh drinking water. They learned how to use a Coleman stove and how to prepare boxes of food for camping trips. They learned how to smoke meat and how to cook while camping. They were taught how to make canvas tents, *ulus* (women's knives), and harpoons. One year, George, an ex-military man moved into town with his Inuk wife and family, and within weeks he was offering a 4-day GPS (Global Positioning System) workshop to senior students. Many hunters now use this technology on a regular basis and students wanted to know more about it. During that workshop, students learned more pertinent geography and geometry than I could have taught them in a month of earth science and mathematics.

Natural settings provide a context for teaching and learning with which no textbook or computer-based learning environment can compete (Tanner, 2001). As a former interpretive naturalist, I have a deep love and respect for the natural environment. I understand how first-hand experience in seeing, touching, smelling and hearing the world around us allows all of us to learn in a much more fundamental, meaningful way

than any other learning situation. Sharp (1973) confirms that when students learn in outdoor settings as compared to staying in the classroom, they learn more quickly, appreciate the experience more, and retain skills and knowledge longer. For many Inuit youth, already raised in a mostly outdoor lifestyle, it seems to me that land-based, experiential education is the most natural environment in which to learn.

Land-based activities at Aqiatusuk School became the soul of the school program. Whether it was softening skins in a classroom, or fashioning a harpoon head from scrap aluminum at the Hamlet garage, or spending an afternoon searching for Arctic hare, or camping for a week on Devon Island, the land-based activities held the school together with the community. For Kindergarten through grade 9, all of the other important components of the school's program fell into place around these land themes. Language arts, social studies, science, health, and mathematics (to a lesser extent) were learned as integrated components of larger themes. And, although the schedules for senior high students were still broken down into separate subject areas (mostly for administrative purposes), interdisciplinary teaching according to themes even in grades 10, 11 and 12 was greatly encouraged. In paying attention to the quality of the land-based activities planned for the school, considerable attention was paid to Inuktitut language and Inuit culture within the school program as well. This focus on land-based education reflected a genuine respect for Inuit and their lives, and in my experience helped encourage students and their families to develop an even stronger cultural pride and identity.

Chapter 5 Art in the Classroom

A discussion of language, culture and culturally-relevant curriculum in Inuit schools must include the importance of art education in the school program. Anyone who has taught in Inuit or First Nations classrooms is aware that many Aboriginal students exhibit considerable artistic talent. I have always been truly impressed by the quality of artwork produced in northern classrooms. A large number of primary and senior students seem to be able to pick up a pencil and produce a likeness of whatever it is they are drawing.

Being artistically inclined myself, I was happy to take on the additional responsibility of developing an art program in Pangnirtung when I first arrived in the North as a high school science teacher. I enjoyed it so much that I gladly took on any art teaching I could in Hall Beach and again in Ausuittuq. By that time I had become a member of the NHSP Art Committee and was eagerly participating in the development of a draft Nunavut art curriculum for the senior high school program. In recent years, the only official senior high art curriculum that teachers have had as a guideline came from Alberta. In the early to mid nineties the Saskatchewan K-9 art curriculum was also adopted as an additional resource. Unfortunately, neither of these documents highlighted Inuit art to any extent, and local arts traditions were given no importance at all. Even now, a comprehensive Nunavut arts curriculum has yet to be completed.

In a sense, I was lucky to not have been tied to any particular program of studies. In the absence of a culturally-relevant art curriculum, art teachers were encouraged to be creative and to start with what the students and the community were already interested in. Basically I did what I thought was best for my students. I drew on my personal

strengths as an artist, looked to the community for types of art forms familiar to the students, and asked for help from local artists in the delivery of the program. Colleagues on staff were helpful as well and occasionally contributed to the program.

Aboriginal students possess a long cultural history of artistic expression. According to McGhee (1996), although there is little resemblance between modern Inuit art forms and those of the prehistoric past, art has been produced in Arctic Canada for the last 4,000 years. Over this period the art took many forms. There was no simple development over time, either in Inuit culture or in its arts; yet perhaps some of these arts may have expressed concepts similar to those of modern Inuit art. Inuit have always made functional clothing, shelters, utensils, tools and weapons using materials from the natural world. McGhee remarks that chipped flint tools and weapon points, from the Arctic small tool tradition, since 2000 BC, are surprisingly well and carefully made, and may approach what we could call an art form. McGhee suggests that these craftsmen were interested in more than just the functional aspects of stone tools. These handcrafted objects served specific purposes, yet many of them were fashioned into highly artistic and pleasing forms. McGhee adds that they selected multi-coloured flints, chipped them very evenly and symmetrically, often with decorative edge serration—their extremely small size suggests that there was a high value on the skill necessary to create such miniature pieces.

Even today, an aptitude for creative expression is greatly valued by Inuit. Hands that once carved snow knives and harpoon tips, now shape ivory, antler and soapstone carvings; fingers that once stitched clothing to guard against the cold Arctic weather, now also weave tapestries and sew appliqué. A person who is artistic in Inuit culture is

respected—great importance is associated with these skills. It didn't take long for me to discover that many of my senior students were already accomplished artists themselves, well regarded in the community for their talents. If, for example, someone wanted a line drawing of a polar bear, they knew to ask Adamee. He was always happy to comply, and in very little time, he would produce a well-proportioned, realistic illustration of the animal. A student who is seen to excel in art, regardless of his performance at school in the core academic subjects, receives a great deal of acknowledgement from their peers, family and community. Although Adamee struggled every day with math and English, he did very well in art. He was known amongst the students as "a real artist". Two years in a row Adamee won an annual national art competition where his work appeared in a student art calendar. Adamee was honoured for this achievement in many ways by his friends and family, as well as at the school. As a teacher, I saw that there was a tangible link between a student's success in the art program and of that same student's feelings of self-esteem and cultural identity. Much of what Inuit students choose to capture in their art is a direct reflection of their Inuit culture. Even the youngest students often draw seal-hunters, snowmobiles, whales and birds. As a person who has been interested in art since childhood, I have an emotional understanding of how I am affected when I draw and paint, and when I receive praise for my work. On many levels, I know that part of my continuing personal development is owed to my success as an artist. It makes sense to me that art could be a powerful tool for enhancing self-esteem and improving self-concept of students in the classroom.

Educators agree that an arts education is valuable, although the benefits of receiving such an education, in its broadest sense, are quite varied. The literature defines

arts education widely as including the fine arts (visual) and the performing arts (music and drama). None of the schools in which I taught in the North had any music or drama classes, but they all offered drawing, painting, carving, printmaking, sewing and a number of other visual art activities. The students that I came into contact with were very interested in music in particular but the schools simply did not have the budget for purchasing a lot of instruments, nor the trained staff to deliver the program. Any music education occurred at home and within the community (surprisingly, several of my students played guitar, drums and the keyboard).

In Ausuittuq none of my students had received any structured art lessons before my arrival. Except for the usual art components that accompany student projects at the primary and elementary level, that first grade 10 class had no experience with formalized art teaching. Because I taught most subjects all day with the same students I had the flexibility of changing the schedule to suit our daily needs. Art is a 3-credit course and was scheduled in for roughly four 45-minute periods a week yet often that changed to double periods in one day in order to finish particular projects. Every single student in that class had a relative who carved, or sewed, or drew, or was artistic in some recognizable way. The students had more real-life background in "art" than many southern students of the same age may have had. Even though many of them were budding artists-in-the–rough, we started our high school art lessons at the beginning. We started the year with a unit on the fundamentals, drawing and painting, colour theory and the like. It was a large unit yet since most topics were completely new to the students, the time spent on them was of great interest to them and worthwhile in the long run. No matter how sophisticated their art became in the future, and no matter what medium they

chose to work with, a solid background in the fundamentals of art would be useful. Students were keenly interested in everything—from learning the different grades of pencils, to charcoal, conté, and pastels, to pen and ink. They completely enjoyed themselves but at the same time were very serious, concentrating on learning all the techniques. Of course, they had drawn before, but not within a structured art class. We explored line and texture, design and composition. We set up three-dimensional geometric shapes on a central table with strong lighting to learn about the properties of light and shade. Still-life compositions were arranged in the classroom for students to practice. With prodding, students eventually took turns acting as models, up on top of that central table for their classmates when the life drawing section of the course began. Students were encouraged to show everyone in the class their work and each and every piece of artwork produced was signed and stored in a portfolio (a handmade Bristol board folder) at the back of the classroom.

Students progressed quickly from the basics of line and composition and went on to experiment in various types of printmaking, carving and sculpture, skin preparation, pattern making and sewing, tool and jewelry making, even construction technology, computer-assisted art and videography. Many diverse units were offered to students over the years. Interestingly enough, whatever the senior students were doing in art at the school, often trickled down into the junior high class as well as the elementary and primary classes. Sometimes the students themselves went into the younger classes to help present an art activity with the teacher. For the purposes of this chapter, I do not have the liberty to go into all of the particulars of each project completed by most of these students over the 3 and 4 years to follow. I will however explore some specific

examples of the art education that my students received and how it relates to the theme of culturally-relevant curriculum, self-esteem and pride in cultural heritage.

Being able to offer an art program in school is important to many educators, regardless of whether or not the student population is Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Much of the literature focuses on the importance of arts education in improving academic achievement, as well as the development of planning and listening skills, creative thinking, concentration, and spatial relationships and enhancing hand-eye coordination. Arts education is said to encourage cooperative learning and multicultural understanding (Beckwith, 1991; Chalmers, 1996; Ecker, 1990; Saxton 1999), and improve emotional intelligence (Tupman, 1999; Wallace, 1998). Unfortunately, arts programs are often justified in schools on the basis of their contributions to non-art outcomes, increased competency in math for example (Eisner, 1999). Eisner argues that "art for art's sake" also has great educational value. Almost all references to arts education in the literature report that self-esteem is enhanced as a result of participation in an arts program. For example,Cowan & Clover (1991) analyzed factors that relate to self-esteem and demonstrated that it is enhanced by discipline-based art education. Wharton (1981) even suggests that the art teacher's first priority is, in fact, to build self-confidence and concern in students for the visual world. Holt (1997) argues that the passive nature of early arts teaching is a significant element in the *loss* of confidence suffered by older primary children with regard to art. Jones (1997) argues that many motivational techniques used by art educators are actually designed to build student self-confidence. When my students first began drawing life figures, only one or two of the bravest of the class would get up on that table and model for their peers. Aside from the

fact that it was difficult to sit or stand in one position for any length of time, it was especially hard to be the centre of attention and to be looked at so intensely for such a long time. Inuit shy away from being in the spotlight in most situations—it is not a cultural practice to make yourself the focus of attention. It was a slow process, but constant encouragement and a desire to actually see drawings of themselves gave students the courage to model for their classmates. Near the end of the unit, I had so many volunteers that I had to personally choose the models.

Praise for the artwork of the individual students is extremely important. They risk a great deal in attempting to draw something they have never drawn before, or to use colours in new ways, or to carve into an unknown material for the first time. The creating of art is a very personal endeavor. In a sense, students are opening themselves up for the world to see. While participation in art is mostly a solitary activity, after the work is complete, it is viewed by many. Normally quiet students, who often fade into the background at school, frequently produce telling artwork. William rarely spoke in class, even amongst his friends he was considered "the quiet one". Yet when he drew, he exhibited a sense of humour that surprised everyone. Not only was the subject of his art often comical, he laughed a lot with students as they critiqued his work. Juta and Samuel both like to give the impression that they didn't care much about anything at school, yet they discovered that they were each talented watercolourists and took great pride in their work. They shyly accepted praise from their classmates, each with a silent grin. Demery (1984) found a relationship between self-esteem and constructive creativity as promoted in well-designed art activities. In this study, Demery describes activities that renew and enhance the self-esteem of children through an emphasis on basic art skills, the

uniqueness and worth of each individual, success, one-to-one and group interaction, and multicultural data. Schumacher & Linder (1980) showed that students in grades 6 to 12 who engaged in a particular school's arts program in Virginia exhibited an increase in overall self-esteem. Furthermore, administrators and teachers felt that the arts program also increased student creativity, and developed self-awareness and appreciation of the arts (Schumacher, 1981). Saxton (1999) supports the ideas that the arts have the power to engender motivation and to improve academic standings, but she adds that involvement in arts also helps students develop a sense of community and place. Saxton believes that the arts are becoming known as effective cross-curricular integrators as media through which the content of the traditional subject areas can be examined and made relevant for those students who need to see a more direct line between their school learning and their lives.

Emerson (1994) designed a project that helped students learn about ways to investigate self-esteem and develop resiliency through the medium of visual art. She suggested that the environment of the art studio lends itself to students to experiment with ideas and self-discovery. Although I had a true studio for the art program in Pangnirtung (a large, well-lit portable classroom with a loft, completely separated from the school), in Ausuittuq my homeroom classroom was all we had. However, I certainly observed students in the studio atmosphere of art class behaving quite differently as compared to their behaviours in that same classroom during math or English. For art, tables and chairs were moved and rearranged, music was played, lighting was adjusted, students moved about much more freely, and discussions amongst students were rarely curtailed. In this environment they took more risks, they ventured further with their

work, they experimented more loosely. If something didn't work out the way they had envisioned, they would simply try again. Students felt secure and comfortable in this atmosphere. I would often sit at the back of the room and simply watch my students with great pleasure as they went about doing their work. When art class was over, tables and chairs would be moved back into place, the music would be turned off and a completely different feeling would begin to permeate that very same room.

Much has been written about the value of the arts in areas such as multiple intelligences and creativity (Eisner, 1994; Gardner, 1983, 1991, 1993). Researchers like Gardner believe the arts represent the intelligences that are taught *least* often in schools, those of music, spatial reasoning, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. More and more, arts education is being recognized for its capacity to enable students to express human emotions, perhaps even aid in the healing process of those locked in physical or emotional trauma. Commenting on a pilot project run by the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Wilkinson (1997) states, "if *Learning Through the Arts* does nothing more than help children and teenagers cope with the emotional challenges they face...it will surpass any expectations anyone could have for its success". According to Tupman (1999), arts education helps to shed light on the soul and the spirit and to begin a search for artistic and cultural truth. He adds that, "arts education combines hearts and head and body as well as spirit and soul." Wallace (1998) conducted a study that explored the relationship of arts education to emotional literacy, which includes the interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Arts education is proposed as a means of developing positive self-esteem, trust, self-acceptance, and acceptance of others. In this study, Wallace's data revealed that students with education

in the arts make more emotionally literate decisions and are more aware of their feelings and of the feelings of those around them. I remember the discussions that arose in my classroom of Inuit teenagers after I asked them to do two abstract paintings—one portraying happiness, and one portraying sadness. I was expecting dumbfounded expressions from the students, yet to my surprise they immediately began speaking with each other about their own experiences and relating them to colours. Dark brooding colours to represent gloom and sadness, and bright cheery colours for happiness. Some thought about textures and quality of lines. All the while they put paint to paper, small groups of students engaged in separate conversations about the topics of their paintings. It is Wallace's belief that the decision of educational systems to cut funding for arts education has deprived children of access to intelligences of equal importance to those intelligences being currently taught in schools, those of linguistics, mathematics and logic. I agree completely.

Even though Inuit make up the majority of people in Nunavut, Inuit students are in a minority position within dominant Canadian society. As members of a minority group, Inuit youth may be considered at-risk (Cummins, 1996). Many researchers agree that at-risk youth, including disadvantaged youth and students of cultural minorities, all benefit in some way from the arts. Weitz (1996) confirmed that arts programs offer opportunities for children and youth at-risk to learn new skills, expand their horizons and develop self-esteem and well being. Weitz states that these programs provide crucial building blocks for healthy development in places of safety and through interaction with caring adults. Arts programs place a premium on giving youth a chance to succeed. Similarly, Unsworth (1990) argued that a major factor for student dropouts is

lack of self-esteem, and showed that art activities have a therapeutic value. He further suggested that students should be allowed to practice right-brain drawing in order to improve self-concept.

Personally, I found that right-brain drawing activities were well received by my students as interesting activities in themselves. Betty Edwards (1989) has expanded on earlier brain research by developing practical applications of brain theory in the enhancing of creativity and artistic confidence. She describes the dominant left side of the brain to be responsible for verbal, symbolic, logical and analytical thought. The "left brain" processes information on linear, sequential data. The subdominant right side of the brain is responsible for visual, spatial, relational, holistic and perceptual thinking (Gestalt perception). The "right brain" uses intuition, and experiences leaps of insight. In order to gain access to the subdominant visual-perceptual R-mode of the brain, it is necessary to present the brain with a job that the verbal-analytic L-mode will turn down. By learning to purposely access the R-mode, one gains access to powerful brain functions often obscured by language.

As an exercise designed to stimulate right brain thinking, I asked students to first draw a profile of a person's head on the left hand side of a piece of paper, with the head facing in towards the centre of the page. Students were then instructed to draw two horizontal lines, one at the top of the profile and another at the bottom. They soon guessed at this stage that I was going to ask them to complete the "vase". But first, I asked that they go back over the drawing of the profile with a pencil, naming each part of the face as they got to it. Students were asked to repeat this a second time. This is an L-mode task: naming symbolic shapes. Students were asked to draw the profile in

reverse, in effect, completing the vase. They were instructed to be sure that the vase was as symmetrical as possible. As students drew the second profile, they all showed visible signs of mental conflict. They found themselves to be drawing lines in the opposite direction to what they really wanted. They began to scan back and forth between the two profiles, estimating angles, curves, and length of lines in relation to the opposite shapes. No longer was their drawing a profile—it had become nameless. The students had made the shift from L-mode to R-mode, the mode of the artist. Rather than thinking about the face part that they needed to draw next, they were using the shape of the space between the two profiles as their guide. Students always responded well as I tried other right-brain exercises throughout the year, as "art aerobics" or warm ups for other art activities.

Every culture has its own unique way of expressing itself artistically. It follows that arts education can act as an outlet for the expression of a student's own cultural heritage. Today, art remains a fundamental aspect of everyday life in the North. In a time where the use of Inuktitut language and the adhering to traditional cultural beliefs are on the decline, the non-verbal expressive nature of art is a link for Inuit to a rich heritage that need not be forgotten. Artists represent their world, past and present, in their art. Inuit art most often presents the animals and people of the Arctic world. Sometimes mythical figures are depicted, or creatures from the artist's imagination. Inuit culture lives on in the artwork.

Many of my students were keen on learning how to carve. Soapstone carvings are produced by Inuit in all Arctic communities—most well known Inuit artists are carvers of stone. I felt silly showing Inuit how to work stone, so I asked the father of two elementary students in the school to spend time in the senior art class teaching carving

techniques. Joeli was happy to be asked and immediately made plans to come in for 2 hours each day for one week. Although Joeli worked part time for the Hamlet, he was an accomplished artist and earned part of his living through the selling of his carvings, and most recently, his metal jewelry. Joeli had taught jewelry-making techniques to other Inuit adults at an Arctic College campus in a larger community, and was also preparing for an Aboriginal Art Show in Arizona for the following spring. Students knew that Joeli had many things to teach them. Prior to him arriving, each student had mixed and poured plaster into milk cartons of various shapes and sizes. By the time Joeli was about to teach his first class, the plaster had solidly hardened—not so hard, however, so as to discourage the students in, for what was for most of them, their first attempt at carving. The cardboard carton was then peeled off each block of plaster. Students had been instructed to bring in their own carving knife for the project. They could hardly wait to begin. Inuit adults generally model behaviours and skills and allow children to copy them as they watch. I imagined Joeli would do his own carving and allow the students to cut into the plaster as they wished—learning through trial and error is a common and effective way of acquiring new skills. I was quite delighted to see that Joeli had in fact decided to walk from one student work station to the next and monitor each of their progress as he instructed them on the correct proportioning of the human face. He told the class that most of them could probably carve an animal reasonably well but the facial features of a person were very difficult to do. This is why he chose to teach the class how to carve a face. Joeli carved his own piece of plaster only occasionally when the students were ready to go on to a different part of the work. Most of his time was spent guiding the class in the step by step process of producing the likeness of a face out of the

plaster. Joeli spoke almost entirely in Inuktitut as he taught his eager students, using English words only when the appropriate Inuktitut word would not come soon enough. He was attentive to each student and demonstrated immense patience. He was not afraid to be critical of their work, offering ways to change or improve on their progress. However, Joeli would not carve any student's piece for them—they had to do it themselves. Throughout the week Joeli spoke not only of the specific task at hand but also of his experiences as a working artist, of hunting and traveling over the land, of family and community life, and about many other topics of interest to the group. As each day passed, the rectangular blocks of plaster were slowly and magically transformed into a collection of animated Inuit faces, each one reflecting a unique artistic style. By Friday, students were truly amazed at what they had accomplished. And from a cultural perspective, they learned far more than the simple proportions of a face.

Stokrocki (1992) maintains that Navajo art education in one particular Navajo public school was largely responsible for the transmission and retention of Navajo culture within the community. In another study, Davis (1994) declares that through mentorship and apprenticeship learning programs (including art activities) that unite children and adults and that promote Navajo language, culture, and values, students' sense of physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being may be restored. DeLeon & Argus-Calvo (1997) believe that education in the arts is not only intrinsically valuable for many Native American populations, arts education also supports student persistence and achievement generally, regardless of cultural group. Culturally-relevant materials in any classroom complement the curriculum in many positive ways and help to make learning meaningful. Rolle (1990) designed a program involving art and

cultural heritage materials that successfully raised the level of self-concept and classroom competence of black male students aged 8-12. Rolle also observed improved attitudes towards school, school subjects, and studying.

Art education can serve as a method for teaching all students about multiculturalism throughout the world. Ecker (1990) defines multicultural art as participation in the artistic activity of another culture for the purpose of understanding that culture on its own terms. He states that a multicultural approach to education can fulfill children's need for cultural self-esteem, personal vision of a democratic society, and cultural understanding as a condition for world peace. Inuit society is so rich in culture that it would be easy to teach almost exclusively about the North and its people. Many Inuit students themselves never seem to tire of learning about polar bears, whales, hunting and camp life, even as they get older and enter junior high school. There is an attempt to avoid an ethnocentric school program and many schools adopt themes throughout the year that allow teachers and students to learn not only about the Arctic and its people, but to explore the world at large. Most schools, for example, adopt a "multiculturalism" theme at some time during the school year. Art activities for the teaching of this integrated theme are diverse and attempt to introduce students to other cultures in the far reaches of their world. One year, in Ausuittuq, younger classes chose to produce a colourful collage of the worlds' flags. Another time, Australian and African animals were studied and drawn then displayed in the hallway. Chalmers (1996) explored the implications for art education from the broad themes found in art across the cultures. He focused on how art education programs promote cross cultural diversity in art, affirm and enhance self-esteem and pride in students' cultural heritage, and address

issues of ethnocentrism, bias, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and racism. As part of the senior art program in Ausuittuq, students were introduced to a significant number of global cultures through the teaching of art history. Students chose a renaissance artist, for example, researched his life and then attempted to model the artist's style in their own drawing or painting. In using art to learn about other countries, their wildlife and people, students gain a better understanding of where Inuit culture fits into the overall global picture. I found that my students were always marveled by the differences in the lives of people in other cultures, yet they always seemed content to be where they were and proud to be Inuit.

The Economics of Art

Inuit art is recognized worldwide and has experienced a huge surge in popularity over the past 40 years. Blodgett (1979) attributes the beginning of modern Inuit art to James Houston's arrival in the Arctic in 1948. Blodgett states that Houston's trip north heralded the beginning of a new, contemporary period in Inuit art. Carvings, prints, tapestries, paintings, and many other crafts and art works have been made available to the world in ever increasing supply since those early years spent by John and Alma Houston in Cape Dorset on Baffin Island. Today, traditional skills are being turned into economic opportunities all across Nunavut and the NWT, which, according to The NWT Community Digest (1996), not only strengthen individual communities, they allow the world at large a glimpse of life in the Arctic. In almost every northern community local art works can be purchased at the Co-op. Visitors to these communities buy up a large proportion of the art but Inuit too are buying their own art as gifts for

friends and family and to adorn their homes. In larger centres, Inuit works of art can be bought in craft stores, art galleries, and museums. Soapstone carvings are probably the most renowned of Inuit art, but northern arts and crafts come in a host of other materials that native people have used for thousands of years: antler, bone, ivory, animal hides, and others. Even traditional Inuit clothing, made of seal, caribou, polar bear and muskox skins, designed for the Arctic climate, has been transformed into unique Canadian fashions. Visitors to Iqaluit can purchase sealskin vests, muskox wool hats and caribou mittens.

Many Inuit today earn part of their living through the sale of their carvings, prints, drawings, and fabric arts (skin clothing and tapestries), as well as jewelry and tools. There are more artists per capita in the North than anywhere else in Canada. A significant portion of the economy in the NWT relies on the sale of Inuit art. It is not unreasonable to assume that, given the appropriate guidance and opportunity, many Inuit students will also be able to make a living through their art. Showing students how to present their work in a marketable fashion as well as teaching them how to price and sell their work are valuable skills to be taught in a senior art program in Nunavut. Perhaps more than anywhere else in the country, the pursuit of art as a career may offer many Inuit students a happy and rewarding lifestyle consistent with their cultural identity.

The Ausuittuq high school class was very excited at the prospect of organizing the first Aqiatusuk School Art Show and Sale. They had worked non-stop for the past week or so choosing art from their portfolios gathered over the year from their art class activities. They had also made specific pieces just for the show and sale. The students presented a vast array of work for their friends and family to view. Foremost in their

minds was the thought of how much money they could make if they sold everything they thought they could. Pricing the pieces turned out to be the most difficult part of the preparation for the event. Some ventured over to the Co-op to learn the prices of some of the arts and crafts on sale in the store. They really had to ask each other and their teachers how much they should expect for the art works. This in itself was a learning opportunity that they had not anticipated. Most students under priced their work, they still did not feel that theirs was "art like in the store". After some agonizing weighing of the consequences of their chosen price (is it too cheap or too much?), the tags were stuck on the items and placed on the tables. Drawings and paintings had been lovingly matted with colourful Bristol board and hung on the walls of the classroom and nearby hallway. Jewelry, made mostly from Fimo polymer clay, was beautifully displayed in handmade origami gift boxes on strategically arranged fabric on tables. The terracotta air-dried sculptured clay heads were placed on the same tables, mixed in alongside the boxes of earrings, necklaces and brooches. Polar bears, seals and skidoos carved into blocks of white plaster of Paris also sat on tables waiting to be admired and, hopefully, purchased. Duffel socks and mittens, sealskin toys, kamiks and crocheted hats added to the diverse works of art presented to the community by the students. The high school class had graciously allowed the younger students in the school to put some of their artwork for sale on tables as well. Coloured doilies, glitter-glued pages of people and animal pictures rested next to the tissue-paper windows and crayoned kaleidoscopes made up of student names. Joeli, the artist who had come into the senior classroom earlier in the year to teach carving techniques, had brought some of his work in for sale as well. He

displayed his carving and jewelry portfolio on the table beside his pieces. Needless to say, the Aqiatusuk School Art Show and Sale presented a wide range of local artwork.

When the show "opened", hordes of excited people rushed into the school and made their way to the senior classroom. It seemed that every parent in town had come to buy their children's' work. There was no squabbling about the prices, money was handed over without question. People moved about from table to table snatching up carvings and jewelry and glitter art. Drawings and paintings disappeared from the walls. Students were smiling from ear to ear as they listened to the compliments from all of the art critics in the room. They had forgotten about their preoccupation with the money they would earn as a result of the show. They were being paid in praise and acknowledgement from their families and friends.

In that one single event, students learned more about art and the potential of being able to earn a living (at least in part) through art than any teacher could have taught them in a lecture in front of the class. They learned how to work cooperatively with others in the planning of an important school event. They learned about leadership and responsibility. They had to prioritize which work they would include in the exhibit and determine what price to ask for the work. Students learned how to finish and present artwork for a show and how to display their work in a pleasing way to attract buyers. Most importantly, students observed first hand the positive reactions of people tc their work, boosting their self-esteem and confidence immensely. Not one student went home that evening without an enhanced pride in their ability and a feeling of strong cultural identity in being an Inuit artist.

Chapter 6 School-Community Partnerships

Being a very small school of 60 students in a community of 150 people, it could easily be assumed that every single occurrence at the school would be known within the community and every event in the community would be known within the school. This is not the case. Even though more than one third of the community population spends each and every day within the confines of the school, great efforts must be made on a continual basis to ensure that there is meaningful and respectful communication between the school and the community. Both the school and the community members need to work together to guarantee that the school and community do not act as completely separate entities. As educators, it is very easy to become wrapped up in the day to day routines of the classroom and school, and to not bother sharing the events of the day with parents and the community at large. Likewise, community members are busily going about their lives as their children attend school. An added obstacle in the North stems from the fact that, although changing slowly, schools are still considered southern-based institutions, with little connection to the everyday Inuit life experience. Even in the south, parents are often intimidated at the thought of entering their child's school. This fear is magnified in the North. Very few northern schools boast a majority Aboriginal staff—most teachers are English-speaking only and come from southern locations. Language can be problematic in a school where many unilingual English teachers deal with the children of unilingual Inuktitut parents. As a result, schools seem foreign to many parents and community members, and many of them in fact have negative views concerning schools. It is therefore up to the school to make the initial

efforts towards the development of an inclusive and supportive school-community relationship.

The establishment and maintenance of culture-based schooling is dependent upon a strong sense of community ownership. *Our Students, Our Future: An Educational Framework* (GNWT, 1991) points out that where people feel that the school belongs to them, they are more comfortable playing an active role in their children's schooling by providing direction and by contributing to the implementation of that direction. They are real partners in the education process and view that role both as a right and a responsibility. I found that the strength of the school-community relationship in Ausuittuq depended a great deal on effective communication links between teachers, members of the local education authority, parents and students, as well as with local government agencies, and businesses. As with personal relationships, attention to school-community partnerships needs to occur on a continual basis. Although effective communication in itself is difficult to achieve, it is also not enough to simply communicate well. A reciprocal relationship of mutual appreciation and understanding needs to be established in order for the relationship to benefit both parties. In Ausuittuq, many strategies were implemented to develop these types of partnerships between the community and the school.

Partnerships with Parents and Community

Educators throughout North America continually struggle to include more parents in the everyday activities of their children's schooling. Teachers recognize that when parents support their children to learn, student achievement improves significantly

(Cummins, 1996). Children benefit from seeing their mothers and fathers interacting with their teachers in the school environment. Most parents work, have many home responsibilities, and often have little extra time to participate in school events, let alone time to give to schools as volunteers for programs. At the very least, informative communication with parents should be frequent enough so that they have a reasonable awareness of the kind of school environment that faces their children each day—parents need to have knowledge of the activities their children are involved in at the school. In communicating as often as possible, more and more parents may want to become involved in the school program in one way or another. Students throughout North America have been seen to appreciate the benefits of substantive integration between their school and after-school environments (McLaughlin, 2001). Communication can be especially difficult in a cross-cultural environment, and where most teachers do not speak the same language as the parents. As with schools everywhere, it is critical for northern schools to reach out to parents in whatever ways they can, and to encourage them to take as much responsibility as possible for their children's education.

Aqiatusuk School information was shared with the parents and community as effectively as possible through the written and spoken word, as well as through invitations to a variety of school events. Letters and notes were sent home with the eldest child regularly, and correspondences were always translated into both Inuktitut and English. When possible an Inuktitut speaking staff member would write the notices, but often it was Meeka, the office manager, who would translate the notices from English into Inuktitut. As well, a monthly newsletter, produced by mostly staff and students, was sent out to each home and business in town. The articles for the newsletter

were written in either language, each being translated wherever possible. Senior students, as part of their Inuktitut language classes, were involved in the translating along with the bilingual staff. Newly acquired digital cameras allowed for many colourful images to be inserted into the newsletter and a wide selection of computer software and technology resources helped to make the newsletter quite impressive. There was never any lack of news to share. All students were involved in contributing articles. The primary students wrote in Inuktitut, by hand, so that their parents could observe their progress in learning the Inuktitut syllabics. For example, each December these very young students would write heartfelt letters to Santa Claus, exclaiming how good they had been and what they wanted for Christmas. Parents loved seeing their children's handwriting, but also appreciated knowing ahead of time what their children expected to see under the family tree. The newsletter boasted artistic drawings from all grades, usually related to the particular themes the classes were involved with. Sometimes the newsletter carried articles related mostly to that school theme, other times the newsletter was a potpourri of different topics. Senior students interviewed elders or local business people, or even each other. Often they were asked to express opinions on some issue of local importance. And of course, there were always lots of requests for help with a variety of school activities—a lunch, storytelling, the breakfast program, an upcoming assembly, and so on. After Sila, a parent volunteer, baked a delicious apple crumble as part of the snack program, students raved about it so much at home that parents asked for the recipe to be printed in the next newsletter.

In a sense, the school newsletter became a community newspaper of sorts. It was hoped that parents would eventually do some writing to be included in the publication as

well. For some months, the newsletter was a joint venture between the school and the community Adult Education Program, run by Nunavut Arctic College. After YoAnne's first year in Ausuittuq, in addition to her full time teaching, she took on a half time position with the College as the adult educator. It became easy to blend some activities between the college students with those at Aqiatusuk School. Writing for the newsletter allowed the community adult learners to improve their overall literacy and gain experience with writing in both languages. Their articles were published along with those of the school's. On some occasions, when the school photocopier was not working properly, local businesses made the copies for us as a community service. The newsletter became a school communiqué that many parents and community members looked forward to receiving each month. Each time we were asked when the next edition would "hit the stands", we knew that we were doing something right. To the staff and students, it meant that parents were interested in the school program.

As much as people loved receiving the school newsletter, they were equally happy with hearing the weekly school radio announcements on the local "FM", as the radio was referred to by people in town. Each Friday, an Inuit staff member, usually Hannah or Oolassie, collected lists of informative class news from teachers and talked about those events during a 30-minute spot during the morning broadcast. If there had been a recent school assembly, for example, all students receiving award certificates would be announced on the radio. Particular students would be congratulated for their achievements. Reports on recent activities as well as notices of upcoming events would be given to listeners. Students too were encouraged to speak on the radio. Oolassie and Hannah would often call up the station during school hours and have their students take

turns on the phone giving their own announcements. Sometimes an entire class would walk over to the Hamlet building and squeeze into the cramped quarters of the radio station to give their messages to the community.

The radio was used throughout the year as a way to reach parents as they sat in the comfort of their own homes, or with friends at their homes. People of Ausuittuq like the "call-in" format of a radio show. Whenever the school needed to hear the opinions of the community, a summary of the issue at hand was first delivered either by an education council member or the principal followed by people calling in to the station to express their ideas. Everyone in town would have the radio turned on, even the businesses and offices. School goals, school year calendar dates, spring camp locations, school improvement plans and the like were all issues that were discussed in part on the radio. Many different people called in to offer opinions. In using this valuable local resource for such purposes, the school was able to quickly gain an understanding of what was expected by the community regarding a number of important school topics.

To further develop meaningful partnerships with parents, and to enhance the lines of communication, a number of activities were planned to encourage people to spend time with each other. As described earlier, the September picnic and scavenger hunt brought many people together at the beginning of the year. Not long after the start of classes, teachers were encouraged to make "home visits" to the parents of their students. For a new teacher to the community, this always meant walking from house to house with someone who could translate the conversations. In a small community, home visits to all of the parents of school children are feasible—often they can be completed in one or two afternoons. Not only do these visits allow teachers and parents to meet

face to face early in the school year, they ensure that the first official meeting takes place in a non-confrontational manner outside of the school. It is the teacher who is the visitor to the parent's home, not the parent visiting the school. I always made a point to brief the new teachers so they knew what to expect during those first visits. Many qallunaat are surprised at the fact that very few doors are ever locked in many small northern communities, and that no-one knocks before entering a house—people just walk in. Teachers are able to learn so much more about a student, his family and cultural background through spending time with their family in their home, even a quick visit early in the year is helpful. Sometimes teachers only stay for 15 minutes or so, sometimes long enough to share a pot of tea. Often, little conversation occurs. The point is to communicate to the people of the community that teachers are open, willing and ready to take the time to discuss their students' progress with their parents anytime, anywhere. During the school year, teachers continued to pay regular visits to the students' homes, yet many of those visits became more social than official as people got to know one another.

Regular events were planned throughout the year at the school. Parents were invited as often as possible. Sometimes an individual teacher would simply send invitations home with their students so that parents could attend an "end-of-theme" party in the classroom. This gave a chance to parents to view their children's class work and to celebrate the learning that occurred over the previous month or so. There was always cake and juice served during these "parties", followed by the playing of games.

Special spaghetti and lasagna dinners were held periodically to encourage more people to come into the school. In the space of 2 hours after school, usually on a Friday,

the hallway would be turned into a café, complete with checkered tablecloths, candlelight and music. Ground caribou or muskox meat was the preferred ingredient in the meat sauce and when it was featured on the menu, it was "first come, first served". Most families in town showed up for the dinner events. One year, a new teacher, Stephen, arranged to have McDonald's in Yellowknife fly out frozen Big Macs and Quarter Pounders as part of a fundraising campaign for a school trip. People in town had only seen McDonald's commercials on television. Some may have visited a restaurant in their travels, but most had never before eaten a McDonald's hamburger in their life. Needless to say, the event was a huge success with the community. It was not repeated, however, due to the enormous cost of airlifting food all that way. Any event that included food was an automatic success. The sharing of food, of gathering around a meal, and of feasting are all cultural traditions that are still greatly celebrated and enjoyed. Potluck lunches were held in the school hallway on numerous occasions. At one time, a 16 by 24-foot tent was erected in front of the school for an outdoor potluck and everyone in town attended.

On a larger scale, "open houses" were organized where students and teachers would develop displays and activities for parents to participate in throughout the school. Stations were usually set up in each classroom, manned by the students themselves. Performances were staged in the hallways. One particular early November open house stands out in my mind. The students had prepared their displays weeks in advance. The classrooms and hallways were jam-packed with posters and evidence of all of their hard work. The activity stations were prepared on the afternoon of the big event. Each student had a specific project that they wanted to work on during the evening's activity.

The primary class had been practicing songs, and the elementary class had been busily producing arts and crafts projects all week. The junior and senior high classes focussed on math, science and computer activities for the evening. The turn out was tremendous. The students did such a terrific job reminding their parents of the open house that at one time in the evening I could do nothing but gaze in wonder over the sea of heads surrounding me in the hallway at the entrance to my classroom. I was reminded of a super blowout sale at a popular department store where upon opening the main doors a rush of people flooded in to fill the place. Every classroom attracted people of all ages. Toddlers, elders, babies in mothers' *amoutis*, fathers and businessmen all crowded around the students at their projects. The dissection trays of earthworms, fetal pigs and frogs in the senior classroom were very popular. Most people had never seen any of these unusual creatures before. Some students lead parents in the process of dissecting a fresh specimen. Others demonstrated how to view the specimen under a microscope. A group of students had set themselves up in another corner of the room with drawing boards and easels. They were painting with watercolours and drawing each other. Many parents sat down and did some drawing of their own. Parents had to wait in line for many of the activities. Computers were relatively new in the school at this time and the novelty of sitting at a colour terminal even to play word or mathematics games was irresistible. The junior high class had taken on the computers as their main project that night. Each of them sat at a terminal, with two or three adults by their side, as they navigated their way through the games. Everywhere I looked I could see students and adults engaged in teaching and learning with each other. Optical illusions and math puzzles occupied another group of people, while some parents were busily making their

own crafts in the elementary classroom down the hall. At one time, excited voices of very young children could be heard near the main entrance into the school—they were gathering people to listen to their songs. Within minutes just about everyone who had come out for the evening's festivities was squeezed into the primary classroom to watch the show. Proud parents smiled from ear to ear as their children sang in Inuktitut followed by English, and then Inuktitut again. Camera flashes went off and videotape was rolling. The evening lasted for nearly 3 hours and by the end everyone was exhausted. But the celebration was well worth the effort. Students were proud of themselves and teachers were happy to have seen so many parents in the school. Most importantly, in that one event, the school became a much less intimidating place for parents and community members to enter.

Like the open houses, the science and math fairs attracted many parents, as did the yearly science and technology competitions in the gym. Each year parent judges were recruited for the competitive events and the entire community was invited to view the displays and then the awarding of the certificates and prizes.

School events like the ones described above are important in the development of partnerships between the school and the parents of the students, as well as with the people of the community. Interactions also need to run deeper in the sense that the people of the community must feel that they have ownership of the school. They must be involved in the decisions, big and small, that are made at the school and impact on the lives of their children. It is the parents who must help create the vision of the school program for their children and they need to be diligent in ensuring that the school continually reflects that vision. Tompkins (1998) remarks that the biggest thing they did

to improve the school-community relationship was to improve program and programming so that students were happier and more successful in school. Parents need to be involved at all levels of strategic planning for their community school. "Community Visioning" meetings and workshops took place in most Baffin communities between 1993 and 1995. School staff, education council members, parents, community members, students and elders gathered over several meetings to determine what each school should be teaching and what would be the characteristics of a school that could promote that knowledge. The results eventually became the basis for the strategies suggested in *Our Future is Now...Implementing Inuuqatigiit* (BDBE, 1996).

As I arrived in Ausuittuq in the fall of 1995, "Visioning" was still in its infancy within the community. Harry, the principal at that time, had engaged the Education Council and community in introductory meetings, where a preliminary direction was determined for the school. In the fall of 1995, a more detailed plan was developed which determined where the community wished to see the school in the next year, in the next 5 years, and the next 10 years. When I took over as principal the following year, one of the first steps towards realizing this direction was to develop school goals that reflected the wishes of the community as well as the developing philosophy of the Board. The "Visioning" information gathered the year before was reviewed early in the first term with staff, education council members, and with the community via the radio and notices distributed in town. A great deal of community input was used in the development of the school goals (see appendix). I believe that in going through this process, parents and community members became real partners with the school and contributed in important ways to the education of their children at Aqiatusuk School.

Partnerships with Local Agencies and Businesses

In a small community, it is often difficult to separate the individual parents and community members from the people who run the local businesses and work in the various governmental agencies. Like anywhere else, these people are parents and community members themselves. However, being such an insulated community, everyone knows everyone else's business, and the lines between personal and business often become blurred. Regardless, there were several partnerships that developed between the school and specific community groups that further added to and benefited the overall school program.

Across North America, a wide variety of educational studies, focused on various program models, link after-school program participation with improved attitudes toward school, higher expectations of school achievement, better work habits, and higher attendance rates, especially for low-income students (Miller, 2001). These after-school programs take on many forms but are generally categorized into school-age childcare programs, youth development programs, or educational after-school programs. In small, isolated Inuit communities such as Ausuittuq, due to a lack of many formal types of youth organizations, after-school programs take the form of any variety of community activities, ones that are often related to a cultural tradition. Sometimes, due to the tremendous learning potential of these activities, time is taken from within the scheduled school day as well as time outside of school. Instead of formalizing youth programs, all contributions from the community and its members in taking responsibility for the education of children are greatly encouraged. A student in the Maritimes, for example, may head to a Boys and Girls Club after school, whereas students in Ausuittuq may go

out on the land with a respected hunter of the community. They may go to the shore to unload sealift supplies for the Hamlet, or help build some furniture for the local daycare facility. In Arctic communities, the boundary between school and after-school programs is much more blurred than in southern towns. However, I have seen northern students derive the same benefits from participation in these activities, as do their southern counterparts.

Collaboration between schools and community-based organizations can help students develop lasting academic and life skills. In a recent study, McLaughlin (2001) found that students who participate in community organizations expressed a sense of personal value and empowerment far greater than did their peers who did not participate in some community-based organization. Students felt valued by adults. This regard fueled their self-confidence and changed their attitudes toward personal dependability. McLaughlin suggests that schools could support community youth organizations in a variety of ways. The sharing of school space and facilities as well as setting up institutional collaborations that connect mutual goals can greatly benefit the lives of young people in a community. Students' lives inside and outside of school are inextricably intertwined, and what students experience outside of school is crucial to their success in school. McLaughlin goes on to state that teachers who have the time and opportunity to become familiar with their students' contexts for learning outside of school can do a better job of teaching. He observes that together, the adults inside and outside of school can use their resources to strengthen learning in ways that exceed what they could accomplish alone. McLaughlin sees substantive collaboration as a way to strengthen the core mission of teaching and learning. It addresses the intellectual,

emotional, social, and physical dimensions of youth development. McLaughlin believes that academic achievement will probably amount to little if a student's emotional or social development does not support a healthy transition to adulthood. He suggests that academic success alone is not enough to motivate young people to tackle challenges, succeed on the job, or effectively navigate the institutions of mainstream society—young people need life skills as well, including a sense of personal worth, a positive assessment of the future, and the knowledge of how to plan for the future. McLaughlin believes that meaningful measures of a student's skills and accomplishments should express that student's development in its totality; such assessments require information from and the perspectives of both schools and community-based organizations.

Miller (2001) suggests that in order to examine the potential of after-school activities, educators need to look at the literature on school failure, especially the achievement gaps associated with socioeconomic and racial differences. School experiences explain only a portion of these gaps—one other explanation which accounts for these differences in achievement involves the difficulties faced by students who encounter a school culture at odds with their home and community culture (Traub, 2000). Delpit (1995) argues that school failure results from inadequate access to the rules of the "culture of power" and the lack of awareness on the part of those in the dominant culture of the existence and meaning of these power differences. Although a minority within the community at large, English-speaking, non-Inuit teachers are the dominant culture in the school. Unless schools can support students' cultures while simultaneously providing access to required skills, young people are likely to see school as a place where success requires loss, and even denigration, of one's family and

community. Cummins (1996) advocates that community involvement in the school helps to empower students. Evidence shows that after-school programs can link values, attitudes, and norms of students' cultural communities with those of the school culture (Cooper, Denner & Lopez, 1999). In the Baffin, I have seen that attention to Inuktitut language and Inuit cultural activities within the school program and in after-school activities help to enhance these connections.

Most northern schools have developed a local "resource bank", a list of people and businesses that could benefit the school program in a variety of ways. In my experience, these lists are often made but people and groups are rarely called upon to contribute to the school in any meaningful way. In Ausuittuq, efforts were made to make sure that partnerships were developed with community groups as well as with individuals. Sometimes seemingly small efforts paid off tenfold. As a gesture of community spirit, junior and senior high students went out in pairs into the community each month with computer "cleaning kits" to do basic mouse and keyboard maintenance on all of the computers in town. This meant visiting the Hamlet and Housing offices, the Heath Centre, the Co-op, the Hunters and Trappers Organization, Renewable Resources and Arctic College. Students enjoyed practicing and showing off their skills, and community employers received a useful service in return. Any individual with a computer at home also received that same service. As computer skills improved, some of the senior students were then invited periodically to help businesses troubleshoot problems that arose. William became quite adept at fixing frozen screens. Other students helped set up hard drives, printers, and modems. When students were able to successfully solve a computer problem for someone at the Hamlet, or over at the

Resource office, their pride was evident in the wide grins on their faces when they returned to the school. After experimenting with new drawing software, senior students went about designing computer-generated town maps with legends in three languages. They then placed them throughout town for the benefit of tourists to the community.

One of the most rewarding partnerships developed with the school was the one with Nunavut Arctic College. In the first 2 years that I was in Ausuittuq, there was no adult education facility, only a small office in the trailer next to the Health Centre. So, with permission, the school was used in the evenings and on weekends for college courses. Teachers at the school began offering their services to teach evening courses for the College. Harry, and then Stephen, taught English upgrading. YoAnne became the instructor for all of the computer courses. After the interest shown by parents at an open house at the school, I began to teach drawing and painting to adults in the evenings as well. The College bought as many of the supplies they could for these courses, and when needed, the school chipped in other supplies. In exchange for the use of the school facility and for the borrowed odds-and-ends, the College contributed an extra computer, a photocopier, paper, pens, ink cartridges, math compasses, and a collection of art supplies for the school.

More and more community people began asking for additional college courses. In the long dark season of the High Arctic, evening and weekend courses are very popular. The Ausuittuq courses were well attended, we were told, more so than those offered in some of the larger surrounding communities. Creativity was the key. In order to encourage literacy amongst the adults of the community, an adult educator began teaching parents how to encourage reading with their children, and involved the students

of the school as well as community pre-schoolers in the program. This "reading circle" took place each Sunday in the school (since that was where all of the books were), offering parents an opportunity to read to their children as well as spend quality time with them.

By this time, YoAnne was the Adult Educator for the community and as mentioned previously, a close relationship between the school and the college was inevitable. Both the school and the college was always aware of each other's activities and often they would work together to develop programs or specific community events. A sharing of resources seemed to be the natural direction in which to move. The main goal from a community perspective was to encourage lifelong learning and to get rid of the artificial barriers between the K-12 school and the College. The College eventually rented a vacant house in town as its Community Learning Centre, and although the school was no longer required for classroom space, the close partnership that had developed continued to grow. Aqiatusuk School became increasingly well equipped with computer technology resources, used by K-12 students during the day and adult learners in the evenings. Some teachers at the school still worked as instructors for some of the evening and weekend adult education courses. The College began to hire outside instructors to deliver specialty courses for people in town. Many were interested in the community administrative program courses, as well as the outfitters and guide program. Although not generally Nunavut Arctic College policy, four senior students from the school were able to participate in that first Guide Training course offered in the community. A well-respected Inuk from another settlement came to Ausuittuq to instruct the course. The following year, one of those students traveled to another

community for 3 weeks to receive the next level of training. Working together with the College enabled the school to present students with many more opportunities. Likewise, college students were able to access school resources and staff as well.

The Community Health Representative, who works out of the local Health Centre, offered her time to the school each Wednesday or Thursday to work mainly with the junior high students. Meeka had three children, two of whom were in school at the time. She and YoAnne would plan together and present high interest, health-related topics to the adolescents of the community. These included sex education, alcohol and drug abuse issues, and a variety of others. Students enjoyed Meeka's visits. She spoke with them in Inuktitut as much as possible and brought with her interesting posters and pamphlets. Meeka also offered a pre-natal nutrition course to the senior high students. At that time, four students were already parents, another one was pregnant, and most of them were already sexually active. Supplies for the courses were paid for by the Health Centre, and the kitchen facility for the cooking of the nutritional foods was provided by the school. This partnership not only benefited the school, the Health Board was able to work towards its mandated role of community health education.

The Nurse-in-Charge also visited the school at least once a week, not always for a medical visit, often just to visit with students at recess time. Cathy had arrived in town 3 months prior to YoAnne and I. She had worked in other Baffin communities as well as with Inuu in Labrador. With her calm, relaxed manner, she was able to build trusting relationships with all of her patients. Cathy listened well and students liked her. When possible, Cathy preferred seeing the students in the school rather than taking them out of classes for long periods as they visited the Health Centre. Sometimes it was less

intimidating for them in the school than at the clinic, depending on what it was she needed to do. Any eye tests or hearing tests were done at the school and almost all of the vaccinations of the various aged children were also given there. Cathy would choose the bravest students first so that they would not be crying as they returned to their classrooms from the makeshift clinic near the office. She usually had lollipops or some sort of treats hidden somewhere in her bag for the youngest children.

The senior students showed great interest in Cathy's talks about sexually transmitted diseases and contraception. We had been learning about STDs in our Human and Personal Development course. Having the community nurse confirm the existence of STDs in town made the learning all that more meaningful to the students. Needless to say, the condoms, pills, IUDs and various contraceptive devices that Cathy brought with her were also of high interest. Cathy has allowed small groups of students to tour the Health Centre to learn about the science that goes on in the clinic each day. Older students have even been allowed to use the autoclave for their microbiology experiments. After Jason broke his ankle, Cathy (and Jason of course) gave permission for a junior high camera crew to videotape the application of a plaster cast to his leg, and the subsequent removal of that cast several weeks later. Jason's classmates were able to view the entire procedure from start to finish. Imagine the learning that could occur if all lessons were as real and hands-on as this.

Any time a health care specialist visited the community, they were asked to come into the school and talk to the senior students about careers in the health care field. There is such a need for Inuit in all of the professions (especially health care and education), that it seemed silly to not take advantage of these visitors and give students a

glimpse into possible careers. Visits by real doctors, mental health workers, counselors, occupational and physiotherapists, and audiologists all contributed to the Career and Program Planning credit requirement for the high school students.

For years, the Co-op's Board of Directors attempted to keep the costs of fresh fruit and produce as reasonable as possible at its retail store. This allows families to eat healthy foods without going broke. The cost of transporting food by air is extremely high all across the Arctic. Most visitors to Ausuittuq were quite surprised by the cost of many food items—they were often lower than in the much larger communities, including Iqaluit. It is no secret that school children learn better when they eat healthy foods. The Co-op donated two cases of apples, each and every week, to the school for an afternoon snack at recess time. A 10% discount on any food purchases for the school was also granted. In return, the school purchased supplies locally when possible, always giving the store the opportunity to match prices with other suppliers out of town. The monthly school newsletter acknowledged any help provided by the Co-op so that the community was always aware of its support for the school. Since the Co-op is the only store in town, it is important for the community to view the store as having an active role in community life, not just in the selling of goods for profit. Prizes were often donated by the store for special school and community events. When the school began experiencing lateness after lunch and general attendance problems one winter, the management and staff of the Co-op helped to enforce a no-students-in-the-store rule during regular school hours. Although not popular with some students, this helped a great deal.

A partnership with the Hamlet of Ausuittuq also proved beneficial. The school is a designated emergency shelter for the community. It has been used on a number of occasions during severe weather. One early winter blizzard had practically the entire community population sleeping overnight in every crook and cranny of the school. The Hamlet offered many services to students at the school. When Toomasie, needed a place for the senior boys to make their own harpoon heads, the Hamlet allowed him to use their garage for the project. There were times when the school had need of propane torches, and other specialized tools. The Hamlet often helped in this regard. When the school could no longer afford to purchase Christmas presents for every child in town, the Hamlet became involved and took care of the entire project. For several years, the school and the Hamlet jointly applied for funding to develop a nutritious snack program at the school. We were able to offer snacks to students at every morning recess for all the years that I taught in Ausuittuq.

Whenever possible, students were encouraged to develop a civic responsibility. One particular spring, the community experienced a serious water shortage. The water storage tanks were almost dry and the entire town went on rations. Senior male students were excused from school for nearly 3 weeks so that they could help chip nearby icebergs and deliver the fresh ice to the town's water silos. We barely made it through that crisis, but with the students' help the Hamlet managed to maintain a minimal water supply until the glacial-fed river thawed and a new supply of water was available. Although potentially dangerous, this opportunity was an excellent way for students to learn about citizenship and active community involvement.

The Hamlet supported a policy that discouraged the hiring of any students who drop out of school. This policy had been in place for a couple of years prior to my arrival in the community. It was a way for the Hamlet to show that the education of the community's youth was valued and important. I must admit, however, that fewer people supported these actions as time went by. With the implementation of a senior high school program, older people were now considered as students. Exceptions had to be made. For example, if older students, with children of their own as well as household responsibilities, required extra income, they were in fact considered for work at the Hamlet on a part-time basis.

The Fire Department and the school worked together to provide very popular, interactive drills with students. As a school, we were mandated to have six fire drills each year. Usually the fire department is warned that the alarm will sound at a predetermined time so that they would know it was not a real fire. One autumn morning the fire chief, Dennis, came into my office and suggested that I set off the fire alarm at a specified time, yet he would not notify his men of the drill. He wanted to see how quickly they could react and get to the school in full uniform with the firetruck. As agreed, I pulled the alarm and began patrolling the hall to make sure that the teachers and students exited the school as quickly and safely as possible. As I turned the corner, I was nearly run down by Josephie, one of the high school students. Unbeknownst to me, he was a volunteer firefighter. He flew out the front door as hordes of students began to leave their classrooms. The large speaker on the school roof was blaring out its siren. Less than 6 minutes later, all students and staff were standing at a safe distance from the school as the firetruck rolled up to the front doors with all of the uniformed men in tow.

By then they knew that this was a drill, but they continued with their duties. Dennis had the men roll out the hoses and make a search of each classroom. Students learned more from this drill than they would have simply responding to the in-school alarm. They watched their fathers, uncles, and friends acting in a serious, professional manner as they honed their skills in responding to the siren, dressing in their firefighting gear, mobilizing the fire truck, and arriving quickly on the scene. We practiced these types of drills three or four times a year. Sometimes, pre-selected students were purposely left in the "burning school" so that firefighters could search the building for students that were unaccounted for by their teachers as they conducted their headcounts outside. Students took great pleasure in timing the firefighters arrival at the school, but most importantly, they knew exactly what to do and what to expect if a real fire did break out.

A few years ago the local Hunters and Trappers Organization received considerable funding close to the end of their fiscal year. They decided to donate a generous portion of the money to the school for land-based activities. A huge canvas tent was purchased for the school, and weekly land trips were provided by the organization from February through May. During this time, all equipment, supplies (including gasoline) and personnel were provided to the school. Each year the Hunters and Trappers Organization awards two muskox tags to the school, which enables a group of students to learn how to harvest muskox with experienced hunters. The school organizes the trip and provides at least one staff member for the activity. Qamouti are always packed for an overnight stay in case of inclement weather. The participating students change each year—most times a multi-aged group is chosen to participate so that older and younger students can interact with each other. The hides of any animals

successfully hunted stay with the school and the meat is shared with community members, usually at a feast in the spring.

The first time I went out on the muskox hunt was with a young junior high group of students. Akavak, an elderly hunter, his adult son, Jimmy and Oolootie, his son-in-law (also the young hunter I had met on that first plane trip into Ausuittuq) were our appointed guides. We left town on six snowmobiles pulling three sleds with boxes of supplies and happy, excited students tightly packed into each of them. We traveled east around the point of land visible from the community—we were aiming for a known muskox herd location, less than a couple of hours from town. It was several hours before we arrived at the desired spot as we stopped often to investigate a number of seal breathing holes. It was hoped that our guides would catch a seal for a fresh meal that afternoon. As we approached the shoreline again, Akavak sighted a herd far off in the distance, up on the plateau at the base of the mountains. Even though I have lived in the North for years, I am still amazed at how an Inuk can see small details kilometres away. I have excellent eyesight, but I did not see those muskox until much later as our entire group followed the guides up onto the boulder-strewn land and, driving our snowmobiles, we shepherded the herd into the distinctive defence position that muskox are known for. For many students, this was the first muskox hunt they had been on—it was as exciting for them as it was for me. Needless to say, two animals were taken that day. They were skinned and butchered on the sea ice below the plateau. Students were given an opportunity to use their knives to help in the preparing of the meat. The stomach contents were studied to see what the animal had been feeding on recently, and the biology lesson continued as they also studied the intestines, liver, lungs and heart.

All parts of the animal were kept. Attention was paid to keep the head and horns in good shape so that the finished skin would look good.

As with most land-based activities, students that did not stand out academically often became the stars outside. Eliyah was always keen to take a lead in the cutting of skins and meat. Norman was on task for everything the guides asked of him. Neither of them was afraid of getting their hands dirty. Leah knew exactly when to get the stove going for hot water. They all knew when to stay out of the way of the hunters. It was during these times that I learned the most about my students and their lives outside of school.

The school has always had a working relationship with the RCMP. Unfortunately, most people assume that when a police officer shows up at the school it is because a student is in trouble for one reason or another. The turnover of officers in Ausuittuq is high. Ausuittuq is a single officer detachment and in 4 years I saw three different policemen. Although everyone is different, most see the value in building relationships with the town's youth outside of law-related issues. Two of the three officers were quite visible in and around the school, often visiting just to "touch base" with the students. At Aqiatusuk School, the RCMP offered gun and boat safety presentations for students each year.

A few years ago a national program began where one day each November, grade 9 students go to work with their parents instead of going to school. They get a look at what their future could be like as a working person, as their adult supervisors show them the "real world" of work. Ausuittuq had already identified career planning and the acquiring of job skills as priorities for the youth of the community. The *Take Our Kids*

To Work program allows students to experience the types of jobs presently available in the community and to see what skills and qualifications are needed for those jobs. Employers get an extra worker, free of charge, for the day.

Instead of limiting the student workers to grade 9, because of the small numbers of students involved, all students in grades 6 through 12 participated in the program. Students identified where and with whom they wanted to work. Community members were then sent letters and then contacted in person to arrange the working partners for the special day. Some students wrote personal notes to community employees, expressing an interest in working with them. Cooperating employers were asked to fill out evaluations consisting of mostly open-ended questions for each participating student. Every single student was evaluated. The community seemed to really involve themselves in this program. These special workday sessions were arranged three or four times each year. The program has been more successful than anticipated. In my last year at Aqiatusuk School, community employers were calling the school, asking for the dates of each upcoming work session. Several senior students secured summer jobs as a direct result of participating in the *Take Our Kids to Work* program.

Some partnerships were developed with agencies outside of the community. The partnering of the Nunavut Science Institute (Iqaluit) and Aqiatusuk School presented some very interesting opportunities for students. A number of visiting scientists has come into the school over the years to share information on various research projects going on in Nunavut. Marine biologists and Coast Guard staff presented slides, video and the viewing of marine plankton to students as they described the North Waters project, research at a large polynia (open sea water) east of Ellesmere Island. This

interaction between students and working scientists has obvious benefits to students. But the scientists are also able to satisfy the expectation of community input into their research, a mandated expectation written into most of their project proposals. For 3 years running, a partnership with the Polar Continental Shelf Project enabled staff and students to visit the ice cap on Devon Island to not only observe, but to participate in a study on climatic change. Community members were involved as well, all coordinated through the school. A few years ago, the Geological Survey of Canada had students and local people involved in a 2 week long prospecting course. Due to high community interest, the course was offered again the following year. Several of my students earned their prospecting licence and were able to stake claims. And finally, the University of Winnipeg requested student assistance in a snow contaminants project 2 years running. It was too expensive to send researchers all the way to Ausuittuq to collect snow samples, so help was enlisted through the school. In return, a sum of money was donated to the school towards any educational supplies.

In *Our Future is Now...Implementing Inuuqatigiit* (BDBE, 1996), the Board (now part of the Qikiqtani School Operations) describes a vision for partnerships where schools are actively supported by and involved in their communities. It is expected that through more community involvement, schools will increasingly reflect the culture of the community in values, policies and procedures, environment, program, behavioural expectations, staffing, and leadership. McLaughlin (2001) suggests that all schools across North America should consider how they can partner with community-based organizations to advance the goals of youth development. Through substantive connections with the youth organizations and their communities, schools can offer more

opportunities for teachers to teach and for young people to learn. As I witnessed in Ausuittuq, partnerships between the school and the community allow students to link their learning with their everyday experience and community life. This helps ensure that student learning is meaningful and connected to the real world.

Introduction to Part 3

This final section of my thesis aims to summarize and draw conclusions to the research into the factors that promote student success in a small, K-12 Inuit school.

Chapter 7 explores the possible contributors to success as well as the challenges along the way that serve to hinder that progress.

In chapter 8, I walk that fine balance between biography and history so evident in self-study research, and I explore the factors in my personal upbringing, in my school and work experiences, that I believe brought me to the Arctic. I consider how the Arctic changed me as a person and as an educator. I attempt to identify what I learned as a result of my northern experience.

Chapter 7 Pulling It All Together

A Context for Critical Reflection

In attempting to re-read the preceding chapters from the perspective of an outsider looking in, I am struck by the almost overwhelming complexity and dynamism of Aqiatusuk School and its community. For such a small school in a small community, the many-faceted activities and interrelated connections with students, staff, parents and town members are indeed surprising. The depth of the role of the school within the community is unexpectedly profound. It is difficult to begin summing up my experience as a teacher and then principal in Ausuittuq, never mind the resulting effects of those experiences in my own personal life. I remind myself that the image of the school portrayed in this paper is in fact something that has developed over time—the school was and continues to be a work in progress. After receiving high school accreditation in 1995, Aqiatusuk School continued to take shape and change over the years. Successfully integrating the K-9 program with the new secondary program took time, effort, and considerable experimentation. Many factors affected the life of the school. Staff changes occurred from one year to the next, as did the education council membership; numerous programs were initiated—some were kept, some dropped; parental and community input into the school program evolved; the older students themselves matured from one year to another, many of whom made valuable contributions towards the future direction of the school. Tompkins (1998) makes the comment that trying to describe the effective programming strategies that turned her school into a place where students were learning and enjoying school is a bit like taking apart a puzzle. She says that to examine one

piece alone does not give one an idea of what the whole looks like, yet each piece is necessary in order to have an understanding of the whole.

When I left Aqiatusuk School in 1999 it was most certainly not the same school I had arrived at in the fall of 1995. Likewise, I did not leave as the same person after those 4 years in Ausuittuq. Both my professional and personal life were greatly affected by the experience. The question here may be, "So what?" Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) admit that quality self-study research requires that the researcher negotiate a particularly sensitive balance between biography and history. They suggest that self-study must focus on the space between self and the practice engaged in. Tipping too far toward the "self" side produces a confessional of sorts. Tipping too far the other way turns self-study into traditional research. As with all research, self-study must answer to the question of significance. It must be presented so as to move scholarship on and advance practice in teacher education, not merely assist in one's own practice. I do believe the critical analysis of my teaching experiences in the North certainly aims to answer the question of, "So what?" Hamilton (1998) suggests that the questions self-study researchers need to ask should arise from concern about the interaction of the self-as-teacher educator, in context, over time, with others whose interests represent a shared commitment to the development and nurturance of the young and the impact of that interaction on self and other. My goal was to interpret and critically examine my pedagogical experiences in a very unique teaching environment. Best practices that I identify, reflect on, and then analyze are contributions to scholarship. As Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) conclude, the ultimate aim of self-study research is moral, to gain

understanding necessary to make the interaction between self and other increasingly educative.

Some time after arriving back in the south, I asked a friend, "Am I ruined?" I wondered if it would be possible for me to be truly excited to teach in a mainstream southern institution again. I felt I had been involved in such a unique, challenging and invigorating experience that it might not be reasonable to expect to feel that way about teaching again. After leaving Ausuittuq I entered a Master of Education program and spent considerable time reflecting on and analyzing my northern experience. I immersed myself in the writings of learning theorists, curriculum planners and critical pedagogists. I shared a particular connection with Sylvia Ashton-Warner in reading her journal, *Teacher* (1963), which documents her time teaching Maori children in New Zealand. I began to write about my own experiences and thoughts about education.

The act of teaching is ever-changing and dynamic—teachers learn to teach every day of their professional lives. Experienced teachers accept that every day is different to the one before, each year posing different challenges than the one previous. Teachers see each student as an individual, yet every class also possesses its own collective character. In order for teachers to improve in their profession it is absolutely necessary to reflect on their own practice. Schulman (1987) describes reflective teachers as those who review, reconstruct, reenact, and critically analyze their own and their students' performances, and who formulate explanations with evidence. Schon (1987) suggests that for beginning and experienced teachers, it is the continuous action and reflection on everyday problems that provides the bulk of their learning. McIntyre & O'Hair (1996) agree that teachers of the twenty-first century must be deeply rooted in the complexities

of teaching, which requires constant environmental assessment—teachers need to begin to acquire decision-making and reflective thinking skills early in their career. They go on to suggest that teachers should focus on the school as a complex workplace requiring them to be trained in reflectivity and critical perspectives.

As McIntyre & O'Hair suggest, reflective teaching gives rebirth to the teacher's "inner voice." Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) agree that authentic voice is a necessary condition for quality self-study research. After distancing myself geographically from my northern school and community, and entering a graduate program, I was provided with the time and space I needed to step back and critically reflect on my teaching practices. I began to articulate why I believe and do the things I do as a teacher, and why I feel they are important. I was able to re-acquaint myself with my own inner voice. I could then begin to answer the question of what factors promote success in a small K-12 Inuit community school.

Contributors to Success

Although I was most certainly in a leadership role as the senior high teacher and then as the principal of the school, I was but one member of a team of educators, paraeducators, students, concerned community members and parents. Like Tompkins (1998), it is sometimes difficult to separate out when I was leading and when I was "hurrying to catch the people I was leading." And, like Tompkins, I have used the pronoun "we" instead of "I" throughout much of this narrative. The fact is we all worked together, regardless of our position within the school. What did we do to promote student success at Aqiatusuk School? The goals of the school clearly describe the type of environment in which successful student learning was expected to take place

(see Appendix). Ensuring that a caring and positive, supportive environment existed within the school for each student and that relevant programs be offered to all students, as well as continually working towards the goal of involving the community with the school all helped students to become successful in a variety of ways. Prior to the addition of the high school program in Ausuittuq, very few (if any) of the students would have advanced to a senior secondary education. After 4 years, two students were able to graduate with a high school diploma. All but two of the original high school students succeeded in passing grade 10 and were able to continue on in grade 11 and 12. The integration of the secondary program with the already existing K to 9 program helped to nurture social skills in all students of the school, as a result of the frequent use of cooperative and multi-aged groupings for learning. Success was measured holistically taking all aspects of a student's life into account. Success was important in each of the academic, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual realms. All students of the school were encouraged to develop as individuals, as well as to learn to relate well with others. Throughout their time in school they acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes to prepare them for their future lives in Nunavut and the world. According to Nieto (1996), no one theory of achievement entirely explains why some students succeed in school and others fail. She adds that it is necessary to understand school achievement as contextual and as an interactive, personal, cultural, political and societal process in which all of these factors affect one another in sometimes competing and contradictory ways. The central argument of Cummins (1996) is that if schools and society are genuinely committed to reversing the pattern of school failure, the interactions between educators and students in schools must actively challenge historical patterns of disempowerment. This requires

that schools respect students' language and culture, encourage community participation, promote critical literacy, and institute forms of assessment that contribute to the school as a learning community.

Despite the inherent complexity of pinpointing pathways to student success, I have attempted to answer the question, what were the factors that lead to success for students at Aqiatusuk School? I examine the successes and ponder the challenges.

Language and Culture in the Classroom

Close attention was given to the wishes of the people of the community when it came to the education of their children. The "Community Visioning" meetings and workshops which took place in Baffin communities in the early to mid nineties helped determine what each school should be teaching and outlined the characteristics of a school that could promote that knowledge. School staff, education council members, elders, students, parents and community members were all consulted with and involved in the process. The results of those meetings became the basis of a long-term plan for the schooling of students in Baffin communities. Inuuqatigiit (1996) articulates the knowledge, skills and values which students need to learn from an Inuit perspective. The Inuuqatigiit document suggests that to ensure that education is meaningful to all Inuit children, it should continue to be student-centered, process-oriented, culture-based, holistic, include Inuit history, and involve parents and elders. A tremendous amount of effort was put into ensuring that Aqiatusuk School embraced the Inuuqatigiit vision of education for Inuit children.

According to Inuuqatigiit, Inuit believe that children who are treated as individuals—with respect, acceptance, and enjoyment—will become strong and confident. This will lead to success in planning and problem-solving, an ability in communicating with others, independent thinking, and a desire to be strong in their own language. In order to achieve this in the present day educational system, Inuit believe that school instruction must incorporate sensitivity to the Inuit perspective—learning should occur within a cultural context where possible, and the use of Inuktitut language should also be encouraged. Nieto (1996) suggests that even the way in which teachers and schools view the language of their students may be an exceedingly crucial contributor to student achievement. Inuuqatigiit implies that subject lessons need to be related to Inuit history, knowledge and experience as much as possible. A connection to the students' life experience needs to be present in each lesson in order for the learning to be meaningful. Nieto (1996) asserts that cultural issues have a huge impact on learning. According to Nieto, cultural differences in learning are especially apparent in learning styles, communication styles, and language differences. Cultural values and beliefs should not be excluded from the everyday learning of Inuit children. Inuuqatigiit tells us that it cannot.

Teachers who practice culturally-relevant methods can be identified by the way they see themselves and others (Ladson-Billings, 1994). They see their teaching as an art rather than as a technical skill; they believe that all students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some; they see themselves as part of the community and they seeing teaching as giving back to the community; they help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural, and global identities. Ladson-Billings adds

that teachers who practice culturally-relevant methods can also be identified by the ways in which they structure their social interactions. Their relationships are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom; they demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students and encourage that same connectedness between the students; they encourage a community of learners; they encourage their students to learn collaboratively. Finally, Ladson-Billings describes how teachers who practice culturally-relevant methods are identified by their notions of knowledge. They believe that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike; they view the content of the curriculum critically and are passionate about it; rather than expecting students to demonstrate prior knowledge and skills they help students develop that knowledge by building bridges and scaffolding for learning.

Within the Inuit context, an "Inuuqatigiit classroom", then, should encompass and reflect Inuit values, beliefs and manners about learning; it has a discipline that is calm and quietly explained; there is meaningful use of Inuktitut language; class resources include many Inuit materials; activity centres include traditional items, as well as books and tapes in Inuktitut; there should be easy access to traditional tools, shelters and equipment; many people from the community should be encouraged to visit the classroom on a regular basis. According to Inuuqatigiit, when these guidelines are followed there are many benefits: instruction will be more meaningful for students and attendance will improve; learning will be more fun for both student and teacher; student motivation will be higher; learning and sharing will be the student's main goal; the school will become more community oriented and parents will feel they have a say in the education of their child; there will be more sharing and understanding between the

school and the community; students will show respect for elders and others; students will show pride in their language and culture.

Inuit elders and parents want to see a culturally-relevant school system in place in Nunavut for their children. Communities want the youth of today to draw on the knowledge and wisdom of the past to take them into the next century. Inuuqatigiit suggests that traditional skills and wisdom combined with present day knowledge and modern technology will enable Inuit youth to learn what is needed to succeed in their rapidly, changing world and beyond.

Community Involvement

Much attention has been given in recent years to the benefits of after-school programs to students across North America. It would be naïve to think that all learning occurs within the boundaries of the school since students actually spend most of their waking hours outside of school. It seems logical to put to use some of those hours to extend learning. Growing evidence suggests that after-school program participation is associated with higher grades and test scores (McLaughlin, 2001). As outlined earlier (see Chapter 6, School-Community Partnerships) I equate after school programs in the south to school-community involvement in Inuit communities.

As described in Inuuqatigiit (1996), elders believe that by including parents and community in identifying strategies that promote positive learning for Inuit children, healthy "helping" partnerships will be fostered within the community. Cummins (1996) supports the idea that students will be empowered in the school context to the extent that their parents are empowered through their interactions with the school. I have no doubt

that a large amount of student success at Aqiatusuk School was a result of parental and community involvement in many aspects of the school program.

Staff Development

Sergiovanni (1996) proposes that teacher development is the single most important key to improving schools over the long haul. He argues that the constructivist principles of teaching and learning, which provide a scientific basis for making decisions about what is best for students, should be applied to decisions about what is best for the development of teachers as well. He adds that the answer to the question of teacher development will be found in changing school cultures in such a way that schools become learning and inquiring communities for teachers as well as students.

At Aqiatusuk School, our small staff of five had to quickly learn to trust and depend on one another for the everyday demands of teaching in an isolated, challenging environment. The degree of success we managed in terms of collegial support was a reflection of each individual staff member's commitment towards their own on-going personal and professional development. In a sense, we had no choice but to work together towards making the school an enjoyable and effective place of learning. Our nearest sister school was hundreds of kilometers away and school board officials visited only once or twice a year. Basically, we were on our own. Professional improvement workshops occurred throughout the school year, most often as in-school offerings. That is, we relied on each other's expertise and willingness to share in order to cultivate our professional development. Each week or so, staff would meet to plan for upcoming themes. Early school closures, that had already been worked into the school calendar,

allowed these meetings to occur within school time so that teachers did not need to spend an inordinate amount of their personal time in the planning. Teaching teams of two would also determine their strategies together on a regular basis. Every couple of years a regional teacher's conference would take place, usually in Iqaluit, where all Baffin teachers would attend any number of workshops. Although most of these workshops, in my view, are quite informative and relevant to Northern teaching, it is the networking and informal meetings and get-togethers that teachers truly benefit from. It is the one time when all Baffin teachers are able to share in their successes and frustrations, as well as share their personal school stories—it is a time where teachers feel connected to a larger community of professionals in much the same situations as themselves.

In 1994, the Nunavut Boards of Education initiated a project related to the professional development of educators working in the school system. This project, called *Pauqatigiit* (meaning paddling together), involved the Federation of Nunavut Teachers, all community education councils, the Nunavut Teacher Education Program with its partner McGill University, and the Department of Education in collaborative efforts to meet the needs identified by Nunavut educators (Nunavut Boards of Education, 1995). This was a much welcome initiative to all teachers, Inuit and non-Inuit alike, working in isolated communities. Not only would it begin to address the multitude of educator needs in Inuit schools, it was a homegrown initiative, developed in the North by and for northern educators.

In her exploration of "The Hunger for Professional Learning in Nunavut Schools", O'Donoghue (1998) argues that "ethically-based professional practice...

requires that southern models are carefully scrutinized and evaluated as potentially violent intrusions and contributors to the exponential and endemic cultural and linguistic erosion that is part of a colonial legacy." She adds that professional learning is viewed as one of the most powerful catalysts in the pursuit of freedom and the retrieval and maintenance of identity, language, and culture. O'Donoghue asserts that professional learning is key to addressing issues of difference, identity, and freedom within the school system. During the 1996-97 school year, 35% of Nunavut teachers in schools were Aboriginal (GNWT, 1999). If this number is to increase significantly, Inuit educators must feel empowered in their positions within the community and educational system.

Regardless of any "out of community" professional improvement initiatives or opportunities, the individual staffs of all community schools must work well together each and every day. Collegial relationships between staff that portray mutual respect and support of each other go a long way to enhance staff development. Rolland Barth (1990) maintains that the quality of adult relationships within a school has more to do with the quality and character of the school, and with the accomplishment of students, than any other factor. This is a belief echoed by Sergiovanni. If this is the case, then I believe that the teachers at Aqiatusuk School modeled healthy and supportive collegial relationships for the student population. Ultimately, this may have added to the success of many students in the school.

Challenges to Promoting Success

While I maintain that the overall program at Aqiatusuk School was a successful one, it certainly was not always a smooth road. The story that has unfolded so far is not only my interpretation of the successes, it is also testimony to the many obstacles that present themselves along the path to student success in northern schools. Teaching anywhere is no small task, but teaching in Nunavut presents certain unique challenges, as Tompkins (1998) attests. Although I have touched on some of these issues throughout the various sections of this thesis, I will consider them here again briefly.

Early in my northern teaching career, I was astonished to know that the 15 students that I may see on a Monday are not necessarily the same 15 that I see on a Tuesday. Attendance seemed to be an option. Unlike many school-aged children in the south, Inuit children possess great personal freedom. Many are allowed to stay out late with friends, often unsupervised, and are allowed to come and go as they please at all hours of the day and night. In small,

close-knit communities this does not pose any danger to the children—everyone keeps an eye on the children from a distance wherever they are. They are safe. Children are not forced to get up in the mornings and go to school. If a child is tired or does not feel like attending school, he does not have to. Many cultural activities keep students away from school as well. Hunting and family camping in spring and early fall in particular accounts for a lot of absenteeism. Often girls in particular are expected to baby-sit younger brothers and sisters while parents work or while they are busy elsewhere. Daycare facilities in the smaller Nunavut settlements are rare. As students get older the lure of working even part-time and earning a paycheque seems to overtake the

importance of attending school. Lateness and truancy are common problems in all Nunavut schools.

Although attendance statistics for Aqiatusuk School have historically been fairly good, it was always a constant struggle to maintain that record. Our main objective was to make school more interesting than any of the alternatives. We believed in the idea that offering a meaningful and relevant program to our students would in itself keep students coming to school each day. If we made parents aware of the importance of school for their children then they would also work to keep them in school on a daily basis. As a staff, we constantly discussed attendance issues over the years and we worked hard to improve upon our school attendance, especially with the seniors. But, as I said, it was something that we had to work at everyday.

Apathy is a difficult condition to overcome. Students find themselves in a psychological space where they are disinterested in everything presented to them. They may be bored, not adequately challenged, overly challenged, uncomfortable, wishing they were anywhere else...there are so many reasons why a child becomes apathetic in school. No matter how fine a program may be, there will always be a number of individuals that have no enthusiasm at all. Sometimes this can spread throughout a class, from one student to another. In comparing all of the schools that I have taught in, Aqiatusuk School suffered the least from apathy. However, one or two students in the junior high and senior high students would show signs regularly after the initial novelty of the start of the year had worn off. Apathy always seemed to affect the older students, the adolescents. What we had to do as a staff was continually strive to develop meaningful lessons for the students where the learning was of interest to as many

students as possible. As with tackling the problem of attendance, the key idea was to make school as interesting for students as we possibly could. We had to find a hook, grab students' attention and keep it. Teachers attempted to ignite the internal motivations of all of their students. To aim for this is simply good pedagogy. However, in a cross-cultural, second language classroom situation, apathy may also arise for any number of complex cultural reasons. Conversations between Inuit and non-Inuit staff, teachers and community were crucial in developing strategies to keep students engaged in their daily school activities.

Discipline codes are as varying and different as are schools. Aqiatusuk School is small enough that individual cases of inappropriate behaviour can be considered as they arise. This is not to say that there was no code of conduct in school. Through constant modeling of appropriate ways in which to interact with others, through regular classroom discussions, through regular school assemblies, students learned that the only "rule" really necessary was to respect yourself, your classmates and teachers, and your family. If students at least attempted to honour this ideal, discipline was not a problem in school. Teachers and students would jointly decide on classroom rules and the consequences for breaking those rules at the beginning of each year. All staff and students were responsible for reminding all persons within the school of appropriate respectful behaviour. Kids will be kids. We did have our share of heated arguments, temper tantrums, the use of profane language, emotional outbursts, periodic playground altercations, and even a fistfight or two. The key here was to consider the individual student's circumstances, to remain as calm and quiet toned as possible throughout the determining of what was to be done, and most importantly to be fair and consistent in

applying the rules. I cannot say that discipline was a big problem at Aqiatusuk School, yet I realize that this was probably a result of how individual cases were handled from the start and how everyone was diligent in maintaining that ideal of "a respectful school" (see Chapter 8, Me and My Learning).

Each September time was dedicated to students and community members meeting new school staff. Teacher turnover rates in the North generally are very high. In the 4-year period of 1995-1999 at Aqiatusuk School, YoAnne and I were the only non-Inuit staff who returned to the community each year. Harry, the principal before me, had remained in the community for 2 years, yet every single other teacher stayed at the school for only 1 year (see Chapter 3, The New High School). The reasons for this short retention of staff in Ausuittuq are diverse. These same factors come into play throughout most other Arctic communities as well. The simple issue of isolation from friends and family affected many southern teachers who came to Ausuittuq. Being one of the most northern communities in the world poses special transportation challenges. Few teachers could fly out at Christmas to be with family. Airline schedules, connections to other locations, and of course the unpredictable Arctic weather all combined to make this difficult. Complete immersion into a different culture and language proved difficult for some. The embracing of, or at the very least, the understanding of beliefs, values, attitudes, and perspectives of a land-based, Aboriginal community was impossible for some. All of the things I admire and adore about Ausuittuq were difficulties to overcome for others. With a total population of 150, Ausuittuq seemed small and lacking in community resources for many. Some teachers could not come to grips with the effects of irregular attendance on their daily lessons; others disagreed with the community's

perspective on the disciplining of children. Again, these were cultural perspectives that affected the life of the school to a large degree. Although the school was, in my opinion, very well equipped with teaching resources, some teachers tired of the constant struggle to develop their own meaningful, culturally-relevant teaching materials. Simply put, teaching *well* in Ausuittuq could be very difficult, both professionally and personally.

Tompkins (1998) remarks that what is asked of northern teachers is quite demanding. She suggests they need to have a strong understanding of how to individualize instruction for a wide range of second language students, who may have a history of spotted attendance, as well as an ability to individualize programs for integrated special needs students. She believes northern teachers require a good understanding of first and second language learning as well as an ability to accommodate students in an ESL situation. Tompkins suggests that northern teachers should be able to work effectively in a cross-cultural environment and have good programming skills in order to create relevant teaching plans. She adds that it would be beneficial for teachers to have some first-hand understanding of poverty and isolation so they could begin to understand some of the forces at work in northern communities.

I believe that personal attributes play a key role in determining whether or not someone is suited to teaching in such a small, isolated Aboriginal community. Some of the staff we lost along the way were in fact ideally suited to life at Aqiatusuk School, yet they had other reasons for leaving the community. In my experience, people who do best in small Arctic schools are those who are people-oriented, open-minded and flexible, accommodating, optimistic, self-confident, interested in the environment, and possess a love of the outdoors. An adventurous spirit is most certainly a prerequisite. People need

to be comfortable in their own skin before they can tackle the challenges of living and working in a completely foreign environment. The strengths of any personal relationships that they have with any number of people in the community can be the deciding factors in whether they flounder or flourish in their newly adopted surroundings. Teachers that come North with a friend or a partner seem to be able to overcome many of the difficulties. Simply having a trusted companion to talk to at the end of the day makes a world of difference. I was extremely privileged to have YoAnne as a constant companion throughout our entire time in the North. The strength of our personal relationship enabled us both to dig in and stay for a long time, and enjoy the challenges we faced together.

I am an optimist. I dwell on the positive. I do admit, however, that I had to navigate my way through some very difficult periods while in the North. I felt frustration at times, with students, with colleagues, with the community. I became sad and angry at what I perceived to be social injustices within the community. The smallness of everything in Ausuittuq got to me every now and then. When I became principal, I struggled with stress more than at any other time in my life. I remember one night lying in bed feeling so overwhelmed that all I could do to release this emotion was to cry like a baby until I fell asleep. This was my lowest moment. Luckily I had YoAnne to help me through it—the anxiety passed quickly. I placed huge expectations on myself. I wanted to do everything well. Each year I would have to keep some space in my professional growth plan for working on ways in which I could more healthily balance my professional and personal life. I had to consciously make time for myself and not be at the school every evening and weekend. Many times I caught myself in my office at

school at 8 o'clock in the evening, still without supper. Most weekends I would be in school on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning. I did learn to deal with the immense workload though. I became more efficient with time. To feed my emotional and spiritual self, I spent as much time outside as I possibly could. I joined in with people on dogteam trips, snowmobile excursions, camping expeditions, and fishing trips. I participated in community events and visited people after school. I became involved in the life of the community. Tompkins (1998) remarks that all too often really good teachers burn out in the North because there is no end to the amount you need to give. She adds that the needs of the children and the communities will always be larger than the energy and caring of the people who are working in schools. This means that educators have to understand that they must find a way of saving something for themselves.

There are enormous challenges to promoting success in northern schools. I have pinpointed only a few. Each factor combines with all of the others to make the challenge greater than the sum of its parts. My main understanding of all of this is that one challenge cannot be considered in isolation to the others. The lives of the students in the school, of the people in the community, and of the individual teachers that make up the staff are all interconnected and influence each other in very tangible and important ways. It is a group effort that makes a school successful.

Chapter 8

Me and My Learning: A Psychological Context

My Psychological Journey into the Arctic

I feel privileged to have been able to live and work and interact with Inuit throughout the North. I have been involved in personal and professional activities that I would never have had the chance to experience anywhere else in the world. When I first arrived in the Eastern Arctic, however, I brought with me a particular set of beliefs, values and attitudes that were a function of my own culture and language, my own background in schooling, and my everyday experience. I soon realized that most of what I thought to be true about education in general, and about student learning, was not necessarily the only "truth." My outlook and overall philosophy, how I taught, changed a great deal as I traveled from one Inuit community to the next.

Any person wishing to discover why they do the things they do, or why they believe in the things they do, inevitably finds themselves reminiscing about the past. We are all products of our past and present, of our family situation, of our particular culture and language. Our attitudes and beliefs are cultivated from the day we are born. In searching out reasons for my own feelings about education, I had to think back on my early childhood and school years. Certain themes began to emerge, themes that were repeated again as I reminisced about later school memories and early work experiences. I began to identify what I call "defining moments"—moments in my life that became integral not only to my personal development but to my professional development as a teacher. Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) refer to these times in one's life as "nodal

moments", times when the course of a life is seen to have connecting lines previously unseen.

I believe that fate conspired to send me to the Arctic. As esoteric as this may sound, upon reflecting on my own life story and my personal development, it seems logical I ended up teaching Inuit students in the High Arctic. In viewing my life retrospectively, I came upon patterns in my life choices and experience. Defining moments throughout my life became connected in some way, leading inevitably to my decision to teach in the North. Allow me to expand on this notion by first disclosing some of my childhood memories, and then by sharing some of the steps that lead to my choosing of a career in education.

While living in Scotland, and prior to entering school at age 4, I spent a lot of my time outdoors playing in the woods or out on the hills. I remember climbing trees and cliffs and happily roaming about the countryside. Often I would hide behind a large boulder, or a hedgerow, and sneak up on the sheep and cows in the pastures. I sometimes imagined myself a shepherd, tending to all of the animals, domestic and wild. I liked to draw and always carried a pencil and paper wherever I went. I wandered everywhere and found myself temporarily lost on more than one occasion. I have recurring memories of golden bracken fern, green fields, and mist and rain. I can still smell the mud of the riverbank, vividly, as I remember the white swans on the water. Interestingly enough, these early childhood themes of a love of nature and a desire to be outdoors followed me into my adult and professional life. I traveled a great deal and began working as a naturalist for Environment Canada before turning to a more

traditional teaching career, although even my choices of teaching assignments kept me near the out of doors.

I received a traditional western-European schooling. I remember absolutely loving to read from an early age. Perhaps, in the beginning, reading was fun because it came to me so easily. As a preteen I would read fairy tales (from a book I still own) to my two younger brothers—they would cuddle up in my bed and I would choose a story for the night. Later I remember losing myself in the adventures of storybook characters whom I came to regard as my friends. Those stories captivated me. The characters would bring me no end of trouble, however, as my parents repeatedly caught me with a flashlight under the bed sheets.

After emigrating to Canada at age 7, I entered an east-end Toronto school, filled with Italian and Greek children. This was my first experience with people of varying ethnic backgrounds. I would imitate their unusual accents as I tried to lose my own Scottish brogue. Soon after my family moved again into the country and I entered yet another school. Although some of my teachers along the way were not always the best educators, many were truly wonderful. I loved school. I especially enjoyed doing well academically. I am sure that my desire to do well in school greatly affected my expectations as a teacher later in my life. My favourite teachers in high school were my art, math and science teachers. Madame Boucher was wild and creative, and encouraged artistic expression in all her students. A very strong-charactered, older woman was my senior math teacher—we all respected Mrs. Cardenas and appreciated how well she explained difficult concepts. Science intrigued me. One of the strongest "aha" experiences I have ever had in my life (a defining moment) was a result of science

learning in tenth grade. Travelling home on the school bus one day, I fixed my eyes on a huge boulder in the field and suddenly I realized that I knew how it got there and why it was there. In my mind, I imagined the glaciers of ten thousand years ago dumping these rocky erratics all across the southern Ontario fields. I remember sitting on that bus with a silly grin on my face, confident in the fact that I understood something very profound.

Although I had drawn and enjoyed art for as long as I could remember, I did not truly begin to appreciate my abilities until I entered high school. I became hypnotized by the incredible realism of the wildlife artists, and strove to be as good as Loates, Bateman and Lansdowne. I shyly remember practically forcing friends to sit at my kitchen table at home and admire each and every page of my new Glen Loates art book. I expected everyone else to be as enthralled with the art as I was. Of course they were not, but they were polite! My senior biology teacher, Mr. Lovering, raved about my detailed, colour illustrations of our rat dissections and I learned for the first time that I could go into the field of scientific illustration, if I so chose. I feel fortunate to have had so many good teachers in my life. Surprisingly, most of them are memorable to me not because of their knowledge of any particular subject but because of the way they made me feel as a student in school. To be sure, this fact has propelled me, in my professional life as a teacher, to emphasize the development of interpersonal relationships with and among students in the classroom.

Throughout school, I tutored friends in need of help with various subjects. I did this because of my need for others to enjoy and understand things the way I did. I liked helping people learn, and I discovered I was good at explaining concepts clearly. Many told me that I should be a teacher, but the very idea of choosing a career that effectively

confined me to the indoors was horrifying. After all, I had plans for a much more glorious, outdoor life of adventure than could possibly be offered by a career of teaching.

On the day my parents dropped me off at the University of Guelph's student residence, I could not wipe the smile from my face. Freedom at last. I was a little nervous, but very excited at the possibility of determining my life's future direction. I enrolled in the Fisheries and Wildlife Biology program, and although it took a semester or so to find my niche, I thoroughly enjoyed university life. I socialized with a small group of wonderful people, mostly with whom I shared common interests. I eagerly soaked up the new information that was presented to me in the lecture halls and laboratories. Very early in my academic life, I became awe-inspired with Darwinian theory, evolutionary biology and, of all things, invertebrate zoology. I discovered the essays of Stephen Jay Gould and the writings of Jacob Bronowski and Richard Dawkins. A whole new, intriguing world seemed to have opened up for me. In my future, I imagined myself a great Canadian naturalist.

In the spring of my second year at Guelph, the singularly most important defining moment of my professional life occurred. I secured summer employment with the Canadian Wildlife Service, working as a naturalist at the Wye Marsh Wildlife Interpretation Centre, in Ontario. Although I had already developed a strong affinity for nature throughout my life, it was my seasonal work at this wildlife centre that would produce not only my profound respect and attachment for the natural world, but also aid in the rediscovery of my desire to educate people in one way or another. I returned to the "marsh" each summer throughout my university career. I learned the names, both

common and scientific, of practically everything that grew from the ground. I studied the behaviour of animals to the nth degree. I arose at 4 o'clock in the morning for a full 6 weeks one summer to participate in a breeding bird survey. I discovered the joy of walking transects and identifying birds from their calls alone. A large part of my work at the marsh involved nature interpretation for the visiting public, as well as for a number of school groups during the months of May and June. I would lead nature walks and canoe excursions, give slide presentations and provide demonstrations on a number of nature-related topics. Although most of the visitors to the marsh were interested in the outdoors already, I derived great pleasure in turning them on to the intricacies of nature. Each autumn I would return to the university with yet another full summer season of field experience to complement my studies in biology.

After graduating, I returned for one last summer at the marsh and then worked full-time for a year at the University of Guelph Arboretum. It seems that the director, Erik Jorgensen, had noticed my artistic ability while I was a part-time naturalist at the Arboretum's nature centre throughout the school year. Professor Jorgensen took me under his wing, creating a position just for me and hired me as a botanical illustrator. How important mentors are! Technicians would bring me samples from the various plant collections of the University, and holding the twig or flower in my left hand, I would draw the fresh specimens with my right. A year later, after returning home from a 6-month backpacking trip in Britain and Europe, I worked again as an illustrator, designing outdoor wildlife exhibits for a provincial park. I then drove to Saskatchewan to work as a naturalist (where I also met YoAnne), followed with similar work in Newfoundland, Ontario and New Brunswick. At some time amongst all of this activity,

YoAnne and I managed to fit in an extraordinary 5-month safari in East Africa. For a long while it seemed my career was a perfect combination of nature illustration and interpretation.

At some point along the way, I decided to earn my teaching degree. Two specific memories stand out for me from that particular year. The first one was a slap-in-the-face realization that not everyone was an environmentalist. There were actually people in this world that knew very little about the natural environment, and could care less. I realized that after spending my entire life concerned with nature, I had subconsciously come to believe that everyone thought the same way when it came to environmental issues. I had managed to surround myself with like-minded individuals. Here, I met people training to become teachers, who seemingly had no environmental conscience. This troubled me greatly. The second defining moment of that year occurred when I observed a group of pre-service science teachers modeling a junior high science lesson. They were collecting insects from the "school yard" for later observation with microscopes in the classroom. Over a short period of time the insects were lured into a container of sugar water, drowning in the process. I instantly expressed my disappointment that teachers, through their actions, would encourage young students to senselessly kill living things, albeit insects, for such a frivolous cause. Could the bugs not be trapped live in a butterfly net and be observed alive? I was greeted with blank stares and mildly teased about this for a short while afterwards. But these actions seemed poor judgement to me. I thought that as science teachers we should encourage curiosity about the natural world but, more importantly, we should be instilling a value for life in our students as well.

The week after watching a documentary on the Arctic, by Moses Suzuki, entitled *The Nature of Things: The Edge of Ice*, an advertisement for teaching positions in the Baffin appeared in a national newspaper. I applied and was offered a job—in July of that year I moved to Pangnirtung, Baffin Island. The rest, they say, is history.

The Beliefs of One Teacher

Having answered the questions of how and why I ended up teaching Inuit students in Nunavut, other important questions remain to be answered. How did I know to do things the way I did? What did I learn from my experiences? How did these experiences change me? How could schools anywhere in the world benefit from northern educational methodologies?

It Takes a Community to Raise a Child

I suppose the most profound effect that living and working in the North has produced in my life is the absolute belief that it does take a community to raise a child. I see community involvement as a key factor in the success of schools. I have observed this philosophy in action, and when all people concerned work towards the development of strong links between the school and its community, powerful things happen. Schools need to reflect the beliefs and values of its greater community. Working in the North has solidly convinced me of the importance of including the language and the culture of the students in the school curriculum. I have witnessed the value of students being able to regularly learn in their first language throughout their school years. Too many teachers focus on the less-than-perfect English skills of their second language students. Should

we not focus on the fact that those same students are able to communicate in more than one language. How marvelous! We need to celebrate bilingual and multilingual students much more often in schools.

I admire the way Aboriginal cultures revere their elders. Respecting and valuing the wisdom of older members in our society needs to be taught and reinforced in our schools in very real ways. I believe that elders in any community should be integral to the school program at all levels. Why could schools not be designed to include an elders' meeting room where these wise members of the community can sit, have tea, socialize with each other, as well as actively participate in the school program by telling stories, demonstrating cultural skills or teaching language where needed?

Healthy Relationships

I have come to understand that school administrators play a key role in building a positive, healthy school culture. Attention to the quality of the personal interactions between the staff themselves, as well as with students and their parents, is of utmost importance. My main focus as a school principal became the developing of a respectful, supportive environment in which teaching and learning could occur in a way that benefits all members of the school population. As Barth (1990) points out, the perception that students have of how the adults in their school behave towards one another greatly influences the atmosphere of the school and eventual student success.

I learned that a school principal needs to model both a professional and moral style of leadership within the school as well as provide whatever support is needed to allow teachers to get on with teaching. I now appreciate the value of administrators who

provide leadership in the ongoing, professional development of their staff. If teacher development is an important factor that leads to school improvement, then professional development for school staff should occur on a regular basis. The strengths of teachers on staff need to be both recognized and made use of. As with students in the classroom, staff within the school need to feel appreciated and valued.

I see the importance of teachers being encouraged to develop a shared sense of purpose for their school. In Ausuittuq, I learned to make available opportunities for shared decision making and problem solving as often as possible. This helped to develop a collaborative approach, even a style of shared leadership, within the school.

As Cummins (1996) comments, human relationships are at the heart of schooling. What we do matters. Healthy relationships amongst all staff and students of the school are cultivated sometimes in the most basic of ways. In saying this, I am reminded of a student and a particular incident early on in my stay in the North. Seepa had one of the sourest looks I have ever seen for a young person of only 13 years. A deep frown adorned her face, it was almost a look of permanent anger. She smiled only in the presence of her very best of friends and even those occasions were infrequent. I often felt that she was looking at me from afar, out of the corner of her eye, but she always turned her gaze away when I turned my attention towards her. Not being Seepa's teacher, I only came into contact with her during breaks in the hallways or outside at recess. One day, while on outdoor supervision, I absent-mindedly walked past her and her group of friends sitting on the steps of a nearby portable. Seepa waited for me to get right in front of her and then suddenly asked, "Why are you always smiling and in such a good mood?" I immediately answered, "Why not?" I paused then added, "I like

smiling and I am in a good mood most of the time." Seepa further inquired suspiciously, "But you can't always be in a good mood all of the time!" "No..." I agreed, "but if I do wake up in a bad mood, or if something really bugs me at school, why should I put everyone else in a bad mood? Besides, when I smile I feel better. Don't you?" Seepa did not answer my question, she simply stared at me. Her friends had not entered into the conversation, they were quite content to watch the interaction between Seepa and myself. I considered prolonging our talk—this was the first time Seepa had even given me the time of day—but I decided to continue on my rounds of the playground. As I left, Seepa surprised me as her face lit up with the most genuine bright smile I could possibly imagine. "OK! See you then." she said, and I continued on my way. I couldn't help but smile even more myself.

It seemed to me I had somehow passed a test. Seepa still looked angry a lot of the time, but she smiled much more often than I had seen her smile before that first conversation. At innumerous steps along the way I have learned from many "Seepas" that the connections we create in classrooms, in the school and in the community are central to students' development and growth as they, in the words of Cummins (1996), "negotiate their own identities". As I have learned alongside my students I have been able to negotiate my own.

Respect, Respect and More Respect

I believe that educators must always remind themselves that we teach children, not subjects, and that every person is deserving of respect and kindness. This makes sense to everyone, yet "walking the talk" often proves difficult, especially in challenging

circumstances. All teachers can recollect at least one particular student when pondering their times of difficulty over the years. Rosie is one of those students for me.

Rosie was a very aggressive young woman. Her dark, foreboding eyes and stern facial expression could bore holes into your very soul. It was very intimidating to face this young teen in grade 8 science. Although known to be very bright, Rosie had a history of violent classroom behaviour. She was a leader and had the ability to draw other students into her disruptive ways. I was warned by other teachers to not provoke her in any way. Being early in my teaching career, I gingerly went about my job of teaching. I smiled so much those first few months that my face hurt. I tried to learn some Inuktitut, and some of the cultural ways as quickly as possible. I learned that raising eyebrows signified *yes*, and that a scrunched up nose represented *no*. If a behavioural incident occurred, I tried my best to diffuse the situation and carry on with the lesson. However, each day that I had to face that grade 8 science class, my stomach was in knots. What would Rosie do today?

One day, late in October, Rosie decided to have a tantrum, throwing a desk and chair across the room at a young boy. The other students were shocked, and nervous. They awaited my reaction. I waited for a moment, then directed Rosie to step into the hall, I would be out to see her shortly. Surprisingly, she went without any argument. I quickly organized some seatwork for the class, then went into the hall. Rosie was waiting outside the door, obviously bracing herself to receive some yelling from her angry and frustrated teacher. I can honestly say that at that point in time, I had absolutely no idea of what I was going to say or do to this child. I had not prepared for such a confrontation. I did know, however, that I had to deal with the situation somehow. I did not say anything

for what seemed like an eternity. We both stood in the hall, silently. I instinctively knew that raising my voice would accomplish nothing, never mind being extremely inappropriate from a cultural viewpoint. I still remember to this day the words that did eventually come.

"I know you are trying your absolute best to make me not like you, Rosie." Long pause. Rosie was motionless. "But... it is too late—I decided I liked you a long time ago. No matter what you do I will like you. You can't make me not like you Rosie."

As I slowly and calmly spoke these words, Rosie's eyes filled up with tears and she began to cry. I put my hand on her shoulder and steered her towards a hall chair near our classroom door, and told her that when she was ready she was welcome to join the rest of the class and finish up her science lesson. I left Rosie in the hall and returned to a hushed classroom. Two minutes later, as quiet as a mouse, Rosie entered the room and continued on with her work. From that day on, Rosie was an exemplary student in my class. I know that she was not an angel in all her classes, but for some reason I was able to say the right thing at the right time and allowed her to trust me. The next time Rosie expressed anger towards me was 3 years later, after I had announced that I would be leaving the community. She simply said in her monotone, stern voice, "You should stay until I graduate." As it turned out, Rosie became the youngest ever Baffin high school graduate exactly 4 years later.

I remember Rosie with great affection. Rosie taught me that all children need to be loved, no matter what. I learned that all students need to be given the benefit of the doubt. I learned that students with labels, who do sometimes behave badly, can change.

Children deserve to be respected. I think I learned more from Rosie than she did from me.

Most people we meet in a lifetime are interesting, decent human beings. Everyone has a story to tell; everyone has something to contribute to society. All people, regardless of age, socioeconomic class, colour, race, cultural background, or religious affiliation deserve to be respected and valued for who they are as individuals. I regard youth in our schools as people first, then students. I do believe that people are inherently good—the majority of people are good-hearted at their core. In school, I try to be a person first, then a teacher and principal. Throughout my life, I have found that when we treat others fairly, with respect and kindness, we are treated the same way in return.

In schools, expectations of this sort need not be verbally expressed—they simply need to be modeled, understood and accepted. I make an effort to understand where my students are "coming from". I remind myself each day that every child who walks through the doors of the school comes from a unique household with a unique history. I feel that totally immersing myself in the cross-cultural environment of Inuit communities has allowed me to further develop the ability to see the world from another person's perspective. I try to walk in another person's kamiks every now and then so that I may begin to understand their personal point of view. Regularly adjusting and re-evaluating my own perspective as a teacher of Inuit students became absolutely critical.

On Fairness and Discipline

Many teachers fall into the trap of believing that they have to treat every student equally in order to be fair. Yet if the aim in education, as Nieto (1996) suggests, is for an equality of outcomes for a broader range of students, then this simply cannot be true. Rather, we need to treat all students individually, which may mean differently, in order to be fair and equitable in our schools. This concept is confusing to many educators, so it is no surprise that even students themselves often misunderstand the meaning of equal treatment.

An example of this misconception is illustrated in the following story. Dinah took longer to learn concepts than most of her peers. She often had to ask questions over and over again in order to understand even simple instructions. Dinah had difficulty with her vision, she wore thick glasses, and was mildly physically challenged. She often became impatient with herself and had difficulties controlling her outbursts of temper. One morning, during a science assessment, I could see evidence of her frustration. By the end of the period, she was nowhere near completing the test. After her classmates had left for recess, I approached Dinah and offered her the opportunity to come in after school to finish her test. The reaction I received was startling. "I don't want any special treatment!" she angrily replied as she quickly packed up her books and began to leave. I had to think about my reply briefly before continuing on. I did not want Dinah to think that I was giving her "special treatment". I said, "Dinah, this is not special treatment. I do this for many students. I am interested in knowing what you know about science, I don't care how fast you can answer the questions. It is better for me to get an idea of what you have learned." Dinah was still heading for the door. "Sometimes I have given

students an oral exam to test their knowledge. Sometimes I've asked students to take home a test and bring it back the next day. There are many ways that I can test you, Dinah." By now she was hesitating. "I've never seen you do that. Who did you do that with?" I told her that it didn't matter 'who', but that everyone learns in different ways, and everyone reads and writes at their own speed. Dinah still objected with, "But, I'm not stupid, I don't want any special treatment." I decided to let her think about it. I told her that if she wanted, she could finish her test after school and reassured her that she was not "getting something extra" that no one else ever got. I then quietly went about my way, organizing my desk for the next class. Dinah left without another word.

Dinah reminded me that students are keenly aware of your real or imagined perceptions of them. Dinah wanted to be responsible for her learning in the same way as all of her peers—she needed to know I had the same high expectations for her as I did for everyone else. She needed to know I believed in her capabilities. She wanted to be measured against the same yardstick as her classmates. I believe that it is crucial for all teachers to display high expectations for each of their students—students will generally rise to that level—but at the same time, teachers need to take individual needs and learning styles into consideration. Dinah did return to my classroom at the end of the day, in fine spirit, and finished her test. As she closed the door behind her, she smiled and said "thank you."

Regarding discipline, I believe that school rules should be fair, reasonable, and applied consistently, but always taking into consideration the changing, individual circumstances of each and every child. I believe that good behaviour should be noticed much more often than bad behaviour. My motto became "Catch students performing

well, and praise them for it". This is a borrowed version of Ed Miller's "Catching 'Em Being Good" policy, implemented in another Baffin school in the late eighties (Tompkins, 1998). Not only does it serve as a preventative approach to discipline, Tompkins asserts that it is a statement of how teachers value people in school. I know that as a teacher, I heap positive encouragement on all of my students at any possible opportunity, even for small victories. Something deep within me recognizes that this simple acknowledgement is very important to the development of a healthy self-esteem and personal confidence.

I believe in student-directed discipline. When students have a say in what is or is not acceptable school behaviour, as well as in the determining of the consequences for misbehaviours, students become true stakeholders in the system and they begin to police themselves, better than any one teacher could. I have seen the benefits of utilizing alternative forms of behaviour management and discipline within the school setting, and involving students wherever possible. In one particular instance two young students in grade 7 were caught smoking on the school grounds. All students were aware that only the grade 9 to 12 students were allowed to smoke, and that if anyone broke the smoking rule, smoking privileges would be temporarily suspended for everyone. The high school class was allowed to deal with these students in a sentencing–circle in the senior classroom. The senior students sat in a circle facing the offenders who sat in the middle. Older students questioned the younger ones and discussion ensued to determine the appropriate "sentence" for the guilty parties. Students were allowed to speak in Inuktitut (with Inuit staff looking on). The young students were visibly uncomfortable. In a sense, it would have been easier for them to deal with the school principal. Being held

accountable to their older sisters and brothers, whom they greatly respected, was much more difficult. The senior students took their responsibilities very seriously. They deliberated for a long time. Eventually they decided on two days after school detention and a promise to not break the rule again. Not surprisingly, those two students did not find themselves in a sentencing circle a second time.

There is no place for put-downs or punishments in a warm, caring school environment. Empty threats have absolutely no place or value in school. I try to deal with people in subtle, non-confrontational ways where possible. I am a very calm person in school. I take pride in the fact that I never, under any circumstances, raise my voice. I have learned over the years that calm, relaxed, firm tones, combined with periods of silent, patient waiting can accomplish much more than the excitable, impatient shouting that unfortunately occurs in many of today's classrooms. If a teacher truly believes in respecting all people, yelling at students is not a reflection of respectful treatment for all. I try to listen much more than I talk. Inuit have taught me the importance of waiting, and listening, and "speaking" without many words and, perhaps most importantly, the power of silence.

Link to the Land

Inuit have always had a close relationship to the natural world around them...they feel they belong to the land, as they have depended on it for survival and learned to adapt to its rhythms and cycles for centuries. To Inuit, "the land" includes all of nature—the earth itself, as well as the water, ice, wind and sky, the plants and

animals. Inuit believe that all living things are connected in a continuous cycle of life and cannot be separated (GNWT, 1996).

One particular year, the ice was several weeks late in forming on the sea. Hunters were anxious to get out on the land. Their families too missed the taste of country food. As the days wore on, the tension in the community, and in the school grew. At first I did not know why people were so edgy. Eventually I came to understand that the land for an Inuk represents a large part of his spiritual and emotional self. The act of going on the land to hunt or fish is not simply one of a need to eat. It is a much deeper need than anything physical. I have seen men and women be completely renewed after even a short camping trip. A feed of seal meat out on the ice with a companion may be all it takes to set a young man's mind right. My senior students in particular were affected in this way. Sometimes one of them would approach me quietly and ask permission to go hunting instead of attending class in the afternoon. I very rarely denied them the privilege (or should I say "right"?). How could I?

The absolute respect and deep caring for the animals on which Inuit depend for survival, was demonstrated to me one year, early in spring. A hunter discovered a large pod of beluga whales congregated at a small opening in the sea ice only a few hours from town. The news of the possibility of an easy and fruitful hunting opportunity so early in the season spread quickly throughout the town. Snowmobiles and qamouti were packed up and groups of optimistic hunters headed out into the Sound in search of the whales. For generations Inuit hunters have followed the whales from one open area of the sea to another so that they could hunt the animals for food. When they arrived, beluga whales by the tens were competing with each other for surface space in a small 8

by 10-foot opening on the frozen sea. Being marine mammals, these white whales require periodic visits to the surface of the water so that they can take in deep breaths of fresh air to replace depleted oxygen supplies before diving back down into the ocean's depths. As it turned out, there was in fact a handful of similarly sized breathing holes exposed in the same general area of the Sound. At each of these holes, five or six beluga at a time were taking turns surfacing for air before quickly submerging.

It was soon discovered that these whales were in trouble. Such a large number of whales at a relatively small number of holes is unusual. The hunters deduced that other breathing holes in the immediate area must have closed up suddenly with the movement of the ice, leaving hundreds of these animals dependent on just a few cracks in the frozen sea. The belugas were in danger of drowning. As each whale reached the surface, a heavy burst of air could be heard, accompanied by a fountain of millions of water droplets expelled through its blowhole. As the animal then began its return dive, the white dorsal surface of its body was visible for a moment. Deep gashes in the skin from the bulbous head, over the blowhole and down towards the tail were evidence of the jagged ice surface at the breathing holes. Marauding polar bears on the ice near the site also intimated a more gruesome story—many of the wounds inflicted on the whales were the result of bears clawing at them as they gasped for air. Several whales had severely torn blowholes, one in particular had an eye missing.

Over the span of two or three days, nearly everyone in town made the pilgrimage over the ice to witness the plight of the trapped beluga whales. Some canvas tents were erected on site by those who intended to stay longer than a day. Many students, young and old, missed school that week. Instead, the real life experience of witnessing this

incredible phenomenon became their educational lessons. Each day, those of us in town received updated news reports regarding the activities out on the Sound. Members of the Hunters and Trappers Organization and the Renewable Resource Officer carefully monitored the situation, and after countless hours of consulting with community hunters they decided that 15 whales, the most severely injured, could be shot and taken for food. A sudden and drastic decline in the beluga population now would greatly affect their hunting quotas in the seasons to come. The Inuit wanted to ensure that subsequent seasons would provide fruitful.

As each whale was shot, a harpoon was immediately lanced into the animal. The razor-sharp harpoon head cut deep into the tissues of the whale. Groups of Inuit pulled with all their might on the rope attached to the head of the harpoon. As grave a situation as it was, Inuit did not waste the opportunity to teach and learn from the event. Men, women, teenagers and young children were all encouraged to join in on the action. Everyone shared in the experience. As soon as each whale was hauled up and out of the water, and dragged onto shore, a group of three or four people would immediately go about butchering the meat. *Muktaq*, the skin and blubber of the whale, is a highly sought after country food of the Inuit. Everyone in town, myself included, received their share of muktaq that spring.

A decision had been made to drill as many holes in the ice as was necessary to provide the whales with additional breathing holes. The holes would be drilled, one after another, in a line leading towards the open water at the floe edge several kilometers away. Every gas-powered auger in town was gathered for the job. Instead of participating in spring camp that year, two of my senior students, Simeonie and

Joanasie, opted to help Akumalik and the other men drill the extra breathing holes for the whales. Markoosie too wanted to help but found that he could not —he was so greatly disturbed by the anguish of the whales that he returned to town. Eventually, after 10 days of community help, many of the whales made it to safety.

I am sure I will never truly understand completely what the land means to the Inuit psyche, but my own upbringing dictates I at least have a basic understanding of it. I too have an immeasurable connection to nature, a link to the environment, one that has developed in me since early childhood. Living with Inuit, I learned to appreciate in a deeper sense than ever before, the healing power of the land and of the therapeutic nature of an emotional and spiritual attachment to the earth.

Emotion

No one prepared me for the depth of emotion in teaching. Even now it still periodically surprises me. The fact that love enters into the everyday complexities of teaching is rarely mentioned in teacher education programs. Rather, educators are lead to understand that in order to teach well, emotionally distancing yourself from your students is what is expected. It is even considered professional. I ask, how is this truly possible?

Educators come from various perspectives, experiences, and academic areas, but they all care about teaching and learning. Wink (2000) concedes that in a safer world, that would be enough, however, in the social-cultural context of education of today, it is not enough. She adds that we must also care about ourselves, our colleagues, our students and our communities. I have mentioned that the teachers I most fondly

remember from my own schooling are the ones who had an impact on my emotional well being. I remember how they made me feel more so than what they were trying to teach me. Wink (2000) has it right when she declares that "love trumps methods!" Doesn't it make sense that students learn more when they know they are sincerely cared for, even loved, by their teachers?

Even as a principal I cannot count the number of times that I choked back a lump in my throat or was brought to the verge of tears as I listened and spoke with a student in my office. Throughout the course of a week I would invariably have to intervene in a behavioural problem of some sort that needed to be addressed. After slowly gathering as much information as I could, I would usually ask the young girl or boy in front of me, "Would your mother and father be proud of what you have done?" Not one student could ever answer this question. Soon after, tears would begin to well up their eyes. I would allow them time to think in silence. I would then remind them they were loved and supported by their family and that they would still be loved regardless of their behaviour, but that they were capable of much better things. Without exception I would tell students that the teachers, as well as myself, also loved them in our own way, and that we were proud of having them in our school. By this time I would be fighting the lump in my own throat. I would ask students to think about their actions before coming to school the next day and let them go. This method of "soft" discipline proved quite effective for me many times. I truly believe that students want to do well and want to fit in, but they need to feel loved most of all. Teachers and principals have to care enough to have faith that people will succeed and patience enough to support them when they stumble or are unsure (Tompkins, 1998).

The warmth of friendship that I encountered not only as a teacher but as a member of the community was also surprising. I can honestly say I felt a part of the community. I would never be Inuk and I would always be from away but I was accepted and welcomed. I was not expecting this. YoAnne too felt this same acceptance and sense of being welcomed. An important event occurred early in our stay in Ausuittuq. YoAnne's father, Marcel, passed away suddenly in December of that first year. She was not able to attend the funeral in Quebec, thousands of kilometres to the south. Without any hesitation, the church elders organized a memorial service for YoAnne's father. Hymns were sung and words were spoken, all in Inuktitut. I brought photographs of Marcel to the church and they were passed from one person to another in the congregation. The community allowed YoAnne to grieve, and they grieved with her. A month or so later, a new baby was born to one of my senior students. Laisa and her family honoured YoAnne's father by adding his name, Marcel, to the considerable long line of names bestowed upon the newborn. This is an Inuit custom that has gone on for generations—elders are remembered and honoured in this special way in all Inuit communities. We were both so overwhelmed with the depth of the community's understanding of our loss and with the sincerity of their emotional support that we were forever changed by the experience.

Throughout my narrative I have alluded to the need for a warm and caring school environment. I have also expressed my belief that schools should reflect community. Individuals and families love and support one another. It therefore follows that people in schools should love and support one another as well. I fully agree with Freire in that education is radically about love.

Pedagogy

I have learned many things about good pedagogy throughout my time in the Arctic. I believe in teaching the whole child, in offering a holistic education where academic needs are provided for as well as social, emotional, spiritual and physical needs. I believe that content is not nearly as important as the process of learning, and that education should be relevant to the student's everyday life experience. To me, schooling should always take place within the cultural context of each and every child. I believe that education should be hands-on and activity-based. I believe in theme-based teaching that incorporates a meaningful interdisciplinary approach. Theme-based programming can provide authentic, meaningful experiences that relate directly to students' lives (Bergstrom & O'Brien, 2001).

I believe in developing a respectful and caring school environment in which students can interact and teach other in formal and informal ways. I see peer tutoring as a valid, even essential, way to enhance student learning and social skills. Learning is social. I believe in cooperative learning and in the use of multiage groupings within the classroom. Again, this reflects real family and community life. Where possible, students should be encouraged to direct their own learning. Most importantly, every student should experience success as early and often as possible.

I must admit that I have difficulty with the concept of grade designations. I would like to see students move along their individual continuum of learning at their own pace, in their own time. Dewey said it best: "Accept the child where the child is." As teachers, we then take that child and help lead him forward. I see the division system used in public schools as artificial. In a sense, we use grade designations as labels for

students that force us to focus on the learning that is lacking instead of the successes achieved by the individuals. Why could high school students not simply count credits towards graduation, and forget about whether they are in grade 10, 11, or 12? And does it really matter how long it takes to attain that diploma? Why do we rush students through school? Every person is unique—so is their time frame for learning. Tompkins (1998) views family groupings, mixed ability groups of students, as a logical reflection of what occurs naturally in the community—older children play with and care for younger children. If programs are individualized for students, then it is not necessary to always place them in same ability groupings. Older and younger children can learn from each other in more realistic settings. Family groupings in school allow children of various ages and abilities to interact with each other and foster an understanding that everyone is good at something, everyone needs help sometime, and all people can teach something to someone else.

* * * * *

So, "am I ruined"? The short answer, thankfully, is "no". I do realize however that all of my teaching experiences from this moment onward will be measured against those that I gained in the North. Admittedly, it is a difficult act to follow. Nevertheless, being the optimist I am, I also believe there are many schools in many communities throughout the world where holistic educational settings, that are humanistic and student-centred, aim to meet the individual needs of students. There are many educators who celebrate the diversity of students' cultures and languages in their classrooms. There are many educators who genuinely care, in a deep sense, for their students and

schools. There are many educators who believe that learning should be joyful. And many teachers understand that it is okay to learn while we teach.

Cummins (1996) emphasizes that individual educators are never powerless, although they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive both for them and their students. Educators have options in their orientation to students' language and culture, in the forms of parent and community participation they encourage, and in the way they implement pedagogy and assessment. Cummins adds that when classroom interactions are fueled by collaborative relations of power, students gain access to ways of navigating difference that our domestic and international communities are sadly lacking at the present time.

For me, living in the cross-cultural environment of the Inuit in Nunavut, where land-based, traditional activities are greatly valued has only strengthened my convictions regarding culturally-relevant, holistic and experiential education. My relationships with Inuit, young and old, whom I have met along my journey, have allowed me to be much more critical of my actions as an educator in a pluralistic society. I am humbled and I thank all of them for this incredible gift.

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Appendix

Aqiatusuk School Goals for 1998 - 1999

*We want to ensure that a **caring and positive, supportive environment** exists within the school for each student by:*

- showing respect and understanding for Inuit culture, values, beliefs and language.
- developing a real sense of family within each classroom as well as among all classrooms of the school.
- encouraging all students to take risks and perform at their maximum potential as often as possible.
- providing a warm, friendly and welcoming atmosphere at the school for students, parents and all community members.

*We want to make sure that Aqiatusuk School is truly a **community school** where:*

- the parents and other community members are regularly involved in meeting the needs of our students.
- the students and staff are involved in the ongoing life and events of the community.
- partnerships between all community agencies develop to benefit all students and community members in their everyday lives.
- traditional knowledge in the community is constantly being interwoven with modern ideas and technology in and out of the classroom.
- parents and community members are gently encouraged to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills in all aspects of the operation of the school.

*We will strive to offer **relevant programs** to all students at all levels:*

- by providing themes, projects, curriculum and program that reflect Inuit culture and language where possible.
- by providing as many opportunities as possible for experiential, activity-based learning both in and outside the classroom.
- enabling them to make connections in the real world between what they learn in school and what they experience daily in their own lives.
- so that students will have the tools they need to succeed in the Nunavut of the future.