

WALKING TOGETHER

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Aboriginal & Treaty Rights Inuit Rights: A Personal Perspective

by Eileen Marthiensen

Government of Alberta ■





INUIT RIGHTS: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Question 1: Who are the Inuit?

Inuit means “the people” and broadly speaking, the Inuit are the Aboriginal peoples of Arctic Canada. However, protocols of respect compel other Aboriginal groups, as well as non-Aboriginal Canadians, to recognize the unique languages and cultures of each Inuit group.

Question 2: Who are the main Inuit cultural groups and languages?

There are approximately 55,000 Inuit living in 53 communities across four different regions of the Arctic:

- Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories. Inuvialuit means “The Real People.”
- Nunavut, which means “Our Land.”
- Nunavik (northern Quebec), which means “Place to Live.”
- Nunatsiavut (Labrador), which means “Our Beautiful Land.”

Each of these groups has settled land claims.

These regions cover one-third of Canada’s land mass.

Languages spoken are

- Inuktitut with regional differences in dialects
- Inuvialuktun.

Question 3: What are the existing rights according to the Constitution Act, 1982?

Since Canada repatriated the Constitution Act in 1982 (BNA Act 1867), these rights are recognized in the supreme law of Canada as non-extinguished rights. This recognition gave credence to Aboriginal Peoples continuing to exercise their rights and to have access to their traditional and ancestral territories occupied and inhabited with other Aboriginal Peoples from time immemorial.

The first milestone in the interpretation of the word “existing” in s. 35 (1) of the Constitution Act 1982 came in a Supreme Court of Canada ruling, *R. vs. Sparrow*, May 31, 1990.





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In this instance, Judge Dickson C.J.C. found in reference to s. 35 (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed; (2) In this Act “Aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. (Canada Constitution Act, 1982) that “The term ‘existing’ in s. 35 (1) of the Constitution Act, 1982, makes it clear that the Aboriginal rights to which the section applies are those that were in existence when the Constitution Act, 1982, came into affect” (R. vs. Sparrow Supreme Court of Canada, Dickson C.J.C., May 31, 1990).

This now becomes the base of arguments between Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and Governments regarding what these rights are and who is responsible for them. Further disputes centre around which Aboriginal Peoples are entitled to these rights.

Question 4: What were some of the impacts of dislocation and relocation programs of some Inuit communities?

During the 1950s, 19 Inuit families from Inukjuak were moved by the federal government to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord in the High Arctic. Three families from Pond Inlet were also relocated in order to assist the Inukjuak families. The families were moved 1200 kilometres from their home communities. Families had to adapt to a different, colder climate, continuous darkness in the winter and a different terrain. The relocations have been described as an attempt by the government to assert Canada’s sovereignty in the previously uninhabited area. However, the government of Canada has expressed that the relocation was an attempt to improve the social, health and deteriorating harvesting conditions in Inukjuak.

The families were promised shelter and supplies and if they were unhappy they could return to their home community after two years. The promises were not kept by the Government of Canada. As a result the unresolved historical trauma, grief, interrupted transmission of culture and loss of identity are shown in the interviews and speakers representing the survivors.

Further information can be found at

- <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/nr/m-a2010/23398bk-eng.asp>
- <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/north/story/2010/08/18/apology-inuit-relocation.html>

Question 5: What is significant about the Inuit land claims agreements?

Each of the four regions has comprehensive land claims agreements with the Government of Canada:

- The Inuvialuit Final Agreement was signed with the Government of Canada on June 15, 1984 and was approved by the Parliament of Canada as the Western Arctic Claims Settlement Act. The Act is protected by the Canadian Constitution in that it cannot be changed by Parliament without the approval of the Inuvialuit.





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- The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was signed on July 9, 1993 while the Nunavut government came into being on April 1, 1999.
- Nunavik signed their Land Claims Agreement on December 1, 2006. Makivik Corporation works to ensure more Inuit autonomy for the regions, especially in terms of the preservation of the ancestral rights of the land.
- The Nunatsiavut Government was created in 2005 as a result of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement. It is a regional Inuit government within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. They are the first Inuit region to achieve self-government.

For further information on

- Inuvialuit land claim <http://www.irc.inuvialuit.com>
- Nunavut <http://www.gov.nu.ca> and at <http://www.tunngavik.com>.
- Nunavik (northern Quebec) <http://www.nunavik.ca> and <http://www.makivik.org>
- Nunatsiavut (Labrador) <http://www.nunatsiavut.com>

Question 6: What are the impacts of Inuit resource development and management agreements?

In each region, the land claims agreements, as well as the development of regional corporations work to ensure that economic and resource development is in keeping with the wishes of the people.

In each region, careful attention has been paid to the stewardship and protection of ancestral lands and of the plant and animal life.

At the same time, resource development such as mining and oil exploration and protection of, conservation areas, land uses planning, wildlife management and harvesting and environmental preservation and protection are carefully managed.

The governments in each region are committed to protecting their ancestral lands, history, languages and cultures as well as to providing education and employment opportunities for their people.

Question 7: How does the Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Model portray the Inuit learning journey and its connection to community well-being?

“The Inuit Holistic Learning Model published by the CCLI it depicts a stylistic graphic of a blanket toss often used at Inuit celebrations, and a circular path, (the Journey of Lifelong Learning) to portray the Inuit learning journey and its connection to community well-being.”





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Inuit lifelong learning is based on traditional Inuit values and beliefs. The outside of the circle shows that economic well-being, environmental well-being, social well-being and physical well-being all lead to community well-being.

If you work inward there are three areas: sila (environment and land), culture and people. These are the sources and domains of knowledge.

- At the centre lies the journey of lifelong learning through the different stages of life: infant and child, youth, young adult, adult, and elder. The graphic clearly depicts a child being guided through this journey of life and learning.
- In the second circle, culture is shown to include language and traditions; people include family, Elders and the community; and sila includes environment and land.
- In the outer circle, family and community members hold up the blanket of learning. Each figure represents a value and belief. The inclusion of ancestors acknowledges the important role of “naming,” a respected Inuit tradition which fosters Inuk identity, kinship relations and the transmission of intergenerational language.

