

# SUMMARY OF AAJIQATIGIINGNIQ



Joamie School Students

A Report on Language of Instruction

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Background

The Departments of Education and CLE&Y commissioned a study into the Language of Instruction for Nunavut Schools in January 2000. Canadian Heritage provided funding for the research. The purpose of the research was to inform policy and planning in order to ensure that strong, vibrant and rigorous language programs in schools result in a bilingual population for Nunavut, consistent with the goal set in the Bathurst Mandate and the Nunavut Act.

Prof. Ian Martin of York University produced the research study, *Aajigatigiingniq*. Dr. Martin worked with a team of Inuit researchers to collect data from 9 communities across Nunavut and from a number of focus groups. *Aajiqatigiingniq* is a discussion paper that presents a major 20-year plan for the development of a strong bilingual program for the Nunavut educational system.

In his report Prof. Ian Martin states that the “long-term threat to Inuit language from English is found everywhere, and current school language policies and practices on language are contributing to that threat.” He further states that the current model, inherited from the NWT, forces Inuit students to become English speakers if they wish to continue education beyond the grade 4-5 transition point and thus “replaces the child’s first language with an imperfectly learned second language and...too often neither language develops to its full potential.”

The current system of language instruction does little more than pay lip service to the language of the students and their parents and grandparents’ values. It teaches them in a language they don’t fully understand with the result that they become bored or frustrated with school and do not graduate or achieve success, as they should. This alienation of young people from education and from their own language and culture is present to some extent in all communities, but Prof. Martin observes that in the larger centres, such as Iqaluit and Rankin Inlet, it is a crisis. Respecting the key role of Inuit language and culture is an important step in reversing school failure and bringing Nunavut’s young people into a circle of belonging, first to Nunavut, and then to the wider world.

Prof. Martin’s paper argues for a 20-year language plan to coincide with the Bathurst mandate vision of achieving a “fully functional bilingual society, in Inuktitut and English...” by the year 2020. He proposes a territory-wide framework for language of instruction along with several models of bilingual education to meet specific circumstances found in some communities. All the models are designed to ensure that Inuktitut in all its forms will be the main working language of government and recognize that the heritage of Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit* is primarily accessible only to those who command a well-developed knowledge of Inuit language.

Prof. Martin’s study draws upon considerable educational research and theory which says that affirming pupils’ cultural and linguistic identities by using their first or heritage language as a full language of instruction develops literacy through their first language without weakening their academic development in English. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that, under a strong bilingual program, Nunavut students’ English skills will improve significantly over today’s level.

Prof. Martin stresses that there must be community education and consultation on the importance of language and the suggested approaches. He identifies the training of a strong new generation of Inuit teachers as the most critical element for success but also points out the urgent need for extensive curriculum development and learning resource production. He observes that public confidence in the Government’s commitment to providing the necessary resources (human, curriculum and materials) is crucial to community acceptance of the framework for language instruction.

## GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR NUNAVUT

Prof. Martin proposes a general framework for the overall approach to the use of Inuit language and English in instruction. It contains four elements.

1. An Inuit language head start type pre-school program,
2. Grades K-3: 100% in Inuit language with the option of one oral English as a second language (ESL) period per day,
3. Grades 4-8: Inuit language used for the main academic subjects and ESL used for two periods per day with a focus on developing conversational skills,
4. Grades 9-12: both Inuit language and English could be used for academic subjects but students would take a minimum of one-language arts period and one other subject in each language.

The broad language education goal of the framework is to prepare students to move from elementary to secondary education with language skills suitable for taking high school courses in Inuit language or English.

**Qulliq Model:** This model is proposed by Prof. Martin to meet the needs of most Nunavut communities where Inuktitut is still widely used. It supports Inuktitut as the main language of instruction through grade 8. In this model, consistent with the current practice in many schools in Nunavut, English is not a language of instruction until grade 4. There may be an introduction of English as an oral subject earlier but the focus in the early years is on building strength and confidence in Inuktitut.

Beginning in grade 4 students would be given a formal language arts class daily in each language as well as two additional periods, one in each language of instruction. These 4 periods of instruction make up the basic language portion of this model. Through grade 8, all academic subjects (social studies, history, mathematics, science, etc.) would be taught in Inuktitut. The community would determine the language of instruction in non-academic subjects for the rest of the school day. At least two periods in each language of instruction would be maintained through grade 12 as follows:

- a period of Inuktitut language arts
- a period of Inuktitut as a language of instruction in a subject
- a period of English language arts
- a period of English as a language of instruction in a subject

**Inuinnaqtun Immersion:** In his research, Prof. Martin identified the Inuinnaqtun speaking communities as ones where profound language loss has occurred. These communities lack a significant number of fluent language speakers and most of the fluent speakers are Elders in the community. However, surveys of students show there is a strong desire to improve fluency in Inuinnaqtun. Parents agree that there should be more Inuinnaqtun in schools although they also rate English literacy as a high priority. Prof. Martin suggests that these communities require a language reclamation model, which should be implemented as soon as possible if Inuinnaqtun is to be revitalized as a living language.

The model that is recommended is an immersion model. It begins with total immersion (100%) in the pre-school. The Aboriginal Head Start in Kugluktuk already has established an Inuinnaqtun immersion program. This program should be replicated in other communities with a similar language situation. Immersion should be extended into the early elementary school years through grade 2.

Following the early years, a regular maintenance model of language of instruction (for instance, the Qulliq Model described previously) would be appropriate. Inuinnaqtun would be the main language of instruction with English required in two periods per day through grade 8.

Martin stresses that the approach in Inuinnaqtun speaking communities needs to be supported by a community language revival plan as well. This includes initiatives that would complement the immersion program such as Elder run language camps, adult learning opportunities, and master-language apprenticeships programs.

**Mixed Population Model:** This model was developed in consideration of the particular circumstances in Iqaluit (and perhaps Rankin Inlet) and the fact that neither of the previous models outlined addresses the issues presented there. These include the fact that Qallunaat make up almost 40% of the community's population and only about half of the Inuit residents say they speak Inuktitut at home. Students report a strong desire to improve their skills in Inuktitut but among Qallunaat parents only a minority report that Inuktitut-English bilingualism is a priority for their children. Given these facts and the strong emotions that language of instruction issues can evoke, particular care is required in consultation with the community and in developing a final model.

Prof. Martin proposes a two-way bilingual model as a possible approach for Iqaluit but states that a community based planning approach be put in place to develop the final model. In Martin's proposed two-way bilingual model, grades K-3 Inuktitut first-language speakers receive instruction in Inuktitut with one period of English as a Second Language per day. English first-language speakers receive instruction in English with one period of Inuktitut as a Second Language a day.

Starting in grade 4, a formal language arts class daily in each language would be offered as well as two additional periods, one in each language of instruction. This would increase until the program is 50% Inuktitut and 50% English by the end of grade 6. That approach would continue through high school.

Prof. Martin stresses that in Iqaluit, perhaps more than in any other community, the acceptance of the option provided is going to depend on the availability of high quality curriculum, learning resources and teachers. As already pointed out, consultation and community involvement is also crucial.

### Critical Elements

Prof. Martin stresses several important elements that are required to support the implementation of all these models:

- Government should re-affirm its commitment to a fully functional bilingual society and, through the Education Act, support a "strong" model of bilingual education;
- Sufficient resources must be provided to ensure that the required number of Inuit teachers are trained and employed in the school system and that Inuktitut language curriculum and resources can be developed and implemented in schools;
- Promotion campaigns and community consultation must be carried out to ensure support for the goal and to allow community input into selection of community appropriate models of language instruction.

For more information or copies of documents contact:

Language of Instruction  
Department of Education  
PO Box 1000, Stn. 960  
Iqaluit, NU  
X0A 0H0

Telephone: (867) 975-5600  
Fax: (867) 975-5605

Copies of *Aajiqatigiingniq* are available on the Department of Education's web site.

<http://www.gov.nu.ca/education/eng/>

