

THE SCHOOL¹

There are many problems with the school. The school has done a lot of damage to our culture and our children. It has really changed our lives. The school is not working as it is supposed to. The biggest problem is that our children are not learning their culture in school. They are learning the white culture. This is a foreign culture. The school has prevented us from learning our own history. Too many of our children are dropping out.

Our elders tell us about our first schools:

"In the old days, there was no such thing as school. We didn't learn our culture in school. We learned from our people. We educated ourselves in our culture and traditions. The priest used to teach the children as well. This is how some of us learned to read and write. I learned a little, but not much. I don't even know what Grade 1 is." Tuamish, Elder.

"Some of us kids went to school in Nutak. There was no school there; we had school outdoors. Father Cyr was our teacher. We had school over in Davis. Also, the teacher was very strict. The teacher was very dangerous, very hard on us. I think he hurt us a lot." Sango Bay elders camp meeting.

"I never went to school in the daytime because I worked for my father and mother. I used to go to school in the night. It was very hard. The teacher was not very good. He used to beat me up a lot. Some people say he was good. He used to make us cry a lot. Innu mishinanikan, what we learned was about the bible." Nian and Anishenish, Elders.

"Most problems are because of the school. Like us, we went to school. That's when our problems started. When we were in school, just like today, we never learned anything about our own culture. That is why we don't live like our forefathers lived. We really blame the school for what has happened to our children." Etuetish and Akatis.

"When I was in school, the teacher used to abuse us. He would take a ruler or stick and start beating us. We were in a lot of pain. He used to laugh and make fun at the way we dressed. When we didn't know our work, the teachers used to beat us up. A teacher used to pull down our pants and spank us on our bottoms. I don't want to see this happening to our children." Family Violence Project.

Now, since the new school was built, more people are stuck in the community. Families can't go to the country without their children. There are kids who like to go in the country with their parents, but they are afraid they will have to repeat their grade again. They want to stay caught up with the other children. Some teachers won't let the kids go to the country with their parents. Over the years, some of us never wanted to go to school. We wanted to go to the country because

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we felt we learned better things from our parents and it was easy to learn. School work was too hard. Teachers would explain things over and over again. But our parents were better teachers. They taught us our culture. Teachers used to beat us when we didn't know what they were trying to teach. Our parents were patient. It was easy to understand the things they taught us.

"In the Mushuau Innu school before it burned down, Sister Martha used to teach us the Innu language. I think an Innu teacher should teach our language. When my late father told us about legends, this is how I learned about life in the bush. When he told us a legend, I could almost picture it in my mind. When I was young, I thought legends were bedtime stories. When a person talks about life in the country or animals, then you get an idea of how the people used to live in the country." Tumas.

"White people tell us we don't have any education. We have more education than they do because we learn a lot of things. An elder is like a Minister. He has a lot of experience in how to take care of his people. Women have a lot of education too, because they know how to do a lot of traditional things like how to treat the caribou skin, how to sew, and so on." Band Council interview.

There are some of us in the community who have no complaints about the school, some who feel that the school has helped them. Some people think the education we get from the school is very important because we need it to keep up with white society. For example, we need education for land claims negotiations and for relocation. Some of us think there have been times when the school has worked better than at other times.

"This school has taught us about the world around us, both pros and cons. It has helped us to get a better look on life with a proper education." Innu teacher.

"When school was first started, the priest was the one who used to teach the children. This is when I found out that the school board was helping the priest. That is when the school was built at the new site of Davis Inlet. The new school was named Mushuau Innu School. This was a good name for our school because we are Mushuau Innu and this is our land. That is how the school got its name. I started working at the new school. The principal asked to come and work. It was good when we worked. Then another person came and a third principal was hired. We liked working together. It was great working with other people from the village. Then the school burned down. We never knew how the fire started." Manteskueu.

TEACHING OUR OWN CULTURE IN SCHOOL

"In the past, we were like foreigners in the school. The school taught us everything that we never saw or heard of before. The teachers teach our children about the universe, wars and animals from other countries. What is the good of these things for us?" Innu Nation interview.

"I talk to young people but they don't seem to understand. The language I use is hard for them. I often hear the children name things in English. I want the children to learn our way of life. This is

very important. If our culture and our language is lost, there is nowhere in the world where it can be found. My younger children sometimes bring a kind of paper to me from school. They are really proud. I guess they don't really know the school can make them lose their own culture. Whatever they learn in school is white man's ways. I guess one day the children will find out what they have gained and what they have lost from the school. They will learn that they have lost more than gained." Kaniuekutat.

There are no books on Innu culture. Innu teachers have to do it themselves. They get books from Sheshatshiu or La Romaine, but it is really hard for them to understand. They have to change the words they can't understand. They just put these books away but they keep coming.

"I don't know how much time the teacher aids are given to teach Innu-eimun. They probably are given only a few minutes. That is what I went through when I taught school. I was always given so little time to teach Innu-eimun, I didn't have enough time to teach what I wanted to. When I taught at the school, the students behaved very well and they listened too. But since I have not been teaching at the school, the students don't seem to listen to their teachers any more. Maybe the teachers aren't teaching the students very well by not explaining to them about the subjects they are learning." Manteskueu.

"The school is only teaching English to the older students. I am learning how to write English and I am getting better every day. The saddest thing is that I can't even write in my own language." High school student.

Our Innu teachers should make more of our own books in Innu-eimun. They need the help of the elders to start these Innu books. They need supplies to make these books for our school. Someone came to the school once and said we could make our own books. Someone from Utshimassits should be hired to work in Sheshatshiu with other Innu teachers to make our own books and translate the ones they do into Mushuau aianimuan. The Band Council should look for more funding for the Innu teachers.

The school teaches the children white man's games. We could make our children happy by teaching them our traditional games. Right now, the children don't know about our traditional games. Those games are still with us, but nobody is teaching them.

"Our children are taught about other cultures. In our drawing, the child is thinking about the caribou; the teacher is thinking about the giraffe. We teach about animals in Africa. There are no Innu names for these animals. The children are forgetting the Innu names for animals in nutshimit." Innu teachers at Nukum Mani Shan School

Our children need to learn about our traditions and spirituality, about legends, hunting, fishing, about how to read the signs and track down the animals, about animal spirits, how to clean the animals, dry the furs, and about how to take care of the bones. Our children should learn about our hunting grounds, where our grandparents used to walk, and how we used to travel in the summer and by dog teams in the winter. They should learn to make canoes, snowshoes,

moccasins and other crafts. They should learn our own traditional games. We want our children to learn how to respect our ELDERS, OUR CULTURE, AND THE ANIMALS. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT! Our children need to learn from our elders about the old ways. We don't have elders teaching in the school. Our elders are so important.

WE NEED A GOOD EDUCATION

"We are afraid to fail and that has changed us." Innu teacher

We want our children to learn English as well as our own culture. But many of our students quit school because the English books are very difficult to understand or even learn. English is our second language. This is hard for Innu students. Some teachers don't seem to understand how hard it is for the children to learn the white books. Too many teachers get angry when our children don't understand. The students are afraid of the teachers. Children need to be taught things like respect in school. We have to help our children stay in school. Our high school students are not learning very much. They graduate and they still don't know the things that they are supposed to learn from the white teachers.

"If the school doesn't teach our children our culture, in 20-30 years' time, our children will speak only English like in other places in Canada. Some of our children cannot even write their own names in their own language. Another thing, some people finish high school, but it is like they are in Grade 8 or 9. They can hardly write a letter. I would like to see more teaching of the Innu way of life. This is like an education and it is better. If a child knows about life in the country, that is like s/he finished university." Shuash.

"In school, we don't get a good education." High school student.

"I have only seen a few students finish high school. What do they get? Nothing. There are no jobs, just drinking. The school has very big problems." Shushepmak and Mani Katini.

"Children don't want to go to school. I think it is too hard for the children because it's mostly English. I think it must be hard for the children to understand. My son doesn't want to go to school. I keep sending him. He told me he doesn't understand the books and the work he is asked to do. He says the teacher will get mad at him if he doesn't know what to do." Miste-Shishin, Elder.

The school is too small; we need more classrooms. The children need to learn music and art. We need a classroom for art. The children only learn from books. They are bored with the books and need other things. Students need to learn how to ask about things. They need to learn life skills, things like sewing and knitting. We need a homemaker to teach the children how to cook. Half of the kitchen now is used as a classroom.

OUR CHILDREN NEED HELP

Many children cannot listen and learn anything because they have too many problems. It is not good for the teachers as well because if the children are not listening, they are not learning anything. Children have their problems bottled up inside; they can't get it out. They have too much anger inside of them; they can't leave their problems at home and they can't bring them to school. They don't know who they can go to. Teachers don't help them. They only get angry at them. Sometimes the child is caught in the middle between their parents and the teachers. This is why some kids quit school. They don't have anyone to go to.

We need an experienced guidance counsellor in the school to help the children with their problems at home or at school. The children need someone to listen to them. They need counselling, someone to keep them in school and talk with them about their problems. We don't know all the problems children have. We need for them to tell us. The teachers need counselling too because they get mad at the students.

Another problem is that many of our students are dropping out. They are not directed in what they want to learn in school. They lose interest in school, and the teachers are not helping them. Some students finish high school, but they don't know where to go from there.

Many times, children are late for school because the parents are drinking and they come with no breakfast. They are too sleepy and hungry. They can't concentrate. There is breakfast for kindergarten to grade 4. We need breakfast for all the children.

We can't blame it all on alcohol. Some people have a big family. It takes a while to cook the breakfast. That's why they are late. We only have wood stoves. Having no water and cold houses is a problem. It takes a long time to heat our homes in the morning. Our children don't have time to eat their breakfasts. They don't want to be late. If the houses could stay warm at night, and if there was water in the house, the children would be on time at school. The children should also be able to take showers in the school, and the school should provide towels.

WE NEED TRAINED AND EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

We should have qualified teachers in our school. Many of our teachers are just out of university and they have no experience in how our school works. They start teaching in our school and some of them seem just like kids too. They train here and then they leave.

Innu teachers never went to university. The principal comes to them and offers them a teacher's aid job. They don't know what to do when they enter the classroom. They are not ready.

"When I started the job, the principal told me to make breakfast. Then I was taken into the classroom and handed some books. After school, I had to wash the floor like a janitor. My pay was very low. I never had any training. I have asked about taking university courses, but no one listens.

This will be my final year for teaching." Innu teacher.

Some people wonder if the teachers' aids know about the kinds of things they are teaching the students. They think the only good thing they can do is to help the teachers. But many of us think our teachers' aides have more experience and are more qualified to teach our children than the teachers. They do the work because the children don't speak English and don't understand what they are being taught. But the white teachers get paid more.

Innu teachers have been in these teaching jobs long enough. The school board was asked a long time ago for university courses. We were told there would be courses here in Davis Inlet. The teachers' aids don't know why they have never gotten any training, or why they have not had more action on this from the principal? Recently, the principal did ask for teacher aid courses from the university. We were told there is no funding.

Innu teachers also need workshops to help them make books in Innu-aimun. Two teacher aids went to La Romaine 8 years ago to learn about religion. It was very good and they learned so much. They still have those books and use them all the time. That was the only time they ever went anywhere.

Innu teachers feel like nobody cares about what they do. Sometimes, they have good ideas about how the school should be run, but no one listens. Maybe the school board doesn't even recognize the teacher aids. People just see them as interpreters. Innu teachers feel like when white teachers want something new in the school, the answer is always yes. Once the white teachers wanted to learn the Innu language. There was no problem. One of the teacher aids was chosen to teach them.

TEACHERS ABUSE OUR KIDS

Many people are angry because some teachers, including the vice-principal beat up on students. We don't want to see this happening any more. Children won't learn if teachers beat them. Students quit too because of beatings from teachers. This has got to be stopped.

"I remember three years ago a teacher beat up on my brother. He pushed him against a brick wall and bumped his head. My brother had a bruise. This same teacher beat up on other students. Many students quit school because of him." Gathering Voices Participant

"I also remember a teacher beat me up in school. I am 24 years old. He was trying to show me how to do my schoolwork. He started to beat me because I didn't know what he was trying to teach me. The teachers were beating us up. Later, I quit school because I was too afraid. I couldn't understand the white schoolbooks." Family Violence Project.

Girls and boys have been sexually abused by former teachers and brothers. These things can never be forgotten. Some people think these abuses have been covered up. For many years,

people didn't want to talk about these things until we heard about the Mount Cashel Inquiry. Teachers also call the students names, using bad language and swearing at them. They say whatever they like to the children. Some teachers also won't let the children go to the washroom when they need to. Some teachers make fun of the students and laugh at them.

"The teacher once told my daughter not to go to the washroom. My daughter started her period. He told her not to use the toilet and that she would make it too dirty." Family Violence Project.

Some parents and grandparents have taken their children out of school because of these abuses. Some people have asked principals to help, and others have written to the school board. Principals and the superintendent don't do anything. The teachers are never removed. They should not be in the school.

TOO MUCH FIGHTING IN THE SCHOOL

There is a lot of fighting both inside and outside the school. Children fight with each other, teachers fight with the children and the janitor and vice-principal fight with people too. Sometimes there is too much gossip spread amongst the staff.

The children are fighting because they must have too many problems. Something is bothering them and that is why they are fighting like that. The children learn from adults as well. They see adults fighting and they start doing the same thing. If we had a guidance counsellor, the children could go to her and talk about what is really bothering them. Sometimes the teachers don't say anything to the kids when they fight. When Innu children and white children are fighting, teachers seem to always blame the Innu kids. This is not helping our children.

"The school is not working right because many of our children are against each other. I don't want any of my grandchildren hurt by other children. This is why I take my grandchildren away from school. In the country, my grandchildren are happy and free. They work as much as we do. They cut wood, pick boughs for the tent floor. They do everything for us. At the same time, they are learning their culture. Sometimes I have to tell them how we used to live in the country. They learn other things. That is exactly how I want to see them be." Shenum, Elder.

TEACHERS DON'T UNDERSTAND

"Frank Peters used to show the kids movies about cowboys and Indians. He showed us that Indians are bad and losers. The cowboys were the winners." Band Council interview.

Many of us in the community find it very hard because the white teachers don't understand the Innu and our culture. They hurt us. They don't know how we live. There is too much racism and harassment between the Innu teachers and children, and the white staff.

It feels like some white teachers don't really care about what goes on in our school. Sometimes they push too much with the children when they are not causing trouble. They give them two choices. They keep asking them if they did something wrong. The child breaks under the pressure and they will say yes that they did cause trouble even though they didn't do anything wrong.

Another problem is when the teachers or the principal are having problems with a child and they give a letter for the child to bring home to his parents. They are writing to the parents about the child's parents. Children sometimes tear it up on their way home. I think the principal should give the letter to the parents herself, or the teacher should go and talk to the parents himself.

"Some teachers complain about how the children dress. Once a teacher I worked with complained about the smell, that the children smelled, they had no clean clothing. I really hated it when she said this. It hurts me too because they are my people, my children. The white teachers can't even wash the children. They let the Innu teachers do this. We feel that these teachers think the children are too dirty. The teachers should understand that there is no water and sewage in Innu homes. When I was in school, a male teacher once asked me why I didn't dress up nicely like one of the female teachers. I was very embarrassed when he said that to me because my clothes was dirty and in bad shape. Teachers should watch what they say." Innu teacher.

TEACHERS DRINK TOO MUCH

"A principal once said he wanted an orientation for the teachers. He did that orientation for the new teachers over a bottle of wine." Gathering Voices Participant.

Some of the teachers who come here drink too much. Children complain when they see the teachers drinking. The teachers do foolish things. We have seen teachers make excuses that they were sick. They were sick from hangovers. We have seen teachers drinking. They get drunk. Sometimes they don't come in to teach, it is because they were drunk the night before. They say they have nothing to do in the community.

SCHOOL NAME

The name we have for our school now has caused divisions in the community. It is not good for families to fight. Some of us feel that the name we have now Nukum Manishan School has given too much power to one family in the community. Many of us would like to see our old school's name back. People wonder why the name of the school was changed. The Mushuau Innu School is a good name because we are the people of the barrens. We should change the name when we build a new one school when we relocate. It would help to stop the fighting if we switched the name.

WE NEED A SAFE SCHOOL

There are problems with maintenance in the school. The exit doors are important. After a storm, the doors get jammed from too much snow. Sometimes only the main door can be used. What would happen if there was a fire? We could all get trapped inside. We need to have a fulltime maintenance man. There is funding for someone to shovel those doors. One of the teacher aids has to do the work of a maintenance man too. Teaching is a full-time job. Children are still in their classroom when there are leaks. If this happened in a white school, they would not go ahead and have regular school. This is no good for the children. We need more funding for the maintenance of the school.

INNU CONTROL OF SCHOOL

Our children want a better education and we want it for them too. The school is not working for us. We would like to take over control of our own school. Now we have no say in how the school is run. Over the years, we have gone to principals for help and they don't do anything. It is like we don't have the right to complain about the school. We write letters to the superintendent. He is the same. They don't seem to listen when people tell them things. They don't care.

We have every right to go and see what is wrong with the school. It is our school, not the white teachers' school. We should speak up about the school. We should make our own decisions about how to run our school. We should decide which teachers will work at the school. We should listen to our children. We need to ask them why they are unhappy with the school. Some of us think the school should be closed if we can't have our way.

Many of us don't understand how the school is run. We don't know why some teachers are fired. We wonder how much money is spent on the school? In the past, we helped our children. We were never paid for teaching the children in our culture. But now, we need more funding for our school in Utshimassit.

We need elders to teach in the school. We need to encourage our students to go to university for teacher training. Some of us would like to see an Innu principal soon. We could find someone to work with him/her. Others feel we need to have certified Innu teachers to take control of the school. We would all like to see more Innu people involved with the school. We have volunteers now coming into the school and the children really enjoy them.

We need to learn to not be scared to do things our own way.

"Now I'm old and I'm stuck in this community. As for my grandchildren, they are learning the white man's ways, not our own ways. I'm sad that our culture is fading away. Who is to blame for that? In old Davis Inlet, the children used to respect their elders and they were always ready to help their parents. After moving here, the children changed. They don't care about their

parents. I really blame the school for the way they are teaching our children. Life in Davis Inlet is getting worst every year. Some of the young people are very good hunters but they don't follow our ways. They don't respect the animals. They are like white people. In my days, every part of the animal was important. The skull had to be hung on the tree. It was the same for small animals." Tshenish, Elder.