Reconciling the Role of a Qallunaat Teacher in Nunavut

Jay McKechnie
Email: jmckechnie@teachers.ntanu.ca

Abstract

The development of a ‘made in Nunavut’ social studies curriculum offers a unique site of culturally relevant schooling for Inuit high school students. The Nunavut Department of Education is committed to integrating the Inuit Qaujimajatauqangit (IQ) principles into all aspects of schooling in the territory. However, the history of colonialism continues to present challenges to fully implement these IQ principles in a way that is culturally relevant to students. Nunavut relies heavily on Qallunaat (non-Inuit) teachers and administrators for the education system to function. But it is expected that Inuit societal and cultural values dominate teaching practices and content in the classroom. How can Nunavut reconcile these seemingly opposing realities? I will seek to engage how power hierarchies in Nunavut produce inequalities in the ability for Inuit to realize and secure their material, cultural, and emotional needs (Steinberg, 2012). I will engage these complicated issues by discussing the complexity of identity in Nunavut through the lens of Stuart Hall’s work *The Future of Identities*.

I am interested in the concept of reconciliation and what this means for non-Inuit educators working in Nunavut. I am a Qallunaat (non-Inuit) social studies teacher currently teaching in Nunavut. As a social studies teacher, I am privileged with the opportunity to engage issues of colonization on a daily basis with my students. However, the naturalized epistemologies of Qallunaat teachers working in Nunavut schools continues to hinder Nunavut’s unique potential to resist colonial hegemony through Inuit self-government within the constructs of Canadian society. In
considering these issues, what role do Qallunaat educators play in the future of Nunavut?

*Keywords*: Nunavut, reconciliation, Qallunaat, Education

There is a tremendous amount of tension within the Nunavut education system. Education was once used as a destructive tool by the Canadian government to assimilate Inuit into mainstream Canadian society, but is now viewed in public discourse as the way for Inuit to gain a new sense of self-reliance. However, the residual effects of colonialist epistemologies continue to support hegemonic power relations in Nunavut’s education system.

Nunavut is Canada’s newest territory and offers a unique example of Aboriginal self-government. At its inception in 1999, the Government of Nunavut incorporated Inuit societal and cultural values by implementing the Inuit Qaujimajatauqangit (IQ) principles into the very structure and function of government. The education system is expected to support this project of Inuit self-governance. However, education’s ability to accomplish this virtuous task is limited by the continued dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies within the structures of the school system. Nunavut relies heavily on Qallunaat (non-Inuit) teachers and administrators for the education system to function. But it is the expectations on Nunavummiut that Inuit societal and cultural values dominate teaching practices and content in the classroom. How can Nunavut reconcile these seemingly opposing realities? For myself, as a Qallunaat teacher presently working in Nunavut, I want to examine my role, and by extension all Qallunaat teachers, in providing a culturally relevant education for young people in Nunavut.

I will seek to engage how power hierarchies in Nunavut produce inequalities in the ability for Inuit to realize and secure their material, cultural, and emotional needs (Steinberg, 2012). I will engage this set of complicated and interrelated issues by discussing the complexity of identity in Nunavut through the lens of Stuart Hall’s (2006) work *The Future of Identities*.

I will begin by locating myself as a Qallunaat teacher in Nunavut by discussing my role as a high school social studies teacher. This will include my involvement in developing the Nunavut social studies curriculum. I will
then address the colonial gaze that permeates the naturalized epistemologies of Qallunaat teachers working in Nunavut schools. Part of ‘staring back’ involves comprehending race as a discursive, rather than a biological reality (Hall, 2006). I will conclude by discussing Nunavut’s unique potential to resist colonial hegemony through Inuit self-government within the constructs of Canadian society. Education is key to this moment, but the education system lacks the necessary capacity to fulfill this promise. In considering these issues, what role do Qallunaat educators play in the future of Nunavut?

**Locating the Self**

As a non-Inuit teacher working in Nunavut, I stand at the front of the classroom as a representing agent of colonization. I have been teaching grade 10-12 social studies in Nunavut for the past five years. I have the privilege of regularly engaging in topics of colonialism on a daily basis with students who have suffered the direct consequences of Eurocentric hegemony. This places me in a sensitive position, as I have to speak to the processes of colonization, while at the same time, representing the colonizer. I often become a target for student anger and frustration. These moments of ‘push back’ can be interpreted as attempts to resist the naturalization of colonialist and imperialist practices that have led to the construction of hierarchical power structures (Shobat and Stam, 2009). The students are articulating the tensions that exist in how they view their world. This creates a space for both student and teacher to critically engage in a learning process that studies the world that shapes both our identities (Kincheloe, 2010). Clearly, this allows for some really great moments for learning, but it can also escalate to violence and behavioural issues. There is a delicate balance in assessing each student’s capacity to engage in critical discourse. There is a high level of emotional investment in these topics, so these issues have to be approached with sensitivity to build a safe learning environment to allow for constructive conversations to occur.

I situate myself as a student within Inuit society and position myself within the Eurocentric institution that I represent. Establishing this relationship of mutual respect is crucial in helping my students “develop their analytical and interpretive abilities, their research skills, their epistemological consciousness, and their sense of identity as empowered democratic citizens” (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 13). This can only work if clear expectations are established from the first day of school. It also demands a
tremendous amount of patience and self-reflection on my part in order to not become reactive to student anger and frustrations. Creating a safe and positive learning community demands maintaining clear expectations and containing behaviour with natural and consistent consequences. This process has become much easier the longer I remain in the north by allowing secure attachments to develop between students and myself. Only by establishing clear expectations and boundaries can we engage in critical discourse.

This critical engagement is the essence of social studies, which is to engage, understand, and deconstruct different literacies of power (Kincheloe, 2010). Students in Nunavut are often struggling with a personal crisis of identity (Hall, 2006). Inuit are blessed with direct connections with Elders who have lived on the land as Inuit had for millennia. But the young people of Nunavut live in a fast-paced, media-saturated, and globalized world. The disorientation between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ can be difficult to navigate. By definition, modern societies are in constant, rapid, and permanent change (Hall, 2006). Students struggle with connecting the traditional knowledge with the pressures of contemporary society. Within the social studies curriculum, this tension allows classroom discussion to be relevant and potentially transformative. A new grade 10 social studies module, The Residential School System in Canada: Understanding the Past – Seeking Reconciliation – Building Hope for Tomorrow (Government of Nunavut, Government of Northwest Territories, Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2012), is an intense and emotional topic of study that allows students to engage issues that directly affect their lives. However, students will often lament that school interferes with their ability to connect with their culture (Aylward, 2009). Nunavummiut have maintained solid connections to Inuit culture. Inuktitut is still relatively strong in Nunavut, as is the connection to the land. This is important as Marie Battiste explains, “[l]anguages are the means of communication for the full range of human experiences and critical for survival of the culture and political integrity of any people” (Battiste, 1998, p. 18). The challenge of educators is trying to convince students that education is a means of bringing these two worlds together. Ultimately, it is the student that needs to choose academic success for herself to realize this potential (Landson-Billings, 1995). However, most students view education as a means of getting a job in the community. The rhetoric of neoliberalism permeates the dominant discourse of education in Nunavut as a means of securing work and economic self-reliance. The Department of Education introduced a new ‘multiple-options’ curriculum in 2012. The goal of this
new curriculum is to prepare students with the necessary skills to obtain their career goals. Certainly economic security is an important objective in Nunavut as government dependency is a major issue facing the territory with a rapidly growing population. In regards to issues of identity, simply obtaining a government job will not address the larger cultural needs of Inuit society.

Stuart Hall (2006) discusses how the “crisis of identity” has resulted from the formed identities that once stabilized the social world, and are now in decline, and that new identities have led to a fragmentation of the modern individual as a unified subject. This dislocation of self is well articulated by Hall (2006), who explains,

This loss of a stable “sense of self” is sometimes called the dislocation or decentering of the subject. This set of double displacements – decentering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves – constitutes a “crisis of identity” for the individual (p. 249).

By engaging the regimes of truth (Foucault, 1984) a critical pedagogy can begin to seek answers to these conflicting notions of identity by understanding the way power shapes our knowledge. It is important to critically engage how some knowledge is constructed into our consciousness and supports dominant power structures (Kincheloe, 2010). Students often express their concern that Qallunaat culture continues to dominate Inuit culture in Nunavut. This sense of superiority is connected to the historical narratives taught in schools. The history of contact is a narrative heavily steeped in the introduction of superior technology, medicine, and worldviews (Christianity). As Steinberg explains, “[w]hiteness [Qallunaat] presents itself not only as a cultural force or a norm by which all other cultures are measured, but as a positionality beyond history and culture, a non-ethnic space” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 349). The grand narrative of contact results in Inuit students essentializing themselves. A general understanding of essentialization “entails a representative practice of redundant marking that reduces people in these groups to a set of unchanging characteristics” (Montgomery, 2005, p. 319). Students new to grade 10 social studies will often refer to their cultural identities through the lens of the colonizer by describing Inuit culture by rote repetition of what they have been taught in school as to what it means to be Inuk. This often incudes a shallow understanding of Inuit culture by describing it in terms of living in igloos, wearing skin clothing, and drum dancing. Inuit culture is then relegated to
distant past or current forms of performance. In general, the way Inuit history is taught in Nunavut is based in the history of contact. This is a major factor in supporting dominant epistemologies. Like most Canadians, the understanding of “the story of Canada began with references to the “coming of the white man” or to “white man’s early efforts at settlement”” (Montgomery, 2005, p. 322). When working with students who have essentialized themselves through the perspectives of the other, it becomes clearly problematic if Qallunaat teachers go unchallenged in their own dominant perspectives of Inuit culture and society. “One of the central dimensions of Western colonial domination has involved its production of “universally valid knowledge” that worked to invalidate the ways of knowing that had been developed by all peoples around the world” (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 5). The naturalized notions of white superiority permeate the essentialization of both Inuit and Qallunaat culture.

I had a student in a grade 10 social studies class once tell me that: “We used to be Eskimos.” I asked what he meant, and he explained that they used to live on the land, and wear skin clothing. I asked: “What are you now?” He responded: “Inuit”. I explained that Inuit have always been Inuit and the only difference is the history of the Inuktitut term ‘Inuit’ and the Algonquin word ‘Eskimo’. At the end of this discussion, the student was still not convinced and clearly identified himself within a contact framework where the binary between the land and settlement, Eskimo and White, civilized and savage, were static in the way he imagined his heritage. This is a salient example of an individual identity fragmented in relation to power (Steinberg, 2012). The benefit of teaching social studies in a small community is that I have the opportunity to teach every student multiple times throughout their high school career. The ability to develop a social studies program that recognizes the essentialized concepts of Inuit culture allows for a formative approach to a more critical and deeper understanding of Inuit culture. It is in part a response to this essentialized understanding of Inuit culture that the Department of Education has focused on creating a grade ten social studies curriculum that challenges students to dig deeper into what their understanding of Inuit culture and identity. Much of this curriculum is still in the development and piloting stage.

**Nunavut Social Studies Curriculum: A Work in Progress**

Nunavut uses Alberta's social studies curriculum but is currently developing its own high school curriculum that is more culturally relevant.
This new curriculum has a heavy focus on civic and citizenship education. The grand narrative of national citizenship that dominates the Canadian social studies curriculum offers some interesting challenges for Nunavut teachers. Nunavut, with its Inuit majority population, has a unique position in Canadian history as the first jurisdiction to be under Aboriginal self-government.

As a member of the Nunatusiutit working group, I am helping to plan and develop the Nunavut social studies curriculum. This working group is presently focused on grades 7-12 social studies programming, whereas the grades K-6 social studies curriculum is completely dependent on the Alberta curriculum. A constant struggle for this working group is that “knowledge is always a site of contestation and conflict. What does it mean to produce rigorous knowledge for the social good?” (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 10) The task of destabilizing the Eurocentric narratives that students have received about their cultural history is a challenge. Even if the learning material is culturally relevant, the manner in which it is taught may not be. Currently, there is a lack of proper orientation and training for Qallunaat teachers new to the north. This lack of training, combined with a lack of culturally relevant curriculum and resources, can lead new teachers to the north to rely on their provincial curriculum and teaching experiences for guidance in the classroom. The silent messages received through the social studies curriculum from K-6, places Inuit knowledge on the lower end of the power hierarchy of knowledge. However, the cultural socialization of students in the home and the community greatly influences their intellectual thinking (Gay, 2002). The pull between these two worldviews contributes to identity and power issues.

An omnipresent tension in the Nunavut social studies curriculum is the separation of space from place (Hall, 2006). There are people living in Nunavut, who, during their lifetime, have lived on the land like their ancestors and have also witnessed man walk on the moon. In much the same way, young people in Nunavut live in isolated communities, but are saturated in media-rich social lives. It is therefore important “to recognize the swirling spheres of influence that inform young people’s worldviews and knowledge bases” (Taylor and Hoechsmann, 2012, p. 328). Media allows young people to traverse space within their communities. But the Elders remind the youth that they must learn the place names of the land, as each name holds sophisticated stories and cultural knowledge literally essential for survival. The majority of these places also have the names and language
of the colonizer. The naming, and in some cases re-naming, of place speaks to the struggle of securing space within a globalized world. In much the same way, the social studies curriculum is attempting to restore the proper Inuktitut names of cultural knowledge as a way of helping students navigate this globalized society in a culturally relevant manner. Using the proper Inuktitut terms allows students to engage with their culture that goes far beyond the classroom. Students are able to connect with stories they have heard from family members while also gaining a deeper epistemological understanding of the Inuit worldview.

A culturally relevant teacher must utilize the cultural strengths of students in order to make a connection between the value of education and cultural identity. A culturally relevant teacher can help students understand the outside forces that shape Nunavut society (Hall, 2006). This is an important task for social studies, as life in the community might seem static to students, but indeed is changing rapidly along with the rest of the world. Some of these changes, such as global warming, may be beyond the control of Inuit, but certainly pose a significant concern for Inuit society. The difficulty in social studies is how to connect these global concerns with the local issues facing students, within a culturally relevant framework. Ultimately, students in Nunavut must be prepared to participate and influence decisions in this globalized community without having to relinquish their cultural identity. Landosn-Billings (1995) outlines three criteria for what she terms a “pedagogy of opposition.” These three criteria include:

1- students must experience academic success;
2- students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and
3- students must develop a critical consciousness through which the challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

This pursuit of culturally relevant teaching must be based on the belief that students can and must succeed (Landson-Billings, 1995). Students in Nunavut face all types of challenges in succeeding in school, including: intergenerational trauma, food security, and over crowded housing. This push towards academic success needs to be based on validating the strength of Inuit culture. For Nunavut to succeed, Inuit must feel empowered to participate in the restoration of Inuit Nunangat (the people’s land).
The role of citizenship education is a push for democratic engagement and participation, and is directly linked to the Inuit Qaujimajatauqangit (IQ) principles of working together for a common purpose. As such, “a central purpose of a democratic curriculum … involve[s] exploring where knowledge comes from, the rules of its production, and the ways we can assess its quality and the purposes of its production” (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 3). As part of this pursuit of a democratic pedagogy, an assessment of how Nunavut remains embedded within a colonial framework is required. For all Canadians, “[c]olonialism remains as a vital formational and definitional issue” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 105). In the context of the Nunavut classroom, this colonial framework is played out daily through the interaction of Inuit students and Qallunaat teachers.

**Addressing the Colonial Gaze**

Peter Kulchyski (2005) discusses how Qallunaat often operate as a form of “class conscious” in remote Nunavut communities. He explains how Qallunaat will “frequently speak of the ‘troubles’ in the community: alcohol addiction, drug addiction, violence, family violence, assault, sexual assault. In this world view the community is a kind of rural ghetto where, borrowing their idiom, ‘these people’ - Inuit - are not succeeding at the painful process of adjusting to modernism” (Kulchyski, 2005, p. 205). As Hall argues, that this “play of identities” leads to the politicization of identity. Hall (2006) explains,

> Since identity shifts according to how the subject is addressed or represented, identification is not automatic, but can be won or lost. It has become politicized. This is sometimes described as a shift from politics of (class) identity to a politics of difference (p. 253).

Prior to arriving in Nunavut, the majority of Qallunaat will receive their information of Inuit culture and society from mainstream media. The ‘commonsense’ notions of Inuit society provide a surface-level representation of complex societal issues that lack historical context (Tupper and Cappello, 2008). Verna St. Denis uses the term “racialization” to make sense of how this works in the public consciousness. She explains, “[r]acialization is a concept that brings attention to how race has been used and is continually used to justify inequality and oppression of Aboriginal peoples” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1071). This often results in deeply embedded hegemonic power imbalances where in fact Inuit themselves begin to
essentialize this sense of inferiority. Inuit and Qallunaat have naturalized this hegemonic hierarchy by unconsciously accepting the role of colonizer and colonized. Rupturing this hegemonic power imbalance requires genuine dialogue (Buber, 1947) in order to disrupt these essentialized concepts and the racialization of Inuit as inferior.

**Race as Discursive**

What do we speak of when talk about race? As Stuart Hall notes, “[r]ace is a discursive not a biological category” (Hall, 2006, p. 258). This discourse of race must include a critique of the exclusion of whiteness as a race. Like most Canadians, Qallunaat teachers have received their education of Aboriginal Peoples through their respective provincial curriculum. Montgomery (2005) provides an in-depth historical critique of Canadian textbooks as it relates to the construction of race. Montgomery illustrates that textbooks do not deliberately set out to teach about race, but that they do through the creation of national narratives through the creation of commonsensical imaginings of history. Montgomery (2005) argues,

> A salient way to minimize the racism-sustaining effects through any strategy employed to oppose racism is to displace race-thinking with conceptions such as racialization that de-naturalize “race” and make obvious its banal tendencies without eliding the devastating realities that past and present race-thinking has brought about (p. 335).

When race is created as a naturally existing reality, it is often accepted that conflict between races is inevitable, and that the oppression of one race in favor of another justifies hegemonic power relations. In the absence of a discourse of race, these hegemonic power relationships that place white superiority above Inuit epistemologies will be permitted to continue much like they did during times of aggressive assimilation policies of the early part of the twentieth century (Montgomery, 2005). The expected outcome of the lack of discourse “contributes to the banal of commonsensical reproduction of racism in student learning resources” (Montgomery, 2005, p. 315). As such, schools are intimately connected to the wider dialogue within communities they serve (Taylor and Hoechsmann, 2012).

The political reality of Nunavut provides an interesting context for the tension that surrounds race. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) explains, race can also be used to the benefit of the oppressed. She illustrates how, the dominant ideology of the Euro-American epistemology has forced each into
an essentialized and totalized unit that is perceived to have little or no internal variation. However, at the same moment, members of these groups have used these unitary racialized labels for political and cultural purposes. Identification with the racialized labels means acknowledgement of some of the common experiences group members have had as outsiders and others (p. 262).

Nunavummiut have fought for, and won, a means of establishing their epistemologies as the very foundation of government based on their cultural majority. The problematics of this epistemological foundation is challenged by the fact that the majority of teachers in Nunavut are Qallunaat with their own ways of thinking and talking. How can Nunavut reconcile these disparities?

**Nunavut as Resistance**

Nunavut offers a unique moment of resistance against Eurocentric hegemony situated within the federal political structure of Canada. As such, one must consider the fact that Eurocentrism tends to permeate Canadian society and continues to structure contemporary practices and representations in society (Shobat and Stam, 2009). This tension is played out within the area of education. The majority of teachers are from southern Canada (White, 2009) and tend to teach the core academic subjects. Inuit teachers predominantly teach the elementary grades, Inuktitut, and cultural skills (i.e. shop and sewing). The separation of academic and cultural courses continues to reinforce the hierarchical structures inherited from colonialism and makes it seem natural and inevitable (Shobat and Stam, 2009). This hierarchy reinforces cultural polarities and can make it seem that these ‘cultural courses’ supplement the ‘real’ curriculum (Aylward, 2009, p. 88). In response, teachers are constantly challenged to incorporate the Inuit Qaujimajatauqangit (IQ) principles into daily planning and instruction.

Traditional Inuit knowledge, referred to as the Inuit Qaujimajatauqangit (IQ) principles, were incorporated at Nunavut’s conception. The IQ principles are as follows (taken from the Government of Nunavut website):

- **Inuuqatigiitsiarniq:** Respecting others, relationships and caring
for people.

Tunnganarniq: Fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive.

Pijitsirniq: Serving and providing for family and/or community.

Aajiiqatigiinniq: Decision making through discussion and consensus

Pilimmaksarniq: Development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.

Ikajuqtigiinniq: Working together for a common cause.

Qanuqtuurniq: Being innovative and resourceful.

Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq: Respect and care for the land, animals and the environment.

The IQ principles play a fundamental role in challenging Eurocentric hegemony. The IQ principles are a clear articulation of Inuit societal values but have not yet become part of the commonsense for Qallunaat in their approach to teaching. For the IQ principles to become fused into Qallunaat epistemologies, Qallunaat teachers need to be given the opportunity to engage how, “Eurocentrism is not a conscious political stance taken by people in the world but an implicit positioning” (Shobat and Stam, 2009, p. 139-40). This unconscious positioning of Eurocentrism in the attitudes and beliefs of Qallunaat teachers tends to undermine the whole project of Inuit self-government. If those in positions of authority and influence hold Eurocentric perspectives remain unchallenged, then the hegemonic hierarchy of European and Inuit worldviews will continue. This speaks directly to Henry Giroux’s discussion of school as sites of both domination and contestation where “power must be seen as a force that works both on people and through them” (Giroux, 2001, p. 63). Schools need to be sites of discourse where the relationship between power and knowledge and the inequalities in wider society, can be viewed and evaluated in terms of historical and contemporary contexts, in short, as societal processes (Giroux, 2001).

It is interesting to reflect on how Eurocentrism has become “obscured in a kind of buried epistemology” (Shobat and Stam, 2009, p. 138). It is this moment that exposes the relationship between school culture and lived experiences that produces dominance and resistance located within power dynamics that are inescapable (Giroux, 2001). The need to imbed the
elements of critique and conflict (deliberation) as the core of one’s pedagogy is clear. Giroux proposes this can be accomplished through “different social groups both accept[ing] and reject[ing] the complex mediations of culture, knowledge, and power that give form and meaning to the process of schooling” (Giroux, 2001, p. 62). The shared narrative of colonization that binds Inuit and Qallunaat together can create a space for solidarity and reconciliation.

Giroux (2001) articulates the naturalization of Eurocentric hegemony by failing to recognize,

how the social, political, and economic conditions of society create either directly or indirectly some of the oppressive features of schooling. More specifically … the ways in which powerful institutions and groups influence knowledge, social relations, and modes of evaluation that characterize the ideological texture of school life (p. 55).

A dialectical critical approach that involves “mediation” is a way of working towards a more equal partnership between Inuit and Qallunaat. Working together to develop a tool to critically examine how one’s “own views about knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through commonsense assumptions” (Giroux, 2001, p. 67) can lead a meaningful dialogue about how these variables structure the school environment.

By understanding school as an agency of socialization that occurs through the social interactions of students and adults, teachers need to be aware of the unconscious representations that they construct in the school. This must include attention to the “structural silences” and ideological messages that shape the form and content of school knowledge” (Giroux, 2001, p. 61). This effort is necessary if one is committed to a pursuit of liberation, personal dignity and social justice (Giroux, 2001). Teachers can be empowered to be agents of change by developing and implementing their own personal epistemology that reflects “a theory of schooling concerned with both reproduction and transformation” (Giroux, 2001, p. 61). The process of developing a reflective and inclusive pedagogy begins by “developing a theory of classroom practice…based on a theoretical foundation that acknowledges the dialectical interplay of social interest, political power, and economic power on the one hand, and school
knowledge and practice on the other” (Giroux, 2001, p. 44). In the most fundamental sense, the classroom teacher plays the role of ‘mediator’ between theory and practice in daily interaction with young people, and the various stakeholders in education. The creation of a genuine dialogue about how to best examine one’s personal views with regards to how “knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through commonsense assumptions they use to structure classroom experiences” (Giroux, 2001, p. 67) would be beneficial to daily teaching practice, and also provides a means of *ikajuqtigiinniq*.

**Qallunaat Educators and the Future of Nunavut**

The concept of race continues to create divisions between Inuit and Qallunaat and is resulting in the fragmentation of Nunavut society (Henderson, 2007). As a consequence, the displacement of Inuit epistemologies with Qallunaat ways of thinking and learning continues. As Gay explains, when students “are denied use of their natural ways of talking, their thinking, intellectual engagement, and academic efforts are diminished as well” (Gay, 2002, p. 111). Developing a means of bridging this cultural gap clearly needs to be a focus for teacher training in Nunavut. Without effort in developing this awareness of race, “the educational legacy of imperialism … that has shaped many of our ideas about education [will continue] to play a small but significant part in what the young learn of the world” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 4). School, for better or for worse, remains an important and consistent source of knowledge about the world for racialized peoples (Taylor and Hoechsmann, 2012). A public discourse, which operates on the assumption that society is not free from the influence of power relationships, is key in disrupting the “dominant modes of exclusion [that] are continuously “naturalized” by power wielders’ control of information” (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 8).

Inuit youth are struggling to negotiate a situation in which they must reconcile a sense of double consciousness. Double consciousness can be generally understood “as transcendent position allowing one to see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion – margins and mainstreams” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 260). This culture of hybridity is a direct consequence of contact and transition into modernity (Hall, 2006). Education plays an important role in helping transcend this consciousness by engaging Inuit youth to recognize the validity of their cultural
epistemologies. But for this to occur, Qallunaat teachers need to engage in a critical pedagogy of reflection.

This critical pedagogy must concern itself with questions of justice, democracy, and ethical claims, involving an appreciation of how a variety of perspectives (Inuit and Qallunaat) produce and deploy knowledge (Kincheloe, 2010). This has intense political, cultural, and emotional ramifications within the Nunavut educational system. Inuit have suffered deep rifts in their social and cultural identity resulting from colonialist policies. The subtle process of assimilation through the colonial epistemologies of Qallunaat, and the self-essentialization of Inuit, has silently naturalized itself within the public consciousness. This is a direct consequence of lacking a shared discourse surrounding hegemony and race.

An approach to developing a unified pedagogy begins with the concept that “school mediates rather than imposes its power on students” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 352). Education must work for Inuit to gain self-reliance and the continued success of self-government by preparing youth to be active citizens. The current situation in Nunavut classrooms is that Qallunaat are not aware of the hegemonic power relations they support. These power relations have embedded themselves within the cultural and institutional domains of Nunavut and have “become so naturalized, [and] so pervasive that it has become invisible or transparent to those who are not adversely impacted by them” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 114). The key is connecting all stakeholders within the Nunavut educational system to a pedagogy of liberation.

Inuit and Qallunaat need to work to “join together in a mutual struggle for democracy and empowerment” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 352). Power manifests itself, not in isolation, but with the social domain. It cannot be expected that Inuit bear sole responsibility for resisting oppression, as the complexity and ambiguity of power does not limit itself to the control of either the dominant or the subordinate (Steinberg, 2012). A pedagogy against oppression involves partnerships between the oppressor and the oppressed (Friere, 1970). Friske explains that power, “is a systematic set of operations upon people that works to ensure the maintenance of the social order ...and ensure its smooth running” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 354). Within the narrative relationship of student and teacher, “individuals move in and out of empowered and disempowered positions” (Steinberg, 2012, p. 354). Translating this narrative relationship to an understanding of colonialist
history, and the whole of the education system, is where a true pedagogy of liberation can be brought to fruition.

The future of Nunavut depends on the positive relationships between Inuit and Qallunaat. But if Inuit youth continue to perceive their culture as being dominated by Eurocentric epistemologies, then the education system is not serving the purpose of Inuit self-government. Students need to see the social capital that their culture possesses. Qallunaat teachers play a key role is facilitating this reflective process, but this goes far beyond teaching Inuit culture as a historical episode in Nunavut’s history. Teachers are in a position to mediate a dialogue with students that critically engages the issues that are currently facing them in the communities. But this requires a pedagogy that is culturally relevant and one that focuses on deliberation. Inuit culture emphasizes the notion of continuous progress in one’s personal improvement. Traditionally, learning occurred through observation and guidance and was facilitated by ‘experts’ within the family. Children were provided with immediate and positive feedback and were encouraged to be persistent in the face of adversity (Aylward, 2009). These observational qualities remain strong attributes of Nunavummiut. In a social studies classroom that focuses on citizenship and personal and cultural identity, modelling the learning environment that respects Inuit cultural and social norms, such as inuuqatigiitsiarniq, tunngarnarniq, pijitsirniq, and aajiiqatigiinniq, is key to making an academic course culturally relevant. As mentioned above, consistent and clear expectations make this possible.

Many students have to overcome adversity to come to class. Focusing on this ability to persevere is a highly relevant cultural attribute that students can take pride in. Ensuring that students understand that the learning process involves continuous progress, and that no matter where they are in their education that they can still succeed, is fundamental to making education culturally relevant. However, we need to do better job at supporting our students by providing them with the required assessments and positive feedback they need to be successful and to ensure their continuous progress (Auditor General of Canada, 2013).

Simply put, the Government of Nunavut lacks the necessary capacity at the present time for change (Auditor General of Canada, 2010). This puts the onus of teacher training on the shoulders of teachers themselves. Qallunaat teachers require the guidance of their Inuit colleagues and friends. But Inuit are also in need of reflective decolonization in regards to self-
essentialization as a consequence of Eurocentric hegemony. A shared narrative of colonization that simultaneously acknowledges and resists the colonial bond between Inuit and Qallunaat is the utmost imperative in fostering this positive relationship.

**Conclusion**

Nunavut is a territory comprised of an Inuit majority and a small minority of Qallunaat from different parts of Canada and the world. This is important to acknowledge when contemplating the ways in which a diversity of epistemological perspectives are developed and practiced (Ladson-Billings, 2000). For Qallunaat teachers working in the cross-cultural settings of Nunavut, this must be part of one’s pedagogy. A pedagogy that focuses on the mediation of dialogue with students in reconciling the issues of double consciousness is key. At the same time, it is important not to support the hegemonic dominance of Eurocentricism. This is no small task. For the Qallunaat teacher, this must involve an attempt to reconcile herself as both an agent of colonialism, and as an agent of resistance.

The discourse in Nunavut of North and South, Inuit and Qallunaat, creates a clear binary between Eurocentric and Inuit epistemologies. Educators in Nunavut should work diligently in partnership to engage the continued Eurocentric hegemony that was, “achieved through conquest and colonization …[and]…legitimate[s] the political and cultural domination of imperialism” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 3). Deconstructing and resisting the maintenance of these opposing epistemologies is a necessary step in the process of reconciliation in Canada’s North. Educators must work in solidarity to resist the ongoing influence of imperialism’s view of the world through the hidden curriculum (Giroux, 2001). A shared narrative of colonialism that leads to partnerships between Inuit and Qallunaat in improving the education system in Nunavut, is indeed a reflection of the wider need for reconciliation between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal peoples across Canada.

Education must empower Inuit youth to feel they have a constructive role in the future of their communities. Through making sense of the past, and developing a shared narrative to navigate the issues faced by educators in Nunavut, we can better assist Inuit youth to become empowered by education, and actively participate in the restoration of Inuit Nunangat.
References


CBC News. Retrieved from: