

# PRACTICES AGAINST CULTURE THAT “WORK” IN NUNAVUT SCHOOLS: PROBLEMATIZING TWO COMMON PRACTICES

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**ABSTRACT.** Practices exist in Nunavut schools that were reported by *Qallunaat* (non-Inuit) teachers in Berger’s (2001) study to “work,” but that seem to be against historical Inuit culture. In this paper we discuss dangers in using such practices in schools that already erode Inuit culture, and also reasons to consider their use, then investigate strict discipline codes, and the use of praise and rewards. We recommend true Inuit control for good decisions about whether to adopt these practices.

UTILISATION DE PRATIQUES QUI « FONCTIONNENT »,  
MAIS QUI VONT À L’ENCONTRE DE LA CULTURE DANS LES ÉCOLES DU NUNAVUT :  
DEUX PRATIQUES COURANTES QUI POSENT PROBLÈME

**RÉSUMÉ.** Les écoles de Nunavut font lieu aux pratiques qui, selon les professeurs *Qallunaat* (non-Inuits) cités dans une étude réalisée par Berger en 2001, semblent fonctionner, mais iraient à l’encontre de la culture traditionnelle inuit. Dans cet article, les auteurs discutent des dangers de se livrer à de telles pratiques dans des écoles qui amoindrissent déjà la culture inuit, ainsi que les raisons qui nous poussent à envisager leur utilisation. Ils étudient également les codes disciplinaires stricts et l’utilisation de louanges et de récompenses. Ils recommandent l’instauration d’une véritable autorité inuit pour favoriser la prise de décisions éclairées au sujet de l’adoption de telles pratiques.

## INTRODUCTION

Student self-esteem and school performance suffer when schools do not reflect and value the culture of the students (Cummins, 1986). Inuit “experience persistent, disproportionate academic failure” (Wright, Taylor & Ruggiero, 1996, p. 734) in the EuroCanadian school system, a system based on western, not Inuit, culture. Even though most students and many teachers in the schools we studied are Inuit, we call them *Qallunaat*<sup>1</sup> schools, since they are patterned after and retain most characteristics of southern schools. They graduate few Inuit students, and continue assimilation to EuroCanadian norms with dire consequences for Inuit society (Nunavut Social Development Council [NSDC], 2000). Berger (2001) found adaptations to *Qallunaat* schools in Nunavut which fit them to their predominantly Inuit students,

but also many practices that did not move the schools toward historical Inuit culture. Some of these, like many ESL strategies, might be culturally neutral, but practices like praising individual achievement were reported by *Qallunaat* teachers and seem to be against Inuit culture, since historically Inuit did not often directly praise children for their accomplishments (Okakok, 1989). These “practices against culture” may be colonialist, creating what Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1994) called a “pressure for assimilation” (p. 44), pulling Inuit toward the underlying values and norms of EuroCanadian culture. They are currently found in Nunavut schools and are potentially dangerous, but there may be reasons not to discard them out of hand.

We begin by problematizing the use of “effective” teaching practices in Inuit classrooms when those practices do not honour Inuit culture. We believe that there should be meaningful consultation with communities, and true Inuit control of Inuit education. In the absence of that process, or until it is completed,<sup>2</sup> we argue for caution when considering practices that are not culturally compatible, as confusion and loss of culture may be the price of student achievement in western-based schools (Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1994; Ogbu, 1992). We then investigate two practices against culture reported to “work” by *Qallunaat* educators in Berger’s (2001) study on adaptations of EuroCanadian schools to Inuit culture, looking for cultural fit or cultural clash, and present more culturally congruent alternatives. We argue that the existence of practices against culture implicates the continuing existence of *Qallunaat* schools in Nunavut as part of the problem to be solved.

By “practices against culture,” we mean teaching methods or ways of doing things that seem incongruent with historical or contemporary Inuit culture, as we understand it from the literature by both *Qallunaat* and Inuit authors. We are aware that culture is not static, that not all Inuit share the same beliefs and practices, and that cultures change over time (Crago, Annahatak, & Ningiurvik, 1993). An extremely complex cultural shift is underway (Henze & Vanett, 1993), and, although Inuit still hold values distinct from Euro-Canadian values (Inuit Qaujimatjuqanginnut [IQ] Task Force, 2002), Inuit culture has been under a massive assault by EuroCanadians for many years. This has sometimes led to alienation and confusion, a divide between elders and youth (Minor, 1992; Reimer, 1996), and changes in some Inuit values (Stairs, 1992); in deciding whether a practice is compatible with “Inuit culture,” a relevant question is, which culture (Henze & Vanett, 1993)? We speculate on this in the analysis of specific practices.

#### REASONS TO ESCHEW ALL PRACTICES AGAINST CULTURE

EuroCanadian schools arrived in the Canadian Eastern Arctic less than a hundred years ago, replacing Inuit ways of educating with a southern system (Van Meenen, 1994). The two ways of learning were not compatible: “for-

mal education is not only alien to Inuit culture but, as initially transposed from the south, is in direct conflict with indigenous modes of transmitting knowledge across generations” (Stairs, 1988, p. 315). For instance, “formerly, Inuit learned by watching and imitating their elders.... Inuit values, beliefs and teaching methods were a way of living, interconnected with each other” (NSDC, pp. 76, 78), and education and socialization took place “in the immediate practice of everyday Inuit life” (Nungak, 2004, p. 15). The artificial environment of *Qallunaat* schools is vastly different.

EuroCanadian schooling purposely assimilated northern indigenous peoples into the mainstream (Brody, 1991; Chisholm, 1994; Lipka & Stairs, 1994), and assimilation continues today (Goulet, 2001; Hookimaw-Witt, 1998). As La France (1994), an indigenous woman, wrote, for indigenous peoples “it is extremely difficult to be educated in a western way and, culturally, remain who we are” (p. 20). Seen from an historical viewpoint, and with concern for the vitality of Inuit culture, all practices against culture not specifically endorsed by Inuit, together with the very institution of *Qallunaat*-based schooling, should be abandoned in Nunavut to protect against further assimilation.

Even practices against culture that increase student achievement are suspect, since greater “success” may mean greater loss of culture (Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1994; Darnell & Hoem, 1996; Young & McDermott, 1988). While no one would desire schools that promote failure, the costs of success are high. Western contact with, and colonization of, the Inuit has led to social problems so serious that “if they were replicated elsewhere in Canada, there would be a public outcry of national proportions, serious enough to topple a government” (NSDC, p. 83). *Qallunaat* schools share responsibility for assimilation and the “Great Cultural Earthquake” (Nungak, 2004, p.14) behind many of Nunavut’s social problems (Brody, 1991; Crago, 1992). In the words of the NSDC (2000), “the education system is culturally flawed and only by incorporating the values of Inuit and using the Inuit language can it come to terms with Inuit society and help Inuit youth adapt to the modern world” (p. 82). Ryan (1992) wrote that western schooling decultures Aboriginal people by asserting the “supposed superiority of Western ideals” (p. 98). If success in *Qallunaat* schools means the devaluing of one’s own culture, being assimilated to possessive western individualism instead of socialized as Inuit for group cohesiveness (Rasmussen, 2002), learning western egocentricity instead of Inuit ecocentricity (Stairs, 1992), and coming to value hierarchy instead of equality (Ryan, 1992), the value of that “success” must be questioned, along with all practices which lead to it.

Even when they are effective at increasing student achievement, practices against culture may result in confusion and alienation. Henze and Vanett (1993) noted that conflicting values can cause “tremendous internal conflict ... when an individual tries to live according to two value systems that

in some ways contradict each other” (p. 124). Kawagely (1995) wrote that for Yupiaq<sup>3</sup> in Alaska, “schooling leads to disillusionment and alienation from the Native ways while instilling values and aspirations from another world that is out of reach” (p. 99), and the NSDC (2000) wrote that schooling in Nunavut leaves young people “aimlessly stranded between the English and Inuit cultures” (p. 82). It will be more difficult for Inuit youth to develop a strong Inuit identity when they attend schools where the main medium of instruction is English, curriculum is mostly southern, and *Qallunaat* teachers use methods which do not honour their culture. *Qallunaat* schools and culturally incongruent practices will never teach “the child the most important thing. Who he is: an Inuk” (Yupiktak Bista, cited in Darnell & Hoem, 1996, 254). Given all of these concerns, is there any justification for considering adopting, or continuing the use of, practices against culture?

#### REASONS TO CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER PRACTICES AGAINST CULTURE

While we believe that meaningful community consultation should be pursued regarding all aspects of education, and that Inuit should have authentic control of Inuit education (Berger, Epp & Moeller, in press), we believe that thoughtful action at the school and classroom level should not wait for this to occur. Educators, despite being embedded in sociohistorical realities not of their making, can employ practices that increase the achievement and well-being of their students (Goulet, 2001, Henze & Vanett, 1993; Tompkins, 1998). Some of these practices may be culturally neutral, while many will be supportive of Inuit culture. The literature on bicultural education suggests moving towards content and pedagogy which honours the local culture (e.g., Crago, 1992; Erikson, 1993; Leavitt, 1991; Lipka, 1991; Stairs, 1991). There is, however, indication that some Inuit might prefer the schools to remain “southern” institutions (Berger, 2001; Stairs, 1994). This may be a result of, in Nicholas’ (1996) words, a desire to possess the “culture of the oppressors, and to seek assimilation into that culture as a kind of relief from their oppression” (p. 62), or a result of having already been assimilated to the extent that some of the EuroCanadian society’s values have become contemporary Inuit values (Crago, Annahatak & Ningiuruvik, 1993). It may also represent a desire to avoid confusion between Inuit and *Qallunaat* values, a belief that traditional skills may be trivialized or perverted by formal education, or a fear that Inuit children will not otherwise succeed in the modern world (Stairs, 1991, 1994). As school success is needed for most high status employment in Nunavut, it is understandable that parents want their children to succeed there. “Effective” practices that seem incongruent with Inuit culture should therefore be considered by teachers and administrators, although they should be approached with caution. As Inuit assume full control of schooling in Nunavut, they will also need to consider which, if any, *Qallunaat* practices to keep.

While attempts to assimilate the Inuit must be guarded against, when consulted, one community in Alaska chose to retain western practices, like putting pressure on students to attend school (Barnhardt, 1999), and there have been repeated mandates from the Inuit Circumpolar Conference [ICC] “that our educational systems are to prepare our children for life based on values and skills from the Inuit culture and the western culture” (ICC, 1983, cited in Stairs, 1991, p. 290; ICC, 1992). Some culturally incompatible practices might be needed to do this, although *Qallunaat* schools are unlikely to be able to educate Inuit for competence in Inuit culture (Henze & Vanett, 1993); ideally, schooling in Nunavut would be reinvented by Inuit. This might result in the teaching of western skills “on the basis of the Native perspective” (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998, p. 162), or a “two-way” schooling model such as Harris (1990) proposed in Australia, with distinct Inuit and western domains, each under local Inuit control, and each promoting values associated with their respective cultures. A “two-way” approach matches the suggestion of a northern Quebec Inuk (cited in Stairs, 1994) who wanted schools to remain southern but thought that the school day should be reduced in length to allow time for other learning. Inuit culture is thought to be resilient (Dorais, 2005; Stairs, 1992; Wenzel, 2001), and can accommodate western practices to some degree, but the choice of which to embrace should be for Inuit to make (Young & McDermott, 1988).

One obstacle to schools based wholly on “Inuit” practices is the possibility that some specialized technical knowledge might not easily be learned through traditional indigenous approaches (Darnell & Hoem, 1996), and schools may be poor places to continue historical activities like storytelling, as the context is wrong and elders may therefore consider it boring (Larose, cited in Rasmussen, 2002). This might not be the case, of course, if schools were radically reinvented.

Despite recent consultative processes (see endnote 2), and a focus on the incompatibility of western systems with Inuit ways (IQ Task Force, 2002; NSDC, 2000), there are significant impediments to radical school change in Nunavut. Ryan (1989) discussed one barrier to change in the context of the Innu (a First Nation in Labrador). He was not optimistic about the possibilities for changing schooling, even under true Innu control: “The Innu, by virtue of their no longer being able to live life on traditional terms, have been forced to deal with Canadian society within the framework of relations set down by the latter” (p. 398). This is also true for Inuit. Without radical steps to reinvent education from an Inuit perspective, including the renunciation of western norms for measurement (Stairs & Bernhard, 2002), it may be impossible to create schools free from systemic constraints, and even this would not free them from constraints imposed by the larger society. In a manifestation of this phenomenon, Crago (1992) reported that the Inuit directors of the Kativik school board in northern Quebec wanted

high school programs to remain structured along western lines in order to prepare students for success in higher education.

We are leery of claims that “it is possible to provide culturally appropriate education for native Indian and Inuit children within the framework of the European model of schooling” (Leavitt, 1991, p. 266), something Leavitt saw achieving through the adoption of culturally congruent pedagogy. Unfortunately, there is not currently an “Inuit” school model that might replace the elementary and secondary schools in Nunavut. The Government of Nunavut and Department of Education seem to favour incremental change and adaptation<sup>4</sup> and have made changes which may actually weaken Inuktitut as a language of instruction (Dorais & Sammons, 2002), despite strong arguments regarding its importance (IQ Task Force, 2002; NSDC, 2000). Thus, it appears that Nunavut students may be destined to live with something like the current system for the foreseeable future. Eschewing efforts to improve the effectiveness of the schools in their present forms would not serve Inuit who support them, or students whose future economic prospects depend, to some extent, on school achievement. Although we believe that community consultation and true Inuit control of education is imperative, until it is realized, exploring ways of increasing student achievement is logical. Still, considering the potential costs is essential.

Educators who use or adopt methods which do not honour traditional Inuit culture should be aware of endangering that culture, but may be able to mitigate the disruption. In an Australian context, Harris (1990) advocated teaching western values (through practices like mandatory attendance) explicitly, as necessary for success in western society, but not as superior to Inuit values (such as the autonomy to prioritize one’s own time). He thought that this would help to preserve students’ integrity. Similarly, in minority settings, Ogbu (1992) recommended helping students see that they could accept school culture while at school without it eroding their own identities.

In the best circumstance, Inuit community teams would be considering all practices to determine their fit with the overarching aims of education as defined by Inuit. In some instances, they might deem *Qallunaat* practices appropriate, as did Mohawk educators in a Mohawk school, who taught the traditional Thanksgiving Address through drilling. They told Stairs (1994) that the Address was so important that drills were appropriate to ensure that it was learned. In no circumstance should practices against culture be considered unreflectively, and adopted simply because they seem to “work.”

## METHODOLOGY

Berger’s (2001) study included predominantly *Qallunaat* educators in five communities in the Kivalliq region of Nunavut.<sup>5</sup> They took part in open-ended interviews (n=20) or casual conversations (n=8) on the topic of

adaptations to typical *Qallunaat* school procedures, meant to increase the success or well-being of Inuit students. The small number (n=2) of Inuit participants in the study is thought to reflect the research design, rather than a lack of interest on the part of Inuit educators. The first author, Paul, spent only a few days in each community. This did not leave time for trust to build, a key consideration when hoping to include Indigenous peoples in research (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Because few Inuit voices were heard, and because both researchers are *Qallunaat*, the findings and analysis should be viewed only as points of departure for conversation and consideration. We recommend dialogue and caution, but do not prescribe or proscribe specific practices.

For the purposes of this paper, two practices reported by participants as successful, but which seem incongruent with historical Inuit culture, have been highlighted from Berger’s (2001) study. This type of practice was not, in fact, the aim of the study, but was reported nonetheless. In each case, variations of the practice were described by several participants, and said to be valuable. Due to reporting by multiple participants, and from Paul’s experience teaching and observing in several Nunavut communities, we have confidence that these practices are being used in Nunavut schools. We have, however, no rigorous way to confirm what criteria participants used in judging them successful, or what, if any, broader factors were considered. We draw attention to the sorts of considerations that may be relevant when choosing to adopt or avoid such practices.

Paul taught grade 7 for two years in a community in the Qikiqtaaluk<sup>6</sup> region of Nunavut, and supply taught in two other communities. His initial motivation for the study was the desire to contribute to school improvement in Nuanvut. Both Paul and Juanita are EuroCanadians who are interested in issues of social justice, the problem of systemic violence, and indigenous education.

## PRACTICES

We now describe and discuss two practices reported in Berger’s (2001) study, situating them with respect to the literature on Inuit schooling and Inuit culture. They are: adopting rigid southern-style discipline strategies, and the use of praise and rewards. (All quotes in italics are voices of *Qallunaat* participants in Berger’s study.)

### *Adopting rigid southern-style discipline strategies*

Several educators in Berger’s (2001) study mentioned “zero-tolerance” or other rigid discipline strategies. In one community a participant said that the local District Education Authority<sup>7</sup> (DEA) had enacted the code, and in another that it had been created in collaboration with the community,

although exactly how was not stated. The logic behind strict codes was described by yet another participant:

*While there might be some cultural considerations to discipline, I largely think that kids are kids and school is a foreign institution anyway, and we're talking about an institution that brings a large number of ... children together for the duration of the school day. And so all of the things that would normally govern traditional Inuit culture and discipline are already disregarded by having this foreign institution of the school, and bringing large numbers of people together to function all day. So I think we ... get into a lot of enabling, we enable a lot of poor behaviour when we try to find cultural outs for basic questions of common decency and good conduct.... If kids fought or swore at each other or at teachers they were removed from the school for a period of time. It was a very hard line, but I think that kids are quick studies, and they will adhere to whatever line you draw. If you want to have learning going on in an institution you need to have order. If you have swearing and fighting and disrespect and kids running around – it's not to say that kids can't have fun at school, I think they should have a great time - but they should have a great time feeling safe and secure and knowing that they're not going to get, you know, biffed in the back of the head or their books knocked out of their hands.... Any of those kinds of aggressive behaviours, I think they should be dealt with just like they'd be dealt with in any other school in Canada, and that is, totally unacceptable. Whatever consequences a principal wants to put in place, whatever works ... there needs to be consequences for bad behaviour.*

The participant stated that tough discipline from the school is not always popular in Inuit communities:

*Dealing with discipline in a very firm way carries with it some potentially very large costs. You have to face the parents; you have to face the community; you have to face the DEA, all sorts of negative or potentially negative responses, and so the cycle goes like this: The teacher tries to employ codes of conduct and common decency, runs up against one or two of these incidents, is so shattered and shaken by them, that they erode their own standards. You do that over a period of a year or two and suddenly you're comfortable with a class that's completely crazy.*

Aside from the possibility that some Inuit may resist the exercise of power over Inuit youth by a *Qallunaat* institution and *Qallunaat* staff, and the possibility that suspending students may be seen as ineffective, some cultural considerations may help to explain resistance to firm discipline and particularly to suspensions. Student suspension may be unpopular because it bypasses many steps in traditional strategies of maintaining harmony, ending with the second worst, ostracization. Historically, unwanted behaviour was dealt with in a number of indirect ways, including ignoring the behaviour, ridiculing the person or gossiping about him or her, shaming, and only in extreme cases, ostracizing the person (Boult, n.d.; Briggs, 1998; Stairs, 1992). One reported zero-tolerance policy required suspension for teasing; this confused traditional modes of discipline to a great degree, as teasing was historically used for socialization (Briggs, 1998; Maguire & McAlpine, 1996), a clear



reminder that behaviours warranting suspension are socially constructed, and may, in other contexts, be praised or ignored (Partington, 2001).

There are, however, indications in the literature that in certain situations some Inuit would support a firm stance on matters of discipline. Minor (1992) wrote that after early care, children got “strict and consistent education in matters of survival” (Minor, 1992, p. 52), and Atagutsiak, an Inuit elder, suggested that children misbehave in school in part because physical punishment is not used (cited in Ootoova et al., 2001).

It is startling to compare the recommendation for a rigid discipline policy with advice from a grade six *Qallunaat* teacher, reported in *Guidelines for teaching in a bilingual setting*:

Throughout the school year, I see regular incidents of children having major tantrums.... Now I usually intervene much later to give children time to deal with their anger. For example, a child is upset about something that I don't even remember, he starts shouting and saying very negative things. I ignore him and go on with the activity with the rest of the class. Since I have ignored him, he decides to go to the back of the room, run the whole length of the classroom and kick the plastic waste basket against the wall at the front of the room. I still ignore him. He does this two more times, and then goes back to proceed with the activity that everyone else is doing. At the end of this class, he brings his work to me. He's made a point of doing the best work he has ever done. The message I get from this boy is, 'Let me work out my anger.' (Nunavut Department of Education, 2001, pp. 5, 6)

A production of the Department of Education's Early Childhood and School Services, it is unclear whether this description reflects the views of Inuit. It seems to honour the Inuit belief that discipline was expected to be internal, and that scolding children was thought to be counterproductive (Maguire & McAlpine, 1996), but this means of handling an individual's anger is at variance with historical practices. The expression of anger was frowned upon, and children expressing anger were laughed at as a means of showing disapproval (Briggs, 1970). In considering anger it is important to realize that emotions are socially constructed – that the social meanings and values placed on emotions differ across cultures (Briggs, 2000), making culturally inappropriate responses much more likely.

Another Inuit cultural value supporting the non-interference of the teacher is the valuing of independence, and as a consequence, Inuit reticence to interfere with others' choices. It is still common to see young children running and playing during events like the school Christmas concert, and unusual to see any attempt made by adults to stop them, even when their boisterous play makes it hard to hear the performers. Historically, direct requests, even of children, were thought to be rude, and no explanation was expected to justify a person's behaviour (Boult, n.d.; Brody, 2000; Maguire &

McAlpine, 1996; Minor, 1992). Atagutsiak (cited in Ootoova et al., 2001) said: "If a child made a mistake, you would wait until the child realized that what he was doing was wrong, as long as it wasn't dangerous" (p. 85), and Ottokie said that:

if you discipline the child all the time, constantly, it seems that they tune you out. If they are doing something and you know nothing bad is going to happen, you should just let them be... We are told to discipline our children positively and kindly. (Ekho & Ottokie, 2000, pp. 52, 55)

This may help to explain the hands-off policy of the grade six teacher. As teachers, however, we remain concerned about how safe other students would feel in an environment punctuated by "major tantrums," although this discomfort may arise from our own socially located perceptions of anger and aggression.

Related to the strict-discipline approach, a small-group behaviour management program was described by several participants. A transplanted southern system, it was an alternative to suspension that separated disruptive students from their classmates. Again, ostracizing a child may be harsh punishment by historical standards, but providing a smaller group size than the regular classroom is more consistent with historical Inuit education (Bould, n.d.). These strict discipline approaches both met with the approval of the DEA, which may indicate true Inuit support of the practices, or, since strict discipline was also reported to anger Inuit, an Inuit tendency to defer to authority (Annahatak, 1994; Brody, 2000; Napartuk, 2002).

One of Berger's (2001) participants described sending students to the program to learn one thing before returning, such as "not throwing desks." She said that the student would get the same work as the other students, and would have a nearly one-on-one student-teacher ratio while there, though s/he would miss movies, gym, and other fun class activities. Once the student had demonstrated consistent attendance and changed his or her behaviour as desired by the teacher, he or she would be readmitted to the regular class. The participant reported increased attendance and improved learning for her students once two students who were intimidating others had been removed to the program:

*A non-attender, since the other two were removed, found that he was able to attend. He now attends 100%. He was a grade two level, and I'd say he's come around and is bordering on a grade four level, because he's so confident in himself; he knows he's not going to get hurt at school, and that's a big thing. The rest of them, those who had problems last year have really improved because the ones they were scared of are now not there in my class, and that means a lot you know. You have to come to school and be safe.*

In their traditional camps, Inuit used ways to settle disputes that were superbly fitted to that environment, and that served to maintain harmony within the group. In the *Qallunaat* school, is the goal of achieving harmony worth the

price of cultural incongruity? If the behaviour modification program and suspending students “works” for the many at the expense of the few (who may end up marginalized and dropping out), are they acceptable solutions? Is using new methods toward the broader goal of collective success actually culturally compatible (or would it be if the aims of the school were Inuit-defined aims)? What will Inuit decide when the choices are truly theirs?

These are not easy questions, and to look at discipline “solutions” in isolation removes from educators the responsibility of looking for underlying causes of the problems (Kohn, 1993). As Partington (1991) wrote, the use of behaviour management approaches pathologizes the individual rather than looking at the institution as the possible source of the problem. It could be that focusing on good programming and a proper understanding of students’ abilities would prevent many discipline problems from arising (Tompkins, 1998). Unfortunately, the lack of an orientation to Inuit culture for *Qallunaat* teachers, their lack of ESL training, and the lack of inservicing to help them effectively teach Inuit students reduces the likelihood of good programming (Berger, 2001). The Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly Special Committee on Education (1982) report pointed to the problem over twenty years ago:

disciplinary problems may also occur ... when a new teacher arrives without proper preparation in a small community.... Southern teachers come to northern schools with little or no knowledge of the Native cultures, little or no training in cross-cultural education, little or no understanding of instruction in a second language. (p. 29)

Compounding lack of knowledge, teacher prejudice, or “culturally inappropriate, prejudicial, and disempowering classroom management techniques” may also contribute to discipline problems in multicultural settings (Grossman, 1991, p. 16), as may the colonial past and present of the schools (Berger, Epp & Moeller, in press). From the schools’ role in forcing Inuit from the land into settlements in the 1950s and 1960s (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994), to their current role in socializing Inuit students to EuroCanadian norms and preparing them for the world of western work, they are not neutral institutions (Henze & Vanett, 1993), and this may cause student resistance (Ogbu, 1992; Ryan, 1989).

It is clear that discipline problems are complex and multifaceted. Focussing only on “solutions” will dis-empower educators who might productively look at and address possible causes over which they have some control. Improved programming can be supported by principals and pursued by teachers. Resources are needed from higher levels to support these efforts, especially through an increase in inservicing. Increasing the number of Inuit teachers, making curriculum more relevant, and, above all, moving toward true Inuit control of education, should be actively pursued. The fact that schools are “essentially a foreign institution ... delivering a foreign curriculum ... in

a foreign language” (McAuley, 1991, p. 45) needs to be addressed by the Nunavut Department of Education.

Teachers and schools, we hope in close consultation with communities, need also to consider how discipline in the schools should function. Creative and culturally compatible practices or modifications are possible. One participant in Berger’s (2001) study described how the increased involvement of elders in the school had positively impacted the behaviour of students, while another described counselling by an Inuk to help students reintegrate after being suspended from school. Disciplining students as Inuit teachers do, privately and quietly, was reported to be effective, and more opportunity to be physically active was thought to positively affect students’ school experiences:

*They come to the gym ... and it's almost all of them excel there. So I think it's good to have phys ed, and a lot of it.... Some students might be doing academically poorly and they come into the gym and they're brilliant, so it's a real boost for them; it's something that they really need.*

Increasing physical education time might be a culturally appropriate and healthy way to approach discipline from a different angle, as might the advice of Ootoova (Ootoova et al., 2001), who said that a child with behavioural problems at school wants to “behave like the other children, but it is their desire to be outside that causes them to misbehave.... they are told, ‘Sit still! Stay still!’ until they start getting angry” (p. 87).

Practices like strict discipline codes which do not seem to honour Inuit culture should only be considered cautiously, and should be discussed widely before being implemented in schools or classrooms. They may “work” to achieve certain goals, but in choosing to adopt them, educators and communities should be conscious of possible side effects – marginalization of some students, tension between the school and community, and the potential danger to Inuit culture of legitimizing western rather than Inuit ways.

#### *The use of praise and rewards*

Three *Qallunaat* participants in Berger’s (2001) study discussed the use of rewards for motivation. One described her system as “*a complicated point system, but it absolutely works.*” She described how students would earn stars for listening to instructions, remembering things they had learned, or for just doing something good. For every two stars earned, the student’s name would go on the board; on “*Friday they get a candy for every star they get.... I found that unless there’s a real challenge that they can see that is concrete in front of them, they won’t work.*” This participant also called praise “*number one in teaching.*” From our experience in schools and from working with preservice teachers in Ontario, this behaviouristic approach including praise and rewards for motivating students seems ubiquitous.

Historically, for Inuit, “direct praise and rewards for accomplishment are rare” (Stairs, 1994, p. 67), and 30 years ago Kleinfeld (1975) wrote that “public verbal praise frequently embarrasses Indian and Eskimo students” (p. 306). When praise occurred in Inuit teachers’ classrooms in northern Quebec, it was almost always directed to the whole group, not individuals (Crago & Eriks-Brophy, 1994). Henze and Vanett (1993) wrote that for Yup’ik students, receiving rewards to motivate them was in complete contrast to traditional ways, and created conflict when practised by the schools, while Lipka, Mohatt, and the Ciulistet Group (1998) wrote that Yanez, a Yup’ik teacher, “stated that overly praising is wrong because it can make one feel better than others and this could be particularly damaging in an interdependent society” (p. 132). More recently, other views on praise have been published. *Inuuqatigiit: The curriculum from the Inuit perspective* (Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment [NWTECE], 1996), said that children “were praised for their progress” (p. 14), and Ottokie, an Inuit elder, said that when parents were proud they “didn’t hesitate to show it” (Ekho & Ottokie, 2000, p. 56). Joamie (cited in Ootoova et al., 2001) said: “Even if we have negative thoughts about our ability to do something, our minds can overcome those thoughts with praise” (p. 250).

If praise and rewards were previously uncommon in Inuit child rearing and education, why might they “work” in these *Qallunaat* teachers’ classrooms? It may be significant that Inuit students are thought to be more present-oriented than southern students, while *Qallunaat* schools are future-oriented (Clifton & Roberts, 1988; Stairs, 1991). When successful, students “got” something for their efforts – the pair of kamiks just sewn, or the seal just caught. These were shared and appreciated, and the child was accepted and possibly feted by the group (Imaruittuq, in Bennett & Rowley, 2004). In the south, when school tasks are not very intrinsically interesting, the promise of future success is often invoked to motivate students (Kohn, 1993), while nothing tangible is produced. If programming is not meeting the needs and appealing to the interests of Inuit students, it may be that immediate and concrete rewards seem necessary, though extrinsic rewards may not be culturally congruent. Perhaps they provide the “something concrete” that Inuit youth would traditionally have had as they learned through authentic tasks and received immediate feedback from their environments (Stairs, 1991).

Furthermore, in the past, mistakes when learning were more critical for Inuit than they are in today’s “protected learning situation” (Stairs, 1991, p. 282). Children’s ways of learning were also significantly different. It was common to work privately on a project until ready to present the finished work to someone as a gift. This is in sharp contrast to the *Qallunaat* school expectation that students use a trial and error approach, even for problems they have never seen before (Stairs, 1994). Both of these historical cultural patterns might serve to prevent students from attempting things they

do not yet feel confident with, and this may be an additional reason why *Qallunaat* educators sometimes feel it necessary to use rewards, in effect to circumvent the natural resistance arising when Inuit students are asked to learn in *Qallunaat* ways.

Again, along with considering whether or not to adopt a specific strategy which may conflict with Inuit culture, it is important to consider why the strategy is necessary, and whether there are any alternatives which might be more culturally compatible. Kohn (1993) wrote that by “solving” a problem with rewards, we never get to consider its roots (and also detailed how ineffective and counterproductive rewards can be, even when they appear to be working). As with behaviour issues, the roots of “problems” with student motivation may go very deep. They may include lack of relevant programming, cultural discontinuity between *Qallunaat* school teaching and historical Inuit learning expectations, and lack of community support resulting from resistance to colonization (Berger, Epp & Moeller, in press; Cummins, 1986; Ogbu, 1992).

Berger’s (2001) participants reported that hands-on activities, teaching through integrated themes, giving students more freedom and responsibility than in a typical *Qallunaat* school, and taking students outside were effective with Inuit students, and noted success using Inuit authors and stories. All of these ideas are supported by *Inuuqatigiit: The curriculum from the Inuit perspective* (NWTECE, 1996). One participant, who also reported using a reward system, said:

*I try and make something happen every day that’s different and I think that’s the key to teaching. Of my attenders I have just about 100% ‘cause they know we’re going to do something different every day and it’s exciting to be at school.*

Every effort should be made, at every level, to increase the cultural compatibility and relevance of curriculum and resources, and to improve pedagogy in culturally congruent ways. Practices like praise and rewards should be considered only after other strategies to improve schooling and raise student engagement. If Inuit were doing most of the teaching and making most of the decisions in educating Inuit students, the question of whether Inuit culture now accepts and endorses the use of praise and rewards, and their appropriateness in Inuit schools and classrooms, could more easily be addressed.

## CONCLUSION

The two practices described here, adopting rigid southern-style discipline strategies and the use of praise and rewards, may help to raise the achievement of Inuit students in *Qallunaat* schools. Because they may be practices against culture, the loss of Inuit culture, confusion, and alienation may result. Because they may increase the effectiveness of the schools, the speed of acculturation might be accelerated, converting Inuit more quickly to

*Qallunaat* values. The choice to use specific strategies should be considered cautiously, with input from parents and the community. Culturally appropriate alternatives should always be considered. The existence of “problems” to be solved by these practices should remind us of the problem of locating *Qallunaat* schools in Inuit communities, and the need for Inuit education to be defined and controlled by Inuit.

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#### NOTES

1. *Qallunaat* is the term used by Inuit for non-Inuit. It is more inclusive than EuroCanadian, as not all non-Inuit are EuroCanadian.
2. Two consultative processes are currently underway. The first included initiatives in every community in Nunavut aimed at eliciting Inuit ideas about the aims of education (L. Aylward, personal communication, September, 2005). The second involves a committee holding hearings in several communities to elicit input into the new Nunavut Education Act (J. Jacquard, personal communication, June, 2005). Neither process is complete at the time of this writing.
3. Yupiaq are related to the Inuit, and reside mostly in Alaska. The singular form is Yup'ik.
4. In fact, massive funding would be required for anything but incremental change, and there are strongly competing social priorities for funds in Nunavut, including healthcare and housing.
5. Five communities in one region of Nunavut were chosen for Berger's (2001) study. The communities ranged in size from 800 to 2200 inhabitants, with an average 85% Inuit. Most Nunavut communities share many of the characteristics of the five communities selected. All Nunavut communities are remote, that is, they have no road access to southern Canada or to each other. The schools employ predominantly Inuit teachers at the primary level, and predominantly Southern-Canadian teachers at the intermediate and senior levels.
6. Formerly the Baffin Region, Qikiqtaaluk includes eight communities on Baffin Island, two on the Boothia Peninsula, and one on Cornwallis Island.
7. A District Education Authority (DEA), formerly called a Community Education Council, exists in each community. It is an elected body that oversees many aspects of school functioning. One participant in Berger's (2001) study noted that all but one member of the DEA in her community was white. When Inuit cede their control of education to *Qallunaat* experts, we can suspect that colonialism has functioned as Ryan (1989) predicted, convincing Inuit of the supposed superiority of their colonizers.

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