



Speaking Notes

North and Central Qikiqtani Regional Teachers Conference

Qanirraqtit: Shared Leadership Moving Forward

Friday February 16, 2018

Iqaluit, Nunavut

Honourable Nellie T. Kusugak

Commissioner of Nunavut

Ullaakkut;

My name is Nellie Taptaqut Kusugak, named after my paternal grandmother. When the movie *Atanaarjuat* came out, found out from my irngutaapik that this was also my name.

Thank you for inviting me to join you today. It is an honor to share with you what I have learned as an educator and as your Commissioner, a representative of Nunavummiut.

Coming together is a valuable experience. Sharing your insights into education will encourage you to be the best you can be in a profession that has a significant impact on our young people – teaching. I am sure that you took advantage of all the knowledge the seminars at your conference provided to broaden your perspective and further develop your teaching and learning skills.

Working together we can help shape education policies and practices to improve education outcomes, support and strengthen Inuit culture, heritage and language and fully prepare students to make valuable contributions to our society.

The theme of your conference, *Qanirraqtit: Shared Leadership Moving Forward*, reflects your awareness that mutual respect and shared responsibility are the best tools to reach our goal of creating a strong and vibrant education system that fully supports student success.

When we used dog teams, the ropes connecting the sled to the dogs were called qiturngat and the Arviat people referred to them as such. When families had children, they would refer to them this way, they still refer to

and use the word. There is a vital connection between children and parents and families that cannot be severed if families are to function well. We are always connected to ancestors in the past for future generations of our children.

That influence or impact lasts forever from generation to generation. Who you are and where you come from is very important. We all need to know family stories because it is important to have that connectedness even though some refuse to share stories because they are too painful, or they are ashamed or they don't think the stories are relevant.

Changes in our education system may be needed to create an education environment that recognizes and supports Inuit identity.

The support of everyone concerned about education is so important. Cooperation and collaboration will bring about the improvements we want.

Team work and determination will take us forward

We will need leaders who are able to keep us focused on our goals, working together guided by the same vision.

The team needs to know that the leader has the courage, strength, confidence, inspiration, focus and awareness to achieve the goals that have been set.

A leader with strong leadership skills will keep the team motivated and committed to success.

Our education system needs Inuit leadership. We need to give Inuit educators the support they need to be leaders. If you are going to lead,

lead and get a top notch leadership team. Leaders make the impossible-possible. SO WHAT? NOW WHAT? What are we going to do about it?

We need to help them connect to their cultural identity so they can bring Inuit knowledge and practices into the education system.

I have read comments by Inuit educators saying that teachers should be progressive, prepared to rebuild society and have a strong conviction in what they want to achieve as educators. You are very fortunate if you have a principal who cares.

Colonization had a huge impact on Inuit. We lost our leaders. Our parents believed that the formal education forced on them had the right leaders to raise our children, not knowing that their children were losing our values and beliefs.

So, what is the best way to move forward?

Our youth have told us how important it is for them to know who they are as Inuit.

Puujjuut Kusugak, the new Deputy Minister of Education has commented on high school education for Inuit saying that:

“When there is no identity for Inuit youth, it really puts them in a difficult position and a lot of their time is occupied by trying to find out who they really are. If Inuktitut was there, if the Inuit history was there, I think the struggles might be a lot less because they don’t have to fight for who they think they are. They already know so they are already confident enough to move on with coping with issues they might have and focusing on the future that they want to have.”

Our education system can provide a strong foundation for our young people by incorporating Inuit values and practices into our teaching theory.

We can put human relationships at the core of the school mission – teachers building relationships with their students, schools building relationships with parents and the community. Kids don't learn from people they don't like, for example my personal experience wanting to learn to braid 4.

The guiding principle, *tunnganarniq*, is a powerful tool. It comes from the root, *tunnga*, meaning to be fully grounded.

Tunnganarniq – fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive – provides us with a framework for all our actions in the school environment. Monthly lunches for elders, where the whole school works together to celebrate them.

Tunnganarniq can help us build a sense of community in our schools that attracts and maintains the interests of our students and inspires them to stay in school.

Teachers who are determined, committed and caring bring *tunnganarniq* to their classrooms.

As Inuit educational leader Nunia Qanatsiaq Anoe said, “*Tunnganarniq has the power to motivate students to become independent learners, to learn more and be willing to help each other...it lifts up their self-esteem and makes the students feel appreciated.*”

For Inuit the goal is to become as capable as possible in every area of life.

How can we build an education system that supports that goal? Team work.

You, as teachers are professionals who have significant knowledge about teaching and learning theory and practice.

If you pair your knowledge with empathy for your students, their circumstances and needs, your empathy will give you the wisdom needed to inspire each of your students, giving them hope, courage and strength to push past barriers and achieve learning success.

A lot can be achieved by listening to your students.

Listening to your students will connect you to them – they will trust you.

Your words are powerful – they can bring life and encouragement. Shortly after my husband died, two of my grandchildren were in a program for grieving children. It helped my grandchildren to deal with their loss in a safe way. It has been 7 years and they are open to talk about their grandfather without feeling they have no voice.

Celebrating success together with your students is a great way to bring students and the whole school together. Students will see that team work leads to success and they are important members of the team.

When students achieve learning success encourage them to share their learning methods with their fellow students. Peer support can play an important part in building a strong, successful and inclusive team.

Students want to know what it takes to be successful in school. You can explain to them the work they will need to do to be successful and you can

reassure them that you are there to support them as they move forward in their learning path.

I believe that home visits are an excellent way to connect with parents and learn about your students and their family life. I encourage schools to set aside several days early in the school year for home visits and let the whole community know that teachers will be visiting the homes of their students. This is a very inclusive way to introduce yourselves to parents.

You can let them know in person what their child's learning path is and tell them how important parents are to helping the education team support student success.

You may have success with informal meetings that bring all parents together to learn about the learning objectives for the students you teach. These meetings can help build a learning community and it will give you the opportunity to give parents more information on different study topics so they can be more engaged in their child's learning.

It is important to work together with other teachers to bridge the language barrier – parents will appreciate the efforts you make to communicate with them.

Elder Louis Angalik said he would like to see the school as a place where inuusiq is taught, like a family with interactions and relationships.

In the Government of Canada apology to residential school survivors, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, "*it has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors who have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered in residential schools - IT IS A TESTAMENT TO*

THEIR RESILIENCE AS INDIVIDUALS AND TO THE STRENGTH OF THEIR CULTURES.”

In residential school they wanted us to lose our identity but Inuit are resilient and full of tenacity, which is why I am here today. Imagine if my ancestors just gave up? I sure wouldn't be here. I experienced residential school when I was 14. We were made to question are Inuit doing it all wrong? Can you imagine the impact this had on me as I started to struggle with who I was supposed to be? Let us take back tenacity and if we need a paradigm shift in education, let us welcome that. You are so very capable of making the best education system there is. We must do that for our children because they are going to lead us into the future.

We don't have time for criticizing anymore. We need to support and encourage each other to go forward, working together.

I would like to commend all the educators here today. Your commitment to the teaching profession is appreciated by your students, their families, your communities and Nunavummiut. I also want to thank those who left family and loved ones to be in Nunavut to teach our children.

For the Inuktitut teachers in the room I thank you for your dedication to preserving, promoting and educating our young people in our Inuktitut language. Your role as Inuktitut teachers in the education system is crucial and so very important. The future of our language is dependent on the work carried out today. Our territory relies heavily on you and your dedication to our language and culture. Never lose hope, continue to work hard to provide strong education in Inuktitut for our young people - it is so needed and will affect generations to come.

As professionals your students will look up to you and see you as role models. 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. 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. This relationship can light a spark that gives them a life-long passion for learning.

It will be a legacy both you and your students can be proud of.

In closing:

Let's build strong leadership and provide the guidance needed to make the education system our own. And let us work together with the communities, families and students to secure a strong future for people of Nunavut.

We want our students to build a good life for themselves.

To do this we must believe in *inunnguiniq* – making an able human being. Our parents have that role but so much of it falls on our teachers who spend so much time with our children.

And if we need help with this our Elders are there to guide us. Use all the resources your community has to offer and learn alongside your students.

Encourage your student to share with you what is in their hearts and their minds.

As Nelson Tagoona said: You gotta shine with your culture.

I would like to commend all the educators here today. You are the qanirraqtit, for our students, you can give our students a passion for learning, and always remember your favourite teacher who gave you a spark! Like Nunia Qanaatsiaq Anoe, Liz Rose gave her a passion and spark, Nunia is a passionate educator, thanks to Liz.

We can build an education system that meets all our needs guided by, *Qanirraqtit: Shared Leadership Moving Forward. Leaders working with other leaders,*

Qujannamiimarialuk.