

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

Case Study:

**Northern Adult Basic Education
Enhancement Initiative, Nunavut Arctic
College**

Iqaluit, Nunavut



Canada

This project is funded by the
Government of Canada's Office
of Literacy and Essential Skills



About the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) in partnership with Employment and Social Development Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami developed a comprehensive inventory of Essential Skills initiatives aimed at First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The *First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES Inventory Project's (FIMESIP)* goal is to better understand the state of practice with respect to Essential Skills initiatives tailored to First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth and adults living in diverse communities throughout Canada and to share these insights and lessons learned with a larger community of practice. Through FIMESIP, we have identified factors ("markers" of promising practice) that contribute to the initiatives' success.

CCDF gratefully acknowledges the support of the Steering Committee and Working Group of FIMESIP:

The markers, inventory, case studies and evaluation toolkit are available at: www.fimesip.ca.

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Overview

In November 2011, the Canadian Northern Economic and Development Agency (CanNor) provided funding to the three Northern Colleges to enhance Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. Nunavut Arctic College has pursued and implemented a number of new initiatives to enhance its ABE programs and support Inuit learners. The funding is managed by Nunavut Arctic College's Department of Community and Distance Learning. Currently, this initiative is in its third year of the five-year Northern Adult Basic Education Program (NABEP). The college is now piloting a number of new courses in the program in the college's Adult Community Learning Centres situated across Nunavut.

The need for this new approach stemmed from observations and feedback about the goals of students who entered the college's Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. ABE programs range from literacy (ABE 110 level) through to secondary school completion (ABE 150 and 160 levels). Adult students entering at the ABE 110 level may take years to reach the 150 level. Often, the goal of adults entering the ABE program is employment. Given family and other life responsibilities, adults want to increase their academic and employability skills so they can enter the labour market with the skills they need. The ABE programs at the college did not sufficiently address the needs of this group, as it was designed for those who continue on through the levels to high school completion. To better support this group of learners, the college began developing an "enhanced" ABE program through the incorporation of Workplace Essential Skills (ES) into the curriculum. This allows students to continue to increase their academic levels, while also gaining key ES should they choose to seek employment. Another fundamental goal of the college's enhancement of ABE under the CanNor funding was to indigenize the ABE curriculum through the inclusion of Elders and development of a new integrated Inuit language curriculum with teaching resources and assessment tools and of a new ABE course to bridge the concept of work in traditional Inuit society and in Nunavut today. The goal of the initiative was to enhance the ABE program, making it more relevant to Nunavut workplaces and increasing student retention by making the curriculum more student-centred.

The college set out a five-year plan for developing the ABE Enhanced Program. In the first year, the program developers conducted extensive research, looking at other programs that have integrated ES into adult basic education, as well as how

other ABE programs have approached the indigenization of their curriculum and practice. In the second year, they began developing curricula, course materials and other elements to support ES learning. In its third year, the program is being piloted. Over the next two years an evaluation of the program will be completed to inform further program development and delivery .

Essential Skill Focus

In order for ES learning to be relevant to Inuit learners, the program needed to infuse Inuit cultural and history, into the program. Accordingly the program developers considered ES development from an Inuit perspective, redefining the ES within an Inuit context and tailoring teaching methods to Inuit learners. As starting point, the program developer added three Inuit ES to the current [nine](#) defined by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). These three additional ES are based on the way of Inuit learning and life and include:

- **Inuktitut Literacy:** Inuktitut literacy is fundamental to the current way of life for Inuit people in Nunavut. In the workplace and in community life, one must be able to speak and write in Inuktitut. The ability to know, speak and write the language is also a strong value in Inuit identity, culture, and tradition.
- **Understanding the Concepts of Inuit Values:** Understanding and upholding Inuit values at work and at home is fundamental to Inuit culture. In the Inuit way of talking about the world of work, you cannot separate work from values. The way you live in your community, at work and with your family are how you express those values. This is different from a conventional approach to the world of work, where ES training is viewed as a strategy to support getting ready for the wage economy. ES training in the Inuit context is about developing skills to help you live your life and express the Inuit values.
- **Creating and Nurturing Personal Wellness:** Tied strongly to the skill of understanding values is the skill of creating and nurturing one's personal wellness. Dan Page, ABE Manager, said, "To be able to work or contribute to society and family, one needs to be healthy, have a positive identity, strong family values, and self-confidence." He added that "... family relationships are important because family is your support as you move through the world, and how you work to support them." Personal wellness, in this context, is also

about employability -- getting work, retaining it and developing one's career.

To integrate these 12 ES into the program, the college uses an ES curriculum customized by the Pathways to Possibilities (PTP) Adult Learning and Employment Programs. The enhanced NABE also includes an *Inuktitut First Language* course and *Preparing for Change* – a cultural history course taught in tandem with the Inuktitut language course contextualizing the rapid changes in the labour market in Nunavut. Participants are also required to build a learning portfolio. The ES are taught via an integrated approach that is applied through a project-based learning process.

Objectives

The main objectives of the five-year pilot project are for students to:

- Develop employability skills that will assist them in being able to find and secure employment;
- Develop increased confidence in their abilities and sense of self; and
- Increase their academic levels so that they can continue onto further learning, including post-secondary education.

Promising Practice (Keys to Success)

Methodology/Approach

Program development began with a team of adult education faculty members from the college who offered different perspectives and lessons learned from their extensive teaching experience. They identified that there was a need for a program to support students who left the regular ABE program looking for a quick transition into the workforce and one that would incorporate cultural learning concepts and practices.

The college explored ES programming across Canada, and identified PTP's *WorkWrite Series* as a suitable model for their program. The ES resources developed by PTP for the college focus on four ES: document use, English Reading, English Writing, and Numeracy. Both the Manager of ABE and the Director of Community and Distance Learning at the college took PTP's training in order to fully understand their assessment model (*Communications and Math Employment Readiness Assessment*, CAMERA), PTP's *WorkWrite Series* and its application to the

development of the ABE Enhanced Program. With this training and their other research, the Manager and Director, with the program development team, developed an approach for the ABE Enhanced Program.

The program development team decided early on that for the ABE Enhanced Program to be successful it needed to be approached first and foremost from an Inuit cultural perspective. The focus of the approach is based in the Inuit belief and value that the purpose of education is to create an able human being or an *inummarik* – an able person who can act with wisdom (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, 2007). Learning is developmental and teaching integrates the perspectives of people of different ages and depths of experience. As such, the learning in this program is holistic in approach and directly connected to the role and reality of work in Nunavut. All skills developed in the program are interwoven together as they are in life and workplace situations. Also, there are many “teachers” in the classroom: there are instructors teaching students, Elders teaching students, students teaching instructors and Elders teaching instructors. Furthering this approach, all instruction of the ABE Enhanced Program is guided by the following learning principles:

- Inuit language and culture should be forefront and integrated within the ABE content;
- Learning should take place in a variety of cultural and workplace settings in the community (e.g. going to sit with Elders in their homes rather than having to make them travel to the classroom);
- Elders are present in the classroom or on the land as the experts, guest lecturers, curriculum advisors and as supports for students and staff;
- Non-Inuit instructors will have the opportunity to learn the culture by taking part in activities with students, recognizing that the instructor is as a much learner as the student;
- Inuit pedagogy is positively reinforced throughout the learning experience, emphasizing, according to Page, “... that learning is personal, not pushing students to participate in an activity, offering encouragement to *try* and emphasizing that learning is a developmental process and it gets better with practice.”

Structure of the Program

The ES curriculum in the ABE Enhanced Program includes 120 lessons taught in 3-hour blocks for 120 days of instruction. The program gives equal weight to *Preparing for Change* (an Inuit cultural history course) and *Inuktitut First Language* as to ES development. These courses ground students in their culture and support motivation to engage with the ES training. ES training would not be possible, instructor Saa Pitsiulak believes, if the program did not start with helping participants to know about themselves.

“Knowing who I am – my identity – who I came from – my ancestry – and how we (Inuit) have lived and survived is what we were taught growing up, so that is where I start my courses from,”

Saa Pitsiulak, Instructor, *Preparing for Change* and *Inuktitut First Language*.

In addition to these two starting components, the ABE Enhancement Program includes:

1. **An Integrated Approach to ES Training:** To customize the PTP *WorkWrite Series* for this program, the program developers focused on Numeracy and Reading Text and intentionally developed activities that mimicked what happens in life and the world of work in Nunavut. The ES are integrated into the curriculum and project-based learning activities across all courses.
 2. **Students Practice their Skills for Assessment:** Instructors use practice sessions as part of the student assessment process. Students are encouraged to assess themselves and discuss their assessment with the instructor. The students are given a few practice sessions before their formal assessment is completed. This allows students, who are generally uncomfortable with formal testing, to be more at ease and feel more confident when the instructor is assessing their skills development. What is also unique about the assessment process is that all ES are integrated into each assessment. There isn't a Math test per se. Numeracy, Reading Text, Writing Text and Document Use questions are interwoven into each test. The college has developed the assessment rubrics to pull out separate marks for each skill. The college approaches ES assessment this way because it provides students with a real life context for
- the skill. The college has found that the students are familiar with the context, then, they are more easily able to demonstrate the skills for assessment.
3. **Supporting a Group Learning Process:** The instructor gives the students a workplace task and student groups work together to complete it. Rather than using teaching strategies that are prescriptive and based on an individualistic approach, this model tries to replicate how learning happens in the workplace and in the community. “Work is a social environment for almost all of us. When [the students] go to work, they will have an opportunity to learn and why not replicate that kind of environment in the classroom,” Dan Page, Manager, ABE. The group learning approach also supports a sense of community in the classroom, as demonstrated by the shared sense of responsibility the participants show towards each other.
 4. **Project Based Learning:** The college uses project-based learning in many of its other programs and has found that it has been very successful with their adult learners. Naturally, the college chose to use this approach in the ABE Enhancement Program. Participants have a blend of projects that are both cultural in nature, such as learning how to make and use the Qulliq (traditional Inuit oil lamp), and other projects that target a community need, such as learning to sew parkas for family, friends or themselves. These experiential projects and activities allow students to demonstrate their development of the 12 ES targeted in the program and each project becomes part of the assessment process in the program.
 5. **Students Direct the Learning:** Students work with the instructor to develop course topics they want to learn about and community-oriented projects they want to develop. They can be something cultural, a current or important issue facing the community, or traditional activities relating to the particular time of year that their course is taking place. Course topics and activities are developed around these themes, while also integrating the development of the 12 ES.

Content of the Program

- **The Essential Skills Curriculum:** The content of the program is generated from, and specific to, the life and work experiences of an Inuk living in a community in Nunavut. Each ES lesson includes ES tasks for the learner to attempt and accomplish. The basis of the ES program content was

created from over 1000 workplace and cultural documents that the ABE Enhanced Program team collected from their community government offices, businesses, community services, healthcare, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) website, ITK's magazine for historical, cultural and contemporary articles, news releases from the Government of Nunavut, local museums and visitor centres, and films and documentaries from the National Film Board. Definitions of sample jobs found in the National Occupational Codes (NOC) are used in the program and, for jobs not found in the NOC, such as Seal Hunter, the team searched for similar roles and adapted them. These documents are organized into life skill and workplace themes such as: shopping, weather, and workplace safety. Elders and local resource people play a critical role in teaching topics such as: leadership, cultural ceremonies and games, hunting and gathering food, how to make and use tools, learning about the weather and parenting. All topics are related to the 12 targeted ES.

- **Preparing for Change:** This course introduces participants to Inuit history, culture, traditions and way of life. The content explores a range of historical topics from life before contact to colonialism, and focuses on times of transition for the Inuit. Specific topics include: the introduction of residential schools and English language, the founding of Nunavut and its government, and changes in the roles of men and women in the family due to the transition from a traditional economy to the modern-day labour market. The discussion of Inuit values is central to this course. Additionally, the concept of the importance of self-care, what it means and how to find support for it, is also explored.
- **Inuktitut First Language:** To support the development of Inuktitut literacy throughout the program, the language is actively learned through classroom discussion, guest speakers and project-based learning activities. The classroom is decorated with Inuktitut writing from the course calendar to words of encouragement from the Elders.

Delivery of the Resource

By enhancing the training of their own instructors, the college hopes to change the way it delivers ES programming to Inuit learners. Once the pilot period is complete, the college intends to have the same teaching staff offering both the ABE Enhancement Program and their regular ABE Program.

In most of the college delivery sites, there are one or two instructors who manage courses for groups of up to 15 students. In Iqaluit, there are two instructors: one to cover the ES portion of the program and the other to deliver *Preparing for Change* and *Inuktitut First Language* courses. In a typical day at the Iqaluit campus, students begin with an hour of keyboarding, and then they spend the rest of the morning in the *Preparing for Change* and *Inuktitut First Language* courses. The afternoons are spent on the ES curriculum. Each ES session is designed to be delivered in a three-hour block that supports the instructor and learner to cover the entire lesson within the class.

As the program progresses, classes begin to work on their project-based learning activities. These activities often incorporate field trips that take students out of the classroom. This beyond-the-classroom approach supports the Inuit way of learning through observation.

“Well, that’s how Inuit usually learn -- just by looking and they can just see how it’s done. I find that’s easier for me to learn to do things,” states Billy Tikivik, student, ABE Enhancement Program. Fellow student Jesse Flaherty agrees it’s best to “watch and learn.”

To lead the teaching component of the cultural or project-based learning activities, the instructors seek assistance from local Elders, community or family members of the students or their own family - people who have the skills and the willingness to participate and pass this learning along .

Outcomes of the Resource

An evidence-based evaluation has been built into the program to track outcomes at the end of the pilot period. The anticipated outcomes of the program include:

- Increased retention of ABE students;
- Better tracking of student progress, including literacy and skills development;
- Enhanced collaboration with Elder instructors in the college’s ABE programs;
- Increased use of information technology and skills development;

- Increased ES development for ABE learners through specific ES training;
- Integrated project-based learning in ABE programs, with students determining community-oriented projects and developing employability skills, such as teamwork and project management;
- Increased Inuit-language development through new Inuit theme-based ABE resources integrating Inuit history, traditional practices and stories;
- Increased training for adult educators in Nunavut who teach in ABE programs.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Although the program is still in its pilot phase, the program developers had the following lessons learned to share:

- It is important that instructors understand the 'big picture' that frames this new approach to teaching ES in the ABE Enhancement Program. The program is made up of several components and the instructor needs to understand how they work together. Instructors must:
 - Understand the twelve ES;
 - Use completely new ES modules and apply teaching strategies to support them;
 - Integrate *Inuktitut Literacy* and *Preparing for Change* courses within this program, instead of approaching them as stand-alone courses;
 - Support course work with project-based learning and recognize the "teachable moments" and embedded literacy opportunities that come from participating in Inuit cultural activities; and
 - Make use of the supplemental resources developed for the program.

There is professional development planned throughout this project and ongoing communication and support for instructors from the Manager of the ABE Programs.

One of the challenges was developing resources materials and teaching methods appropriate for the different learning centres and communities the college services. To address this challenge, the program developers worked to understand the local contexts and had the educators identify and collect local materials that would reflect the learners' community. The program developers

also visited the communities, conducted interviews with instructors, observed classes and, in one instance, also taught part of a class. All this gave them a better sense of the needs of local learners and instructors. It was decided to create each three hour ES course session to be as structured and detailed as possible to support the instructors.

The original college ABE English language assessment used in the first intake did not meet the needs of this new program. The newly developed English language Nunavut Adult Placement Assessment (NAPA), developed by Dr. Pat Campbell of Grass Roots Research, will be used for the next intake.

The program developers also identified a possible challenge in marketing the ABE Enhancement Program. They needed to find a way to distinguish how the program is different from the "regular" ABE program. They hope that this will come once the instructors have taught the program fully and as learners graduate from the program and talk about their experience with others in the community.

Currently, there is funding to support Elder inclusion in the program through CanNor funding. Elders are included in a variety of ways into the ABE Enhancement Programs, including acting as student counsellors, traditional knowledge experts and guest speakers. They lead aspects of the teaching and curriculum development, especially during the project-based learning activities. The college is currently looking for others funds after the pilot phase to continue to support Elder inclusion in this ABE programs .

Benefits

Interviews conducted for this case study found many benefits of the ABE Enhancement Program.

Participants said they appreciated:

- That there was more time spent on a subject when they needed it;
- The integration of *Inuktitut literacy* and *Preparing for Change* in the course work;
- That the instructors allowed time for breaks;
- That a guidance person at the college could be accessed for support;
- The personal stories shared by the teachers and their use of humour and storytelling; and,

- Being supported in their learning by having their family or community members come to the class as resource people or special guests.

Participants said that their families are very supportive and happy about their progress in the ABE Enhancement Program:

- “My family is so happy I’m in school” (Billy Tikivik);
- “My mother and father are happy; my father is really proud of me, he tells me every day ... even my sister, she doesn’t live here, but she calls and tells me not to give it up...” (Vicky Kooneeloosie);
- “They are very happy; it is my choice to make, but they are even more happy.” (Jesse Flaherty).

Instructors see that the ES curriculum creates a lot of discussion in the classroom. They also appreciate the assessment model. They commented that because the assessment of student skill development is discussion-based, both the instructor and the student acknowledge the learning has been attained and where the student needs more practice. Instructors see a key benefit of the ABE Enhancement Program as having the ability to relate the ES content to real world activities and work tasks the learners see in their own community.

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Resources

- Nunavut Arctic College. “ABE Essential Skills.” Program Outline: 085.
- Nunavut Arctic College. “Career and College Explorations.” Course Outline: 079-135.
- Nunavut Arctic College. “ES Communications 1.” Course Outline: Communications 1.
- Nunavut Arctic College. “ES Numeracy 1.” Course Outline: Numeracy 1.
- Nunavut Arctic College. “Preparing for Change.” Course Outline: 085-100