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How can access to new technologies contribute to the empowerment of indigenous girls
and women in a particular region of Canada?:

The Importance of Education for Iqaluit Youth

Isabella Walter, Jocelyn Ha, Delila Farias, Vivian Maas, Sonia Blinderman, Lauren McKenzie

The Study, Montreal

Lead instructor: Ms. Marie-France Sénécal

UWCM mentor: Dr. Yvonne Saleh

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Context

Nunavut is known for being the home of the largest Inuit population in Canada. According to the government of Nunavut, 84% of the population of Nunavut are Inuit.¹ It currently has the fastest growing population of any province and/or territory in Canada, with an increase of 12.7% between 2011 and 2016.² In Iqaluit, the population was 6 699 in 2011. There are 6 schools in Iqaluit: three elementary schools, one middle school, one secondary school, and one french school. There is one post-secondary school: the Nunavut Arctic College.³ The application fee for Nunavut Arctic College is \$100, while the tuition is \$3400 per semester for degree programs.⁴

In 2011, 67.0% of the Iqalumiut population spoke only English predominantly at home. However, 46.6% of the population had Inuktitut as their mother tongue. In comparison, the territorial percentage for Inuktitut as the mother tongue was 67.8%; a percentage more than 20% greater.⁵

In 2012, the median age in Nunavut was 24.7, whereas the national median was 40 years old.¹ Nunavut has the youngest population in Canada due to high suicide rates, high fertility rates, and lower life expectancy compared to the national average. The percentage of the population that are children (younger than 15 years of age) is the highest in our nation at 31.7%, which is nearly double the national percentage. Meanwhile, the percentage of the population that are seniors (65 and older) is substantially the lowest nationally, at 3.3%. The proportion of males to females is the second highest in the country with 105 males to 100 females, second to only the Northwest Territories.⁶

Research focus

While our group conversed with Ms. Redfern, the mayor of Iqaluit, she enlightened us about many topics that we had never thought of before. She showed us numerous problems that Nunavut is having regarding many different aspects of life, such as education and internet. Many of the topics that we are discussing in this essay were brought to our attention by Ms. Redfern and were discussed with her.

The Inuit are one of the indigenous peoples of Canada. The largest defining moment of their history is arguably their forced sedentarisation in the territory we know today as Nunavut. Although this act was allegedly meant to benefit the Inuit by giving them free healthcare and modern education, their distance from the cities to the South resulted in an astronomically high standard of living. Food, which has to be imported; and lodging, of which there are not enough to house the residents; expend a large portion of their earnings. With such pressing matters at hand, i.e. poverty and hunger, how could we expect them to justify the price of internet?

We – the Canadians of the south – take fast, reasonably-priced internet for granted; the people of Iqaluit, however, are not awarded this privilege. Nunavut relies on satellite internet, which is infamous for being expensive and slow. Unlike Nunavut, the provinces of Canada use fiber internet which is prodigiously faster. The lack of competition in the north allows all of the three local internet service providers to offer packages that sell residents obscenely sluggish download speeds at exorbitant prices.

Although located in a western and developed country, all 25 communities in Nunavut⁷ are extremely isolated from the rest of the world. Their location in the arctic tundra distances them geographically from the rest of Canada. Inexpensive and high quality internet is a critical tool to keep them connected to our contemporary reality. Nunavut's current situation is comparable to that of Canada's before commercial internet was made available. Research was slow and difficult because one would have to go through physical texts in order to find information that they needed; and a person could spend hours upon hours in libraries going through the shelves without finding the information that they were searching for. Now that we have the technology that simplifies the entire process tenfold, it is arguably unethical to not share it with those who do not have it.

Canada has the great opportunity and privilege of being connected via the internet to the rest of the world. In Montreal, \$44.95 per month could pay for unlimited internet with a download speed of 15 megabytes per second (MBS) and an upload speed of 10 MBS.⁸ Meanwhile, in Iqaluit, \$399.00 per month could pay for 50 gigabytes (GB) of internet with a download speed of 15 MBS and an upload speed of 1 MBS (this plan is available in all 25 communities).⁹ These numbers demonstrate the message being conveyed: the internet in Nunavut is considerably more costly and more sluggish than the provinces of Canada.

The government constantly tries to fund projects for the people of Nunavut in attempt to rectify the lack of quality internet, but there have been no results yet. The federal government gives the internet companies of Nunavut the budget to improve the internet, but they have given to companies that own spatial internet satellites.¹⁰ Therefore the federal government is funding slow

satellite companies instead of projects for new, quicker, more affordable internet, which is what they should be financing to help the Inuit get and stay connected.

The laws of Canada dictates that children should receive free compulsory schooling until the age of 16, except in provinces in which the legal dropout age is 18 or until the child has gotten a high school diploma.¹¹ While the rest of Canada does not include it in their curricula, Nunavut has integrated social promotion into their teaching. Social promotion, according to the Oxford dictionary, is “the practice promoting a child to the next grade level regardless of skill mastery in the belief that it will promote self-esteem.”¹² As children would not have to work to achieve their diploma, this system reinforces low school attendance rates.

Countless students have suffered academically because of this ideology. Young children, regardless of whether or not they understand the material they are being taught, are moved up to the next grade because of their age. This does not cultivate lack of grit and drive amongst students as proper education should. Their lack of interest and determination causes many adolescents to dropout of school when they are legally allowed to. Statistically, Nunavut has the lowest graduation rate compared to any other territory or province in Canada.¹³

It is more or less universally agreed, though it may not be reflected in the practices of the country, that education is one of the keystones of a high-functioning society. With the augmented dropout rate and lack of interest in education, a lot of the working population of Nunavut are manual laborers doing blue collar work. A report on the benefits of a well-educated population concluded that university graduates are less likely to commit crimes, and drink or smoke in

excess.¹⁶ This would be exceptionally beneficial to the population of Nunavut because, in 2014, 62.0% of Nunavummiut smoked. This figure breaks down into 59.0% of males from Nunavut and 65.3% of females from Nunavut.¹⁷ Moreover, in 2011, almost 4 500 people in Nunavut were heavy drinkers.¹⁸ A study from the same source deduced that university graduates are expected to live a longer life, and have less of a chance of becoming obese. Both of these aspects specifically apply to Nunavut. The life expectancy in Nunavut is lower than the national average, as mentioned before. In 2001, it was 67 years of age.¹⁹ Also, in 2013, over 10 000 adults in Nunavut were obese.²⁰ The education of Canadian indigenous women would have the same positive effects on society. A quality education for Nunavut's population would be greatly beneficial to their well-being.

It is important that children are properly educated on all topics, including those that are considered taboo by their community. Traditionally, the Inuit community considered sexuality, pregnancy, and other topics of the like as taboo.²¹ Sexual health education, as it is, is lacking in that it is unvarying and it does not reflect the people they should connect to. The applicability of sexual health education as we know it is heavily dependent on one's sexual agency (that is, their ability to make decisions in that context).²² Those who have little to no control over their sexual-decision making are just as susceptible to the associated health problems, but are not taught how to take proper precautions against them. Additionally, a study showed that the majority of youth were familiar with condom use and basic sexually transmitted infections (STI's), which were discussed in school; yet were unfamiliar about Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea, the two most common STI's in Nunavut.²³ Furthermore, little sexual education can lead to teenage pregnancy. In 2009, 20% of births in Nunavut were from mothers between the ages of 15 and 19, compared to 4%

nationally.²⁴ The current sexual health education in place is so distant it undermines itself by alienating the very audience they attempt to reach.

Currently in the world, there is a great deal of sexism towards women. Women, in many countries, still do not have the same basic rights as men do. In western society, numerous women do not have equal pay. Women are underrepresented in many fields, from the media to politics. Canada, for example, has only ever had one female prime minister: Kim Campbell. However, she was in office for the short period of five months (from June to November of 1993).²⁵ The empowerment of women, more specifically Canadian indigenous women, has been an everlasting battle.

Proposed Solution

Our group believes that we can temporarily but quickly ameliorate the current situation of Inuit youth through technological means. In order to improve information accessibility for those who do not have free access to the boundless internet, we propose to personally curate information and resources that we find are both age-appropriate and absolutely vital to know; not unlike how a school board develops its curricula. We can do this by giving them electronic devices that have the ability to function as a mix of a computer and a Kindle, such as Raspberry Pi. These devices would already be programmed to contain information on topics we believe they may need the most. These devices could be updated by downloading ready-compressed files filled with new information. This allows for a temporary solution for the inequality of internet in northern Canada.

By having a discreet mode of research, indigenous women can educate themselves on topics that may be taboo to discuss. These devices could be the solution to the aforementioned sexual health issues that are currently occurring in Nunavut. As these devices are not reliant on WiFi, it offers them the ease and efficiency of filtering through information stored on electronic databases without having the speed be compensated by poor internet. These electronic devices may be more reliable than in books that may be outdated or from people who may be wrong. This could solve most of the North's problems with sexual health, sexual education, and the stigma associated with these two subjects.

These lessons would include as many subjects as possible, including language studies, mathematics, and sciences that are pertinent to students in grades 6 to 12. The device's goal is to specifically allow for Nunavut's population to receive the equal education which they deserve. It would be preferred for the lessons to discuss a wide range of topics which the students could be interested in as a career path. Including career education in these lessons as well would be greatly beneficial to the young adult students who are still deciding which career to dedicate their lives to.

The students can take the device to their community center, where there are computers, and learn or catch up on material that they had missed or not completely understood. These lessons are ideal because they cover two of many different styles of learning: audibly and visually. Video learning enhances the experience of having these lessons since it would be similar to having a chalkboard at school. The environment of learning is quite similar, except the students can work at their own pace in order to learn more efficiently. This way, students can benefit from their education without being impacted by social promotion.

Our group believes that social promotion starts to especially affect students when they start middle school. The impact of it intensifies once middle school starts, as the curriculum gets more difficult. Social promotion at this age is counterintuitive since middle school and high school are the middle to the end of children's developmental years. Grades 6 to 12 are crucial to every student's academic achievement, which is why we chose these years' curricula for our lessons.

The curriculum on the audio-visual devices would be Nunavut's curriculum, from grades 6 to 12, with the addition of sexual education. The government of Nunavut would help decide what goes on the device, but it is mostly pre-determined by their current schooling material. This new device is not reforming the entire territory's education system, but aiding with the flaws within it, such as social promotion and the lack of sexual education. It is possible to add more information that the federal government deems appropriate for the devices since they are easily updated with new information. The Canadian government would need to take the initiative and fund this project.

How our Solution Empowers Indigenous Women in Nunavut

We believe it would in our best interest to present said information in the form of audio-visual lessons, dictated in English, French, and Inuktitut. This would allow unilingual or not perfectly bilingual people to learn their second language properly. This gives the people of Nunavut the opportunity to be connected to the rest of Canada via language. The population could learn our two official languages as a nation, English and French, which would benefit them if they ever travel throughout Canada and the world. This would also allow for lessons in Inuktitut in order to keep the language alive for generations to come, since, as aforementioned, 67% of the

population of Iqaluit predominantly spoke English at home even though 84% of the population is Inuit. The creation of those lessons may also prove to be a learning experience, though for a different demographic. We could involve people in our community by giving them the chance to voice the audio-visual lessons. This would raise awareness about the educational disparity between the north and the south, which would consequently result in a greater, communal effort to combat this inequality that prevents our country from progress as a whole.

The problem with the education system of Nunavut is a vast one that cannot be corrected quickly. However, our team is convinced that our solution, though temporary, may lessen the effect it has on their youth. We believe that our audio-visual lessons could not only educate Nunavut youth on topics that are considered taboo in their culture, but also break the cycle of high dropout rates by fostering in Nunavummiut children the interest in learning to learn.

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