



**Honourable Nellie T. Kusugak
Commissioner of Nunavut**

Speaking Notes

Pilimmaksarniq

**Kivalliq Regional Professional Development
Conference**

8:00 p.m.

Monday February 13, 2017

Maani Ilinniarvik, Rankin Inlet

Pilimmaksarniq: Development of skills through practice, effort and action

Tunngasugitsi, welcome

Your theme: Pilimmaksarniq

I want to thank the Conference Steering Committee for inviting me to do the opening address this evening. It is humbling and a real honour to start this conference which looks like it is going to be fun and interesting.

I know our government is committed to building an education system that helps all students to be successful in school. So, what is our part as educators? Formal education is now the pilimmaksaiji, the one who now passes on this knowledge, beliefs and values. What a great responsibility. Do we have separate Inuktitut words for philosophy and holistic? Or is it a given that in Inuit society, they are in pilimmaksainiq?

Individual Inuktitut names are very important in the classroom. Not an English name, made to sound like Inuktitut. The late Simon Alaittuq Ford insisted Inuktitut names were used. It gave a child an identity, belonging and kinship to classmates, teacher and school.

Inuktitut is a living language. It is all around you. Land trips, fishing, berry picking and seasonal activities are a great way to keep your connection to your environment.

Uliut is doing Inuktitut Guided Reading, tomorrow. This is a great opportunity to raise your concerns and bring forward your ideas and best practices.

I remember, the late Simon Alaittuq Ford, had an elder's feast in the elementary school every month, which the whole school prepared for. A lot of you remember it fondly, I am sure. It was a lot of work but elders had a sense of belonging in that school. That is community involvement.

Elders have always said that we are all learners and teachers. Families won't get involved unless they know that they are welcome. Take advantage of the staff who know the community to come up with ideas on how to involve families. It might take a while but once they know you're sincere they will be more than happy to engage with the schools. This shows that your school sees the culture of the community as an important part of learning. Use all the resources your community has to offer and learn alongside your students.

For everyone here today I encourage you as much as possible to work together to include Inuit culture, heritage, language and knowledge in your daily teachings and interactions with students. This will help our young people, the students of today, grow up with a strong sense of identity, pride and confidence in themselves, in their culture and in their skills. It is so important for you as educators to remember as you work through this week and throughout your careers that your teachings will influence the future of a very young territory. So let us work together with the communities, families and students to secure a strong future for people of Nunavut.

My experiences as a classroom assistant and teacher are very good memories because of all the team work which was insisted by our principals. When school started we visited the homes of our students to introduce ourselves. This was a very intimate visit

for us and it gave a sense of who each student was. It was a bird's eye view of the home. I once taught an all-boys class whom weren't "fit" to be in a regular classroom. That was one of the best learning experiences I had.

Other teachers asked me, "How do you do it?" I just said, "I care." Commitment and loving the students and doing things for them were experiences that would live with them for years to come.

I had another wonderful experience I would like to share - as an Inuktitut teacher in the high school I was given the choice of how I wanted to teach and the principal worked the schedule around my classes. He came to my class often to observe to make sure that I had all I needed and was happy. I have been very fortunate to have worked with principals who cared.

Some of you may remember this, the first report card was sent with the students and the second one was delivered personally and discussed with the student and parents. Communication and relationships with families of the students are all important elements of teaching and learning.

Getting to know families and where the student is coming from is crucial, I think. Respect needs to be both ways and gaining the trust from the person who is responsible for their child's learning is essential. Students need to know that their teachers care about who they are. I think it is very important for teachers to know their students and families. The title of a book, *The First Day of School*, states that the very first impression a student gets of a teacher, sets the tone for the year. I think having expectations and confidence in the students must be expressed at the beginning of the year.

There is much talk about residential school and the impacts it has had on Inuit. Many Inuit families had no choice about sending their children away. The trauma of being taken away from your family and home, broke the bond that a child would have with the mother and caused the loss of one's childhood. The TB epidemic had the same impact as residential school.

Inuit believe that the amautik is absolutely essential to baby. It builds a bond that is unlike any other. In the amautik the child gets the security, warmth, love and the closeness to their mother or caregiver. Residential school trauma is intergenerational and leads to many dysfunctional homes. We see the effects of it with addictions and how a child grows up. It is important to understand what residential school has done to some families. We all know about children coming to school hungry and we try to meet that need first so they can learn. Schools need to be a place of learning. The goal is to build a strong society by focusing on the future and continual improvement.

I have experienced learning English and residential school. We "learned" about someone else's culture, which made us question, "Are we doing it all wrong?" Can you imagine the impact this had on me as I started to struggle with who am I supposed to be? I was lucky that I didn't leave until I was 14 to go to school in Churchill and Yellowknife. I didn't mind so much the education. Missing home was the hard part. I have many friends and have experienced living with all kinds of people, from all walks of life. You learn so much from others and become more tolerant.

David Serkoak is going to do a presentation on history. It is so very important for you to know where you came from and who you are and for others to understand that too. I always say if it weren't

for my ancestors, I would not be here. That is why it is so important to know your culture and language and have the right people teaching. It must begin at home but as you are all aware, this is not the reality anymore in some cases. If we don't take this seriously, Inuktitut might become an endangered language.

I am excited to see that there is a session on *safe talk*. I think it is also very important to have some grief counselling. Shortly after my husband died, two of my grandchildren were in a program after school for grieving children. This was at Simon Alaittuq School. I commend you for helping my hurting grandchildren. It helped to deal with it in a way that was safe. It helped to draw it out and allowed them to talk about it. There are many children who would benefit from a program like this. Thank you very much for that. It has been 6 years and they are open to talk about their grandfather without feeling they have no voice.

Coming together to discuss and evaluate teaching methods allows you to recognize shared challenges and pass on best practices. The wide range of topics you are discussing is very diverse. I am sure you will take full advantage of all the knowledge the seminars at your conference will provide to broaden your perspective and further develop your teaching and learning skills.

Enjoy the conference. Your commitment to the teaching profession is appreciated by your students, their families, your communities and all the people of Nunavut. I commend those who left family and loved ones to be in Nunavut to teach our children. Take the time to enjoy the people and the community, get an Inuktitut name and earn a place with a family and the title

“inumiaq” you’re one of us, which is a great compliment in our society, if not the greatest.

I would like to commend all the educators here today. It is important that our young people see themselves in you. As professionals, you students will look up to you and see you as role models. Take this responsibility seriously. You never know, you may be molding and developing the future Premier of Nunavut or a future teacher. Your lessons, actions, attitudes and level of care will have a lasting impression on all of your students. Make sure to leave a legacy both you and your students are proud of. Remember, you can give your students a passion for learning by lighting a spark in their hearts and their minds. Remember a favorite teacher who put a spark in you!

Qujannamiik, thank you so much, and work together.

Matna enjoy your meeting and help one another.