



Permanent Participant Panel at the UArctic Congress, September 2018

“Education and training in the Arctic: Identifying education and training needs for Arctic Indigenous Peoples”

Summary

The University of the Arctic and Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat organized a panel to discuss education and training needs for Arctic Indigenous Peoples during the UArctic Congress 2018 in Oulu, Finland on 5 September 2018. The panelists represented each of the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' organizations – also known as Permanent Participants – and addressed these questions:

- How is Arctic education shaping the life of local communities now and in the future?
- How will traditional knowledge be a part of the academic world?
- How will vocational education meet higher education in the Arctic?
- In what capacity can UArctic help to offer or promote Indigenous degree programs?

The panel resulted in a robust discussion on historical and contemporary challenges in Indigenous education, general suggestions for improved education systems, and specific actions UArctic should take to improve education outcomes for Indigenous students.

The Chair of the Council of UArctic, Liisa Holmberg, and the President of UArctic, Lars Kullerud, moderated the panel. Panelists included:

- Tiffany Jackson, Aleut International Association (Administrator for the Qagan Tayagungin Tribe)
- Norma Ann Shorty, Arctic Athabaskan Council (Independent Indigenous Researcher; Adjunct Instructor, University of Alaska Southeast and University of Regina)
- Evon Peter, Gwich'in Council International (Vice Chancellor for Rural, Community and Native Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks)
- Dalee Sambo Dorough, Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC International Chair)
- Nina Veisalova, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (1st Vice-President of RAIPON; Advisor to the Rector, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia)
- Ellen Inga Turi, Saami Council (Head of Delegation to the Arctic Council, Head of Academic Administration at the Sami University of Applied Sciences)
- Tukumminnguaq Olsen, Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland

Historical and contemporary challenges in education

Multiple panelists asserted that classroom education was historically used as a colonial tool in Indigenous communities. Panelists discussed that their own parents and grandparents had been forcibly removed from their communities to attend boarding schools where they were not allowed to speak their Indigenous languages. Additionally, discriminatory practices existed in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. Indigenous students who did wish to continue to higher education were often discouraged by educational institutions from pursuing degrees, especially in the sciences.

Consequently, panelists discussed intergenerational trauma caused by past education systems. Dr. Dalee Sambo Dorough quoted her grandfather's words, *"I don't understand why you would go inside a building to learn anything."*

Although there has been progress, there are many contemporary challenges in Indigenous education. Some of the challenges the panelists named include:

- Prejudice continues to influence educators' treatment of Indigenous students.
- Most courses are taught in the majority language and most students do not have the opportunity to learn their Indigenous languages in school.
- Most education is based on western paradigms rather than place-based or Indigenous knowledge.
- Non-Indigenous people often direct the education systems of Indigenous students. Teachers, professors, and researchers come from far away without knowledge of the local people, customs, or languages.
- Today many Arctic Indigenous students must travel south to pursue higher education and are not encouraged to return to their home communities.

Historical and contemporary disparities in Indigenous education have resulted in poor education outcomes. Panelists cited data from the [Inuit Education Summit](#) that only 40% of Inuit continue to higher education (February 2018). Similarly, only 40% of Gwich'in students in Alaska graduate high school. In the words of Evon Peter, *"Among Indigenous peoples in Alaska throughout our state, there is only a 60% graduation rate out of the high school system. But I don't think about it as our young people failing in education. I think about it as the education system failing our students."*

How to improve education systems

To begin, many panelists asserted that Indigenous education should revolve around Indigenous knowledge. Although Indigenous knowledge systems vary between Indigenous communities, panelists related some commonalities (see "Panelists' key elements of Indigenous knowledge" on page 3.)

Panelists presented various opinions on how Indigenous knowledge should converge with western education. One panelist asserted that Indigenous knowledge must be respected on its own, not compared to western paradigms, and sometimes reserved for exclusively Indigenous use. Another argued that educators must find ways to meld Indigenous knowledge and western systems to create culturally relevant education. Yet another panelist cited the *Global Indigenous Youth Caucus* statement to stress that culturally relevant education that provides training on interculturality, stereotypes, and

misconceptions should not only be provided to Indigenous students; culturally relevant education would benefit all students (July 2017).

Still, panelists agreed that effective Indigenous education requires investment. Firstly, panelists suggested investment in youth and elders. One panelist affirmed that educational institutions must cultivate high expectations for youth in partnership with families and local communities. Multiple panelists affirmed that Indigenous youth should receive higher education but return to their communities with the tools to revitalize languages and move towards self-determination. Moreover, panelists asked each other to consider how educational institutions can include elders.

Secondly, educational institutions must arrange programs and funding strategies that invest in Indigenous leadership development. Panelists noted that such strategies contribute to the recognition that Indigenous students, staff, faculty and administrators bring extra value to universities: they hold knowledge that cannot be learned in a classroom, inspire other Indigenous students to apply for admission, and can effectively filter educational objectives for Indigenous students.

Thirdly, more support must be provided for Indigenous research and educational paradigms. Many panelists noted that Indigenous researchers have the capacity to carry out research in their own communities and should no longer be studied by outsiders. Yet larger and monetarily wealthier institutions often receive more funding to study subjects that Indigenous communities would rather evaluate themselves. Panelists asserted that holistic science rooted in Indigenous knowledge is valuable and should be funded as such.

Specific actions for UArctic

1. Collect good practices

UArctic provides the venue for educational institutions to look east and west – rather than south – for best practices in education. Panelists encouraged UArctic to monitor Indigenous achievement, identify and evaluate the most successful programs for Indigenous achievement, and determine where achievement gaps exist before launching any new initiatives.

Panelists' key elements of Indigenous knowledge

- Indigenous knowledge is a systematic way of knowing.
- Indigenous knowledge is paramount to Indigenous world views; it emphasizes ways Indigenous peoples relate to other people and the environment.
- Indigenous knowledge is passed down through generations and relies on communication with elders.
- Indigenous knowledge is not static; Indigenous peoples are constantly producing and reforming Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Indigenous knowledge is place-based and varies depending on the setting.
- Indigenous knowledge holders experience a common fight to bring their world views and understanding back to their peoples.
- Indigenous knowledge is rooted in use of land but opposes conquest of land.
- The Permanent Participants referred to a wholistic definition of traditional knowledge – which is integral to Indigenous knowledge – that they previously developed and can be found [here](#).

2. Provide opportunities for Indigenous leadership

Panelists urged UArctic institutions to initiate programs that build Indigenous leadership capacity and usher Indigenous leaders into high-level administrative, instructional, and teaching-level positions. For example, universities could create positions for Indigenous faculty in language teaching and research.

Additionally, UArctic can strengthen bonds between Indigenous programs and universities as a network of educational institutions.

3. Allow Indigenous students to study from their communities

Panelists pointed to hybrid, flexible programs that would allow Indigenous students to remain in the Arctic and their home communities. Suggestions included more opportunities to attend satellite campuses, engage in distance learning, utilize digital technology, and enroll in micro-credentials (i.e. shortened and specialized versions of college courses). Moreover, UArctic universities could "unbundle" degree requirements so that Indigenous students could access UArctic offerings in their remote communities, earn micro-credentials, and participate in north2north programs. Public-private partnerships like Nunavut Arctic College, Nunavut Sivuniksavut, and Ilisagvik College may help expand higher educational opportunities for Indigenous students.

4. Demonstrate the value of Indigenous knowledge

Panelists provided examples of innovative programs that UArctic institutions could adapt to place a higher value on Indigenous knowledge. The first example was a healing retreat in which 30 elders discussed their residential and boarding school experiences over two years. After sharing their languages, sacred objects and knowledge, the elders and Norma Ann Shorty finished the retreat with a *"backpack of direction, healing, spirituality, and all of these things that western paradigms cannot address."*

The second example was a University of Alaska Fairbanks program that allows Indigenous students to teach and earn faculty salaries upon completion of their master's degree while working toward their PhDs. The panelist said this program recognizes the wealth of Indigenous knowledge that Indigenous candidates bring to the classroom.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the UArctic Congress 2018, UArctic membership proclaimed, "In partnership with Indigenous peoples and communities, we seek to transform our education institutions and systems to be inclusive, relevant and responsive to Indigenous peoples, their perspectives, interests, and knowledge systems" (UArctic Congress 2018 [Declaration](#)). The Permanent Participant Panel identified needs within education systems, provided direction for improvement in Arctic education and training, and suggested demonstrable actions for UArctic. Going forward, UArctic may take guidance from the panel in fulfilling its declaration.

