

WALKING TOGETHER

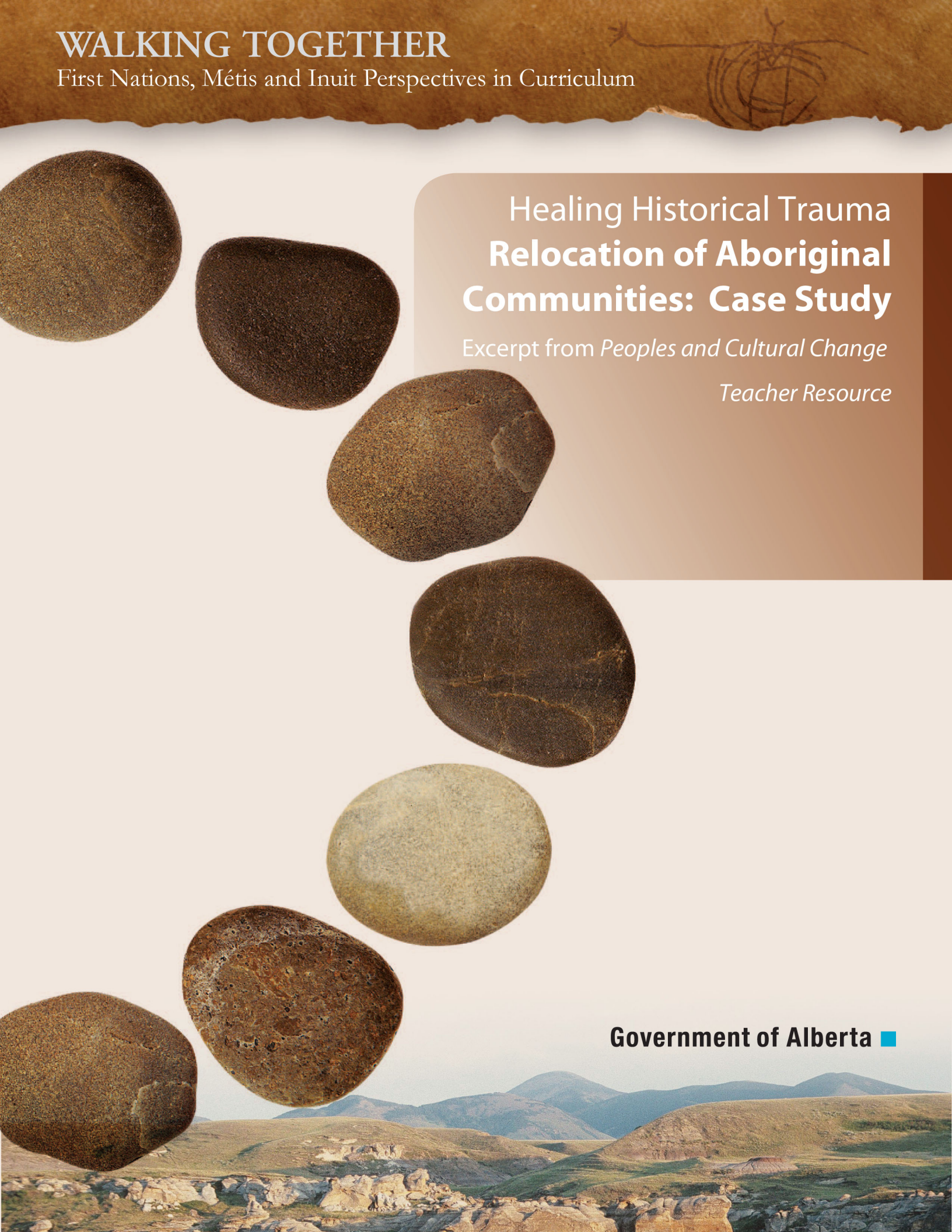
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum

Healing Historical Trauma Relocation of Aboriginal Communities: Case Study

Excerpt from *Peoples and Cultural Change*

Teacher Resource

Government of Alberta ■





RELOCATION OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDY

The Mushuau Innu and Davis Inlet

Excerpt from *Peoples and Cultural Change Teacher Resource*

RELOCATION OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Case Study: The Mushuau Innu and Davis Inlet

Dozens of Aboriginal communities in Canada have been relocated since the 1900s. The relocations occurred across the country, affected First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and in most cases happened on short notice with little to no consultation with the people involved. The negative effects of these relocations — emotional, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual — continue to impact many Aboriginal communities today.

What is relocation?

Relocation is a form of displacement, often the result of deliberate initiatives by governments to move particular communities from one location to another. The relocations of Aboriginal communities in Canada during the past century were seen by the government as the apparent solution to particular problems. Though they occurred for many reasons, these relocations generally fall into two main categories: administrative and developmental.

According to the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, “administrative relocations are moves carried out to facilitate the operation of government or address the perceived needs of Aboriginal people. Facilitating government operations was the rationale for many relocations in the era following the Second World War. Aboriginal people were often moved to make it easier for government administrators to provide the growing number of services and programs becoming available through the burgeoning welfare state Relocation in this category often involved centralization and amalgamation — moving widely dispersed or different populations into a common community.”

Developmental relocations result from the implementation of projects such as agricultural expansion, land reclamation, urban development, resource extraction, and hydroelectric dam construction. The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* states that this type of relocation “is the consequence of national development policies whose stated purpose is primarily to ‘benefit’ the relocatees or get them out of the way of proposed industrial projects.”



Type of Relocation	Reasons	Examples	Dates
administrative	carried out for the convenience of government and to make administration of services easier through centralization and/or amalgamation	Mi'kmag (Nova Scotia)	1942–1949
		Hebronimiut (Labrador)	1959–1960
		Sayisi Dene	1956
		Yukon First Nations	1940s–1950s
		Gwa'Sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw (British Columbia)	1964
		Mushuau Innu (Labrador)	1948; 1967
	addressing the perceived needs of Aboriginal people by moving them back to the land to encourage self-sufficiency or moving them away from negative influences of non-Aboriginal settlements	Baffin Island Inuit to Devon Island	1934–1947
		Keewatin Inuit; series of moves	1939–1963
		Mushuau Innu (Labrador)	2002
developmental	land needed for agriculture	Ste Madeleine Métis (Manitoba)	1938
	land needed for urban growth	Songhees (British Columbia)	1911
	land needed for hydro dam	Cheslatta Ten (British Columbia)	1952
		Chemawawin Cree and Métis (Manitoba)	1964

*Source: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

The Mushuau Innu

For thousands of years, the Mushuau Innu (MOO-shwa IN-noo), “people of the barren lands,” lived a nomadic lifestyle, travelling with the caribou across the Quebec–Labrador peninsula in winter and moving to the ocean shores to fish in summer. They were one of the last First Nations to settle into permanent communities.

Their traditional lifestyle continued as recently as the 1960s. At that time Mushuau Innu were still following caribou herds across the barren lands, as their ancestors had done for thousands of years. Home was a tent that was transported on a dog sled, along with all of the family’s other possessions. A Norwegian anthropologist, Georg Henriksen, who lived with the Mushuau Innu for two years in 1967 and 1968, recalls everyone but the infants walking and running through the snow. The caribou was central to the Innu’s traditional lifestyle and spirituality.



In 1869, the Hudson's Bay Company opened a trading post at Davis Inlet. The Innu visited the trading post periodically, but retained their traditional migratory lifestyle for almost a century. By the 1930s, the Innu were becoming more reliant on the fur trade: store-bought goods and fur-trapping for profit. The shift in their traditional economy left the Innu more vulnerable to seasonal declines in numbers of game animals and increasingly dependent on government relief payments. Annual trips to the Catholic mission at Davis Inlet slowly led to the gradual development of an Innu community there.

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The First Relocation: 1948

In 1942, the Newfoundland government took over the unprofitable Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Davis Inlet, but after an unsuccessful six years decided to close the store and move the Innu 400 kilometres north up the Labrador coast to Nutak. The Innu were not consulted about the move.

A 1993 investigative report by the Canadian Human Rights Commission entitled *Report on the Complaints of the Innu of Labrador* indicates that the Innu did not like the new location: there were no trees, hunting was difficult, and fishing was only marginally successful. The report states that the Innu were moved in response to government concerns over diminishing caribou herds; in the new location, supposedly the Innu could employ themselves fishing and cutting wood.

According to the report, "the decision to relocate the Innu to Nutak was a consequence of the decision to close the government depot at Davis Inlet. It was a decision guided by a belief that the Innu should become economically productive and based on the administrative convenience of the location of the government depot."

By the second winter, the relocation had failed. The Mushuau Innu simply walked back to where they preferred to live: Davis Inlet.

In 1949, when Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canada, no provision was made for Aboriginal peoples. There were no treaties in existence, reserves were not created for the Innu, and they were not registered under the Indian Act. This left the Innu free to continue their traditional ways without interference, although without Indian status, they had no say over their education, health programs, or social services, and were unable to pass bylaws.

The Second Relocation: 1967

The government store at Davis Inlet reopened in 1952 and a permanent Catholic mission was established. Throughout the 1950s and mid-1960s, Newfoundland government officials continued to discuss various options for relocation. A provincial government housing program for the Innu concluded the existing townsite was unsatisfactory. Finally, government officials settled on a location across the inlet, on Iluikoyak Island. The local priest supported the move from Old Davis Inlet on the mainland to New Davis Inlet, which the Innu call Utshimassits — "the place of the boss."



Many Innu say they did not support the 1967 move to the small island. The Innu Elders are “virtually unanimous,” according to the Canadian Human Rights Commission report, in recalling promises of new houses, running water, a sewage system, the inclusion of furnaces, and the provision of some furniture. But housing construction was slow, leaving houses half built when the move took place. Most of the thirty-three houses had no sinks, bathtubs, or toilets, were uninsulated, and had no central heating — in a setting where winter temperatures often dropped to -35°C . Many of the houses leaked within a year.

Moving to an island left the Innu isolated. Adjusting from a nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary existence was difficult. People were cut off from their hunting grounds for four months of the year, because the inlet was too dangerous to cross during spring break-up and fall freeze-up. Shipments of canned food and supplies provided the community but left the Innu without purpose. Eventually, they rarely hunted at all.

Although twenty-three wells were drilled on the island between 1978 and 1991, only three yielded water. Two of them served the Catholic mission, the nursing station, police station, and the school. The third well became the water supply for the entire community. There was not enough water to flush toilets, so a sewer system was impossible. Provincial government promises failed to materialize. Social problems mounted, including majority unemployment, poor health, chronic alcoholism, domestic violence, gas sniffing, terrible living conditions, and high suicide rates.

An Innu comprehensive land claim was accepted in 1978, conditional on submission of a land use and occupancy study. That document was submitted in 1990, and nine months later the federal government authorized negotiation of a comprehensive land claim agreement. In February 1992, six children died in a late night house fire in Davis Inlet. Their parents were out drinking, the community had no fire trucks or pumps, and there was not enough water nearby to fill a bucket.

“In the population of 168 adults, 123 are chronic alcoholics or abusers of alcohol. Ninety percent of all court cases in Davis Inlet are the result of alcohol abuse. We looked at how we ended up in Utshimassits, and what we had lost by settling there. What we lost mostly was control over our lives,” said Chief Katie Rich in 1992. “It was the view of all people that in order to achieve a new and healthy life, we must relocate, to move away from this island to a place where there can be better health and living conditions, a place where we can deal with the problems facing us. Relocation is the first priority for us, and this time, it will be an Innu decision, not the decision of the government or the church.”

As a result of the fire, the Innu conducted an internal inquiry which led to the publication of a report proposing a seven-step long-term plan including a land claim settlement and the establishment of a family treatment centre in the community.

A year later six youths, aged eleven to fourteen, barricaded themselves into a shack, sniffing glue and attempting suicide. An Innu police officer who discovered them just in time filmed the scene, and the band council authorized the release of the shocking video to the media, attracting international attention and national embarrassment. Within two years, the federal government agreed to move the community once again, this time so services and facilities could be improved.

In November 1996, Chief Katie Rich signed the Mushuau Innu Relocation Agreement after a community referendum showed 97 percent of residents favoured moving 15 kilometres



away to their traditional spring gathering site on the mainland: Natuashish, a name meaning “a break in the river.”

The Labrador Innu Comprehensive Healing Strategy was established by the federal government in 2001, with funding of \$65 million over three years towards the aim of stabilizing health, creating safe communities, and helping the Innu build a better future. There are two Innu First Nations in Labrador, the Mushuau Innu and the Sheshatshiu Innu, who live farther south. At their request, both were recognized as bands under the Indian Act in 2002. By 2006, 651 Mushuau Innu people and 986 Sheshatshiu Innu people had registered as status Indians.

The Third Relocation: 2002

In the winter of 2002–2003, the Mushuau Innu began relocating to Natuashish — a newly constructed community designed and built with their participation. This time, residents were consulted about every aspect, from site selection by Elders to the style of housing and family-related arrangement of neighbourhoods to the overall moccasin shape of the village. The new community includes a school, fire hall, police station, nursing station, sewage and water systems, and 133 houses — with the modern amenities that most Canadians take for granted. For many Innu, it was the first time they had running water and central heating.

Since the relocation, things are not perfect. It takes time to recover from decades of social problems. There have been allegations of misused funds, and calls for the resignation of the band chief and council.

A Health Canada spokesperson agrees. “Healing is a life-long process and it doesn’t begin and end with programs being offered or the construction of facilities,” says Sarah Archer. “You have to also work on some of the long-term, underlying causes.”

Among progress in 2006 are plans to build a healing lodge to house addictions treatment programs as well as to expand the local clinic by adding a wellness centre and increasing programs for parents and children. Other initiatives include Next Generation Guardians, a group founded by several respected Innu women to promote cultural activities, and a month-long outdoor environmental experience program for youth at risk, run by the Innu Nation and the Tshikapisk Foundation, a non-profit Innu association focused on cultural preservation and economic self-sufficiency.