

# Pedagogical Pathways for Indigenous Business Education: Learning from Current Indigenous Business Practices

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# Pedagogical Pathways for Indigenous Business Education: Learning from Current Indigenous Business Practices

## Abstract

Business is one of the fastest growing areas in post-secondary education, but there is little understanding of Indigenous business practices. This article looks at three Arctic communities in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, and their associated co-operative businesses. I examine how these businesses express cultural values, as well as the business skill needs within these communities. Key informant interviews were conducted in each of the three Arctic communities, and three conclusions were made: (a) Co-operatives act as links between communities and their economic activities, (b) Business skills within communities need to be developed, and (c) Business skills need to include cultural components, as co-ops represent cultural economic expressions.

## Keywords

Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, business education, co-operatives, entrepreneurship, Arctic

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## **Pedagogical Pathways for Indigenous Business Education: Learning from Current Indigenous Business Practices**

There is a growing population of Indigenous youth preparing for post-secondary education (Assembly of First Nations Education, Jurisdiction, and Governance, 2012; Macdonald & Wilson, 2013). Business education is one of the highest enrollment areas in Canadian universities, but the information on Indigenous business practices are scattered across disciplines (Klinga, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2014). Due to the lack of Indigenous content in textbooks and case studies used in business courses, Brown, Tulk, and Doucette (2016) began to consolidate Indigenous business knowledge as part of their recent collection of essays. This lack of Indigenous content in business education limits exposure to and understanding of the challenges faced by Indigenous business leaders as they attempt to work within the restrictions imposed by colonial systems in Canada, such as the Indian Act. Through its restrictions on land ownership and use, the Indian Act hampers community development and discourages private investment as well as business activities. In order to develop community businesses in Indigenous communities, business leaders must first gain access to land designated for commercial use. Under the Indian Act (1985), land for designated for commercial use can be leased to the business but is owned by the reserve. The lack of ownership of land means Indigenous businesses have limited access to capital; this results in higher risk and thus higher start-up costs. The inability of Indigenous business leaders to access the stored capital within reserve lands results in a place-based character to Indigenous business that can constrain business development.

In addition to the capital access issue for Indigenous businesses, there is a cultural link to place that needs to be captured when considering Indigenous businesses. As Battiste (2010) stated, “Each group develops expertise in their ecosystem that spans trans-systemic approaches to knowledge, which animate and manifest in languages, communication forms, ceremonies and teaching” (p. 31). Siebers (2004) discussed the need to understand the aspirations and interests of the people within their lifeworld, referring to the place-based knowledge embedded in transformational activities, which include business practices.

This article will examine three themes:

- a. Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities,
- b. Business skills within the community need to be developed, and
- c. Business skills need to include cultural components as co-ops represent cultural economic expressions.

Information will be presented on the business culture and place-based nature of Indigenous businesses in rural and remote communities based on the findings from a Social Science and Humanities Research Council funded project to Canada’s Arctic. The information synthesized from the Indigenous businesses will be consolidated with the existing literature on Indigenous place-based economic knowledge (Chambers, 2006; Korteweg, Gonzalez, & Guillet, 2010; Scully, 2012; van der Wey, 2001).

Many Indigenous Arctic communities occupy their traditional lands in rural and remote geographic areas that are distant from non-Indigenous communities located in the same territory (Elias, 1996). The vast Indigenous traditional lands provide a range of resources through hunting, fishing, and trapping that support local community economies (Lemelin & Dawson, 2014; Stabler, Tolley, & Howe, 1990). The

inclusion of traditional activities in mixed local economies is partly due to the isolated, inaccessible nature of the communities. According to Elias (1996), the mixed economy includes domestic production, commodity production, employment, enterprise, and transfers, and they have been seen as a means for financing domestic production. Human interactions with and within the natural environment as a form of cultural economic expression becomes the focus of economic activity as a result of the unreliability of non-domestic production, leading to economic uncertainty within the community (Fall, 1990; Lowe, 2015). The focus on traditional activities, such as hunting, fishing and trapping, as the economic foundation in the community creates a need for a unique set of business skills that co-operatives can help to develop and to which business education can be more responsive.

### Literature Review

According to Madden (2015), pedagogical pathways for Indigenous education are considered to be configurations or approaches that guide the learner's movement towards understanding concepts. Madden's configurations are assumptions about education and teaching including the purpose, goals, central themes, and pedagogical methods, which make up a pedagogical pathway that shapes, but does not determine, the learning journey. Four pedagogical pathways reflect the diversity of theories and approaches to Indigenous education:

- a. Learning from traditional Indigenous models of teaching (Anuik & Gillies, 2012),
- b. Pedagogy for decolonization (Chinnery, 2010),
- c. Indigenous and anti-racist education (James, Marin, & Kassam, 2011), and
- d. Indigenous and place-based education (Scully, 2012).

Gruenewald (2008) suggested that *pedagogy of place*, including *reinhabitation*, is a means to move education toward an ecologically and socially sustainable decolonization of place. Pedagogy of place refers to the education of citizens so that they might have a direct effect on the well-being of the social and environmental components of their community (Gruenewald, 2008). Decolonization of place, according to Gruenewald, refers to reflecting on one's situation, which includes a reflection on the space(s) one inhabits or reinhabits. Berg and Dassman (1990) define reinhabitation as "learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation" (p. 35). The action within a person's situation often corresponds to changing the relationship to a place, which in this article can be seen in the co-operatives reflecting on the community's needs and its actions to address them. Indigenous and place-based pedagogical pathways need to be incorporated into business education as a means of addressing Gruenewald's (2008) objective of reinhabitation as outlined in his article on critical pedagogy of place. Addressing Gruenewald's pedagogy of place can be seen through the economic activities associated with rural and remote co-operatives linking community's needs to economic activity. As will be seen, there is a need to enhance business skills in order to achieve the community's full cultural economic expression. This place-based Indigenous pedagogical approach incorporating reinhabitation is different from the Western approach to Indigenous education, which Battiste and Henderson (2008) have characterized as "add and stir" (p. 13). Their characterization suggests that the Western educational system simply incorporated Indigenous history into the existing narrative of Canadian history. From a business education perspective, curricula presented to students has typically not included knowledge about the many traditional Indigenous economies or place-based relationships in Canada such as the gift and subsistence economies that existed prior to colonialism (Brown et al.,

2016). The current business curriculum focuses on the capitalist system of profit accumulation and ignores the challenges of place-based economies, in which many Indigenous communities and business leaders operate. Business education is a key component of interaction with the ecological and social environments through localized social action, and thus must be guided by a place-based pedagogical pathway. Ignoring place-based relationships is tantamount to going back to the “add and stir” educational approaches used in the past, which ignore Indigenous culture, values, and place-based relationships.

In order to examine a place-based pedagogical pathway, three communities in Canada’s North were visited for this study: (a) Old Crow, Yukon Territory; (b) Nauyasat, Nunavut; and (c) Ulukhaktok, Northwest Territory. Old Crow, Yukon is a Vuntut G’witchin First Nation community that is self-governed, while Nauyasat and Ulukhaktok are Inuit communities governed through hamlet offices. Each of the three communities host community led co-operative businesses that are part of the Arctic Co-operatives Limited service federation. Each community co-operative within the Arctic Co-operatives Limited follows the International Co-operative Alliance’s seven principles (International Cooperative Alliance, n.d.), which affirm the autonomy and independence of each community co-operative. As each community co-operative is autonomous and independently run by the community in a place-based environment, these organizations can be considered representative of each Indigenous community’s business practices.

The major goal of this project has been to mobilize existing Indigenous business knowledge in community-centered co-operatives in Canada’s Arctic. Northern Indigenous communities have developed innovative business practices to improve their community’s economic status that need to be incorporated into current post-secondary business curriculum guiding current pedagogy through a place-based pedagogical pathway. This project provided the first step in examining the role of an Indigenous, community centred, and place-based co-operative business.

## Method

Arctic Co-operatives Limited assisted in asking three Indigenous businesses to participate in this project. Arctic Co-operatives Limited is based in Winnipeg, Manitoba and has had a close partnership with the University of Winnipeg and the researchers associated with this study. The researchers engaged with this study include faculty professors, and graduate and undergraduate students from the University of Winnipeg. Arctic Co-operatives Limited was one of the founding members of the Business Chair of Co-operative Enterprises established at the University of Winnipeg in 2012. The three co-operative businesses, which are part of the 32-member Arctic Co-operatives Limited service federation, were chosen to ensure the widest geographic coverage, so that all aspects of place-based business practices were captured.

A community-based participatory approach was utilized throughout this project. Researchers engaged with the co-operative board of directors, managers, staff, and membership throughout each step of the project to ensure full participation by the community. Community members were engaged in the development of the interview questions, identifying key informants for the interviews, data analysis, and review and approval of conclusions for the study. The key informant interviews included staff, managers, directors, and members of the community co-operatives. Each individual interviewed, however, has

many roles in their community. Some of the directors for the co-operative act as community government leaders working in the hamlet offices or in other positions within the community's government. Co-operative members represent a large cross section of the community including teachers, cashiers, cleaners, priests, and many other occupations within the community. This broad cross section of the community strongly indicates that the co-operative is integrated into community life and place. As Basso (1996) indicated, place is where wisdom sits, and the community co-operatives integrate their business operations within the confines of place, including dealing with the rural and remote nature of the community.

This project utilized semi-structured video interviews with key informants to capture information on Indigenous business practices. Directors, managers, and staff participated in the interviews to provide a thorough review of the business practices. Interviews were completed with 15 people: 5 with directors, 3 with managers, and 7 with staff. Arctic Co-operatives Limited assisted in arranging the interviews on site in collaboration with the local community, including Elders, and the co-operative board of directors.

Questions focused on governance, and management and human resource training and needs. The questions for the semi-structured interviews were developed in partnership with Arctic Co-operatives Limited and the communities involved. Examples of questions include:

- a. Please explain the current governance structure of your business.
- b. As a director/manager/staff, please describe a typical day/month/year.
- c. As a director/manager/staff member, what skills would you like to develop?

All activities completed during the course of this study received ethics approval from the University of Winnipeg Human Research Ethics Board prior to beginning the research.

The semi-structured interview method allowed participants to discuss any and all aspects of the business that they felt were relevant. In-person video interviews allow for the collection of data about the place-based context of the Indigenous businesses. Skype or other distance interviews techniques are not effective because rural and remote communities do not have access to broadband connections.

One member of the research team was tasked with collecting the interviews, and a second with transcription and analysis of the responses. Responses were transcribed and time stamped to allow for quick review of specific sections of the interview.

Utilizing a cross-case comparison analysis, two randomly selected interviews were analyzed to identify categories based on responses by the interviewees. Utilizing Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory, four stages of analysis were completed on the interview data:

1. Comparison of responses to each category,
2. Integrating categories and their associated properties,
3. Delimiting the theory, and
4. Writing the theory.

Based on the initial analysis of the first two interviews, tentative categories were developed. In line with Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Colemand's (2000) method, this initial category identification of the co-operatives based on interview data underwent continual refinement throughout the data analysis process and the feedback was used to refine the categories. Once the categories were identified, based on the

initial two interviews, the remaining 13 interviews were analyzed, and responses were placed into one of the identified categories. By categorizing responses from each interviewee, we are able to reduce the overall complexity and organize the responses based on the conceptual nature of the response (Dey, 1993).

With the responses categorized, the theory was delimited. Aspects of Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed were deemed to be explanatory: The co-operative acted as the community's response to "perceived social, political, and economic contradictions, and [that enabled the community] to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35), a process termed *conscientizacao* by Freire. Many of the responses provided by the interviewees harkened to Freire's approach to popular education as a means of transformation through economic action, much like the educational approach utilized by the Highlander Center founded by Myles Horton, which promoted civic participation and social action organization within communities (see Horton & Freire, 1990; Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1998). Freire's approach encourages the use of existing knowledge—in this case, the knowledge of place—to overcome oppressive or dehumanizing structures. The capitalist economic system can be seen as an oppressive or dehumanizing structure that the community's social action seeks to overcome.

## Results

### Old Crow—Vuntut G'witchin First Nation

Old Crow, Yukon Territory, is an isolated community located on the banks of the Porcupine and Crow Rivers just above the Arctic Circle within an area known as Old Crow Flats. The community, the river, the mountain, and surrounding area of Old Crow were named in honour of Chief Deetru 'K' avihdik, who died in the 1870s. His name means "Crow May I Walk."

The community of Old Crow is a small community of approximately 221 Vuntut G'witchin. The average age is 39.6 years, with a median age of 38.7, which makes this community the oldest of the communities in this project. Of the 215 individuals who completed the 2016 census, 210 (the majority) indicated that they spoke English, and 10 indicated that they spoke both French and English. The mother tongue for most community members is English ( $n = 170$  individuals), followed by G'witchin ( $n = 30$ ), then French ( $n = 5$ ). At home, 200 individuals indicated that English was the language most often spoken, followed by G'witchin ( $n = 10$ ), then French ( $n = 5$ ; Statistics Canada, 2016).

The community sits within a periglacial environment, which means Old Crow has a cold climate and the land is subjected to frequent freezing and thawing cycles. The annual temperature average for daily highs is 20.2°C (68.4°F) in July, and average daily lows of -33.5°C (-28.3°F) in January (Environment Canada, 2018). Being located above the Arctic Circle, there are days in the summer when Old Crow sees the midnight sun, also known as the polar day. Typically, between May 5th and August 8th, the sun will be shining on Old Crow at midnight local time, which is why it is referred to as the midnight sun. During the winter, between December 14<sup>th</sup> and December 29<sup>th</sup>, the sun will hide from Old Crow during what is known as the polar night.

As the most northern community in all of the Yukon Territory, Old Crow does bring unique challenges and opportunities for its residents. For example, Old Crow cannot be accessed by road, making transportation of goods and services difficult and costly. The Vuntut G'witchin First Nation community,



however, took this transportation difficulty and made it into an opportunity by investing in the local airline: “This initiative is unique, just as the relationship between Air North and the Yukon is unique,” said Board Director Greg Charlie, who is also a member of the Vuntut G’witchin First Nation, which owns a 49% stake in the airline. “It is rare to find a bond between a business and a community as strong as the one our airline shares with Yukoners. We don’t take that bond for granted; we cherish it” (Air North Airline, 2017, para. 2; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities).

The community of Old Crow maintained a single store, the North West Company store (also known as the Northern Store). The North West Company Inc. is a Canadian multinational grocery and retail-company, which operates stores in Western Canada, Northern Canada, Alaska, Hawaii, and several other countries and US territories in Oceania and the Caribbean. The North West Company profiles itself as a leading retailer to underserved rural communities and urban neighbourhoods. Typically, the Northern Store signs multi-year leases that grant them the exclusive right to sell goods to these underserved communities (North West Company Inc., 2017).

Some in the Old Crow community believed that profits were being taken from the community through the North West Company arrangement:

We had Northern in our community for about 25 years and they wanted to sign a second 25-year lease. The thing with Northern is I didn’t see any benefits coming to the community. One day they boosted how much of a profit they made out of the communities and Old Crow was third on the list with \$1.8 million dollars. To see that and not to see it in the community I didn’t like it. From the General Assembly, the people directed our leadership to start looking for something else to provide our groceries. (Old Crow Interview #1, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities)

The Northern Store opened in Old Crow in June 1999 with its first 25-year lease. In 2015, the community of Old Crow declined to renew the multi-year lease, and the Northern Store closed in mid-November (North West Company Inc., 2017). For approximately six months, the community was without a primary grocery store (Dolphin, 2014). Vuntut G’witchin First Nation set up a temporary store where residents could get staple foods and basic supplies. For a more permanent solution, the Old Crow community looked to Arctic Co-operatives Limited.

Arctic Co-operatives Limited is a co-operative federation owned and controlled by 32 community-based co-operative business enterprises located in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Northern Manitoba, Canada (Arctic Co-operatives Ltd., 2017). By becoming a member of this federation of co-operatives, Old Crow felt they could provide the goods and services the community needed and, at the same time, keep profits from leaving the community. In addition, the leadership of the community felt that, by working together within the federated co-operative structure, they could provide lower prices on goods and services in the community: “We put our buying power with one store together with 32 other stores across the North and Canada . . . We can get reduced costs on groceries and our produce has never been greener” (Old Crow Interview #2, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities).

The establishment of the co-operative store in Old Crow not only assisted in reducing the cost of groceries and improving the quality of products, it also ensured that money remained in the community to improve the community. During its first seven months of operations, the new co-op grocery store made an impressive \$1.2 million in sales (“Old Crow Grocery Store,” 2016).

What people like about the co-op is . . . 100 percent of the profit from the co-op gets invested back into the community . . . Because we can’t solely depend on our First Nation government to fund everything that we want to see in our community, so this will be another business where we can invest in our community. (Old Crow Interview #1, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities)

The additional funds generated by the co-operative allow the Vuntut G’witchin First Nation to plan for the future of their community:

We are planning for our future. We have a winter road that is coming. We will bring in a new pickup truck for the co-op. The First Nation, the Vuntut G’witchin, they own half the airline that brings that food in, Air North Airline. So, I think they see a bit of a break. Everybody works together and we try to bring the cost of groceries down as much as we can for the people of the community. (Old Crow Interview #2, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities)

Planning for the community requires knowledge of the governance established within the community. Interviewees indicated that they needed to have knowledge and skills related to self-governing communities within Arctic Co-operatives Limited: “Big learning curve for Arctic Co-ops as it was the first time they have dealt with a self-governing nation” (Old Crow Interview #5, 2017; Theme: Business skills within community need to be developed).

The interview quotes presented here are a sample of the interviews that make up 82 video clips totaling over 30 GB of high definition video recordings for Old Crow, Yukon.

### **Naujaat, Nunavut—Inuit**

Naujaat in Inuktitut is  $\mathfrak{a}\mathfrak{D}\mathfrak{I}^c$  and translates into “seagulls’ nesting place.” The name seagulls’ nesting place comes from a cliff 5 kilometers north of the community where seagulls migrate every June. The community itself is located on the Arctic Circle, allowing Naujaat to claim the distinction as the only community located on the Arctic Circle. The community experiences 24 hours of sun in June and 24 hours of dark in December. The climate of Naujaat ranges from an average annual high of  $-8.7^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $17.6^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) to an average annual low of  $-15.5$  ( $5^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), with temperatures reaching below  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-22^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the winter months (Environment Canada, 2014). Along with cold temperatures, Naujaat also resides on the Canadian Shield and has a very thin layer of topsoil over bedrock, known as Arctic Tundra.

According to the 2016 Census, there are approximately 1,082 people living in the community of Naujaat, 47.7 percent of whom are female, and 52.3 percent of whom are male (Statistics Canada, 2016). The population has increased of 14.5 percent since the 2011 Census ( $N=925$ ; Statistics Canada, 2011). The median age of residents in Naujaat is 18.2 years, making it the youngest population base within this study. Even with a young population, the majority of individuals (93%) identify their mother

tongue as Inuktitut. English is spoken by 90 percent of the population alongside Inuktitut (City Data.com, 2017).

As part of this project, seven individuals in Naujaat associated with the co-operative, including a manager, members of the board of directors, and staff. With 110 individual film clips totaling over 51 GB of HD video recordings, this project was able to capture a significant amount of raw video from the community for data analysis.

For a number of years, Naujaat maintained a single store, the Northern Store. In 1968, the co-operative retail store opened in the community (Arctic Co-operatives Ltd., 2007c). From 1968 until now, the co-operative has expanded its services for the community:

We have quite a few business entities. We have a retail store, a 20-room hotel. We have a convenience store and restaurant. We are the agent for the local airline, Calm Air. We run the gas station and fuel delivery. We do construction. We have about 10 to 12 rental units that we rent out to various governments and teachers. (Naujaat Interview #1, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities)

Much like Old Crow, Naujaat found a need to involve themselves in the transportation industry by working with Calm Air. By establishing a link to the airline industry, Naujaat maintains its supply lines and connection to the South. It should be noted that, due to the terrain found in Naujaat, the community has the smallest runway in the North, making it exceedingly difficult to land in the area. In addition to the link to the airline, the co-operative in Naujaat works with Arctic Co-operatives Limited to bring in supplies twice a year via sea freight.

Freight service to Co-op stores in the North is a major factor in our business. Nunavut Sealink and Supply Incorporated (NSSI) was established in the year 2000. NSSI is a partnership formed by Arctic Co-operatives Limited, Desgagnes Transarctik Inc., Qikiqtaaluk Corporation, Sakku Investments Corporation, and Kitikmeot Corporation to provide door-to-door transportation and supply services in Nunavut. Each of our 32 Co-ops is owned by its members—who collectively own 37.5% of Nunavut Sealink and Supply Inc. Profits from this business are returned to members through Arctic Co-ops' patronage dividends. The main services are product supply and sea freight that include warehousing, product sales, maritime packaging, containerization, sale and repair of containers, transportation of all commodities, and cargo insurance. (Arctic Co-operatives Ltd., 2007a, para. 1; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities)

The link to a transportation industry is not the only similarity between Old Crow and Naujaat. Much like Old Crow, the people in Naujaat feel the co-operative offers the community more than a standard store found in the southern part of Canada. It provides for the needs of the community including jobs, housing, and sponsorship for community programs.

Seeing how the co-op fits in the community. How they give back to the community. Different things they are providing. Obviously, jobs for the locals. They also have housing out there. Many different things in the different community they sponsor. That they offer. They try to make available. They try to make the community better. (Naujaat Interview #3, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities)

While the co-operative was seen as giving back to the community the discussion on human resource issues provided information on the need to understand cultural differences within the community:

There are many culture differences that you must adjust to. Some are easy to adjust to; some are very hard. You have to be very sensitive. Coming from a southern atmosphere retail business it's quite a bit different. You have to open your mind to so many different changes. I love the community. I love the people. I wish to stay because of the people. The people make it better. I have been to some places down south that you are just a guy, that has a tie on, that goes to work and you're a number. Here you're somebody. The people respect you and you give respect back. They make your day better, especially the Elders. The Elders in the North are some of the most wonderful people I have ever met. People can make it or break it, but in this community they make it. (Naujaat Interview #1, 2017; Theme: Business skills within community need to be developed)

The need for the co-operative to interact with the community requires skills development beyond traditional business acumen. As indicated by interviewees, there is a need for both business skills and a sense of the community: "The co-operative management needs good business skills and a sense of community responsibility" (Co-op Staff Member Interview, 2017; Theme: Business skills need to include cultural components as co-ops represent cultural economic expressions).

To develop these business skills and sense of community, staff and managers outlined the need for linkages between different communities: "Visit other communities to learn from their success and mistakes. Be part of a larger community of co-ops. Get involved in co-op committees, events, initiatives" (Co-op Member Interview, 2017; Theme: Business skills need to include cultural components as co-ops represent cultural economic expressions).

### **Uluhaktok, Northwest Territories—Inuit**

The traditional spelling of Uluhaktok is Uluhaqtuuq and is translated to "the place where Ulu parts are found." An Ulu, ᐅᐭ, is a traditional crescent-shaped, all-purpose knife used for skinning and cleaning animals, cutting hair, food preparation, and as a weapon. Uluhaktok does go by many names including Holman and Ulu. Uluhaktok is home to 396 people.

The climate in Uluhaktok is much like Naujaat with an average high temperature of -8.1°C (17.6°F) and a low of -15.5 °C (5°F), with temperatures reaching below -30° C (-22°F) in the winter months (Environment Canada, 2014). As with the climate, the topography of Uluhaktok is similar to Naujaat; the two communities both reside near the Arctic Circle with Ulu enjoying full day sun in July.

The people who live in Uluhaktok's climate and topography have a median age of 28.4 years, putting the population in the middle of the three communities studied (Statistics Canada, 2016). English is the language most often spoken at home by 390 of the 396 residents of Ulu (Statistics Canada, 2016). The language spoken and identified as the mother tongue by 130 of the residents of Ulu is known as Inuinnaqtun (Inuvialuktun; Statistics Canada, 2016).

While in Uluhaktok as part of this project, we were able to interview five individuals associated with the co-operative, producing 91 video clips and a total of 26.4 GB of HD film.

The co-operative in Ulu was founded in 1961, making it one of the oldest co-operatives in the study (Arctic Co-operatives Ltd., interview, 2007b). Much like Naujaat and Old Crow's co-operatives, the co-operative members in Ulu focused on the role the co-operative plays in the community:

It feels a lot better to serve in a co-operative environment as opposed to a company where you send all your profits out to shareholders in other countries and things like that. To be able to be in a community that is as isolated as it is, it is difficult to have the stability of regular income and regular price food these kinds of things. To be in a business that does what it can to put it back into the community, that is the biggest benefit. (Ulukhaktok Interview #1, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities)

“It makes me feel good that I am now working with them as a board member trying to help out the rest of the community” (Ulukhaktok Interview #4, 2017; Theme: Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities).

Other similarities between the co-operatives include the involvement in multiple sectors within the local economy, including transportation. Aklak Air maintains a strong relationship with Ulukhaktok's co-operative—the co-operative acts as the airline's agent. Ulukhaktok's co-operative, similar to Old Crow and Naujaat, also operates the local hotel and restaurant. One unique sector that Ulukhaktok operates in is telecommunications, which provides 45 cable channels to the community.

We have the retail operations here where we sell everything from food to snowmobiles, furs, guns, bikes, absolutely everything we can get that people want. Whenever people are looking for new things we try to bring it in however we can. We have the hotel and the restaurant that are doing fantastic. We have cable TV with 45 channels. We do the post office, which is in the Co-op store. We are the agent for Aklak Air, so we are out at the airport three times a week for them. Doing bookings here at the co-op as well. (Ulukhaktok Interview #1, 2017; Theme: Business skills within community need to be developed)

The multiple sectors in which the co-operative operates provide unique opportunities and challenges for the co-operative and community. In addition, Ulukhaktok maintains two competing firms, a Northern Store and a convenience store. It is, however, the co-operative that offers multiple services over and above basic retail. The distinction between community and co-operative does become blurred in the eyes of board members and management as they see the two entities as somewhat interchangeable: “The decisions that you make can impact the co-op or the community. Either good or bad. Your voice can be heard and you can make an impact on the co-op and your community” (Ulukhaktok Interview #4, 2017; Theme: Business skills need to include cultural components as co-ops represent cultural economic expressions).

The voice that the community members sought to hear in the co-operative, however, was the local language to include more people from the community: “More people that can speak the local language so you can have better interaction with Elders and not just the young people” (Co-op Member #3 Interview, 2017; Theme: Business skills need to include cultural components as co-ops represent cultural economic expressions). In addition to the co-operative using the traditional language, the membership indicated a need for cultural training for management: “Proper training for management and the employees. I believe that management should go through a ‘culture day’ to better understand

the community and the people, culture and lifestyle” (Co-op Member #2 Interview, 2017; Theme: Business skills within community need to be developed).

To provide this cultural training, there was an emphasis on direct learning pathways such as on-the-job training, and direct observation with limited lecture-style education: “Allow younger people to observe, teaching people new skills, give a good, not too- long, lecture [or] presentation with examples” (Co-op Member #3 Interview, 2017; Theme: Business skills within community need to be developed).

## **Discussion**

This participatory research project with three Indigenous communities in the Arctic revealed the following themes related to their experiences with community co-operatives:

- a. Co-operatives act as links between community and their economic activities.
- b. Business skills within the community need to be developed.
- c. Business skills need to include cultural components as co-ops represent cultural economic expressions.

### **Co-operatives Act as Links Between Community and Their Economic Activities**

Throughout the cases presented in this study, community co-operatives acted as links between community needs and economic activities to meet those needs. As seen in all three case studies, each community has established a management structure over their supply chains through purchasing shares in transportation industries that service their communities. These share purchases gave the communities the authority to override traditional economic activities focused on profit maximization in order to create a secure supply chain. The ability of the co-operatives to link community needs to economic activities is a key component in the reinhabitation process for these communities.

### **Business Skills Within the Community Need to be Developed**

In order to ensure the reinhabitation process is successful, however, the economic activities must be managed with effective business skills. As discussed in this article, the traditional business curriculum lacks Indigenous content, or the content is included through an “add and stir” approach, that is not representative of the place-based challenges faced by these communities. It is thus important to build business skills within communities to ensure the place-based nature of business operations are considered. The rural and remote place-based nature of these communities has the co-operatives offering multiple services from transportation, telecommunications, retail, fuel, housing, and others that require a broad spectrum of business skills.

### **Business Skills Need to Include Cultural Components as Co-ops Represent Cultural Economic Expressions**

Given that place-based business skills are required within these communities and that these business skills lead to economic activities that represent community expression, there needs to be a cultural component to business skills education for these communities’ business leaders. As a result of the need

for a cultural component or understanding incorporated into business activities, there is a need for business education to include local cultural understandings.

Managing a symbiotic relationship between co-operative and community requires education that includes place-based knowledge. The history, geographic location, isolation, environment, and culture of the community must be understood to effectively manage an economic actor within this environment. As was seen in the Old Crow case study, when these characteristics are not incorporated into the management of a local business, traditional economic motivations override community need. In the case of Old Crow, the community was left without a grocery store for six months, leaving the community without access to healthful foods. The co-operatives within these communities represent more than just a supplier of goods and services; these co-operatives represent a means to reinhabit place in order to pursue social action that improves the social and ecological life of the community. Economic action by the co-operative is seen as a means of community development in opposition to traditional social, political, and economic motivations and activities that do not incorporate an understanding of place.

As each of the communities involved in this research is extremely isolated, the inability of a globalized market economy being able to effectively meet the community's needs is clearly evident. The co-operatives formed in response to community opposition to the mainstream economic system and perceived market failures, which allowed the co-operatives to take over the management of resources that were seen as being mishandled by the previous system. The co-operative represents a community response that creates a pathway to learning that is not based on conventional business educational practice. Community members see a new way of understanding economic actions within their community and developed a co-operative business based on this new understanding. The new understanding of business includes the incorporation of traditional activities, such as hunting, fishing, and trapping, on traditional lands to supplement the co-operative business operations. This inclusion of traditional economic actions helps create the mixed economy of the North, which requires a cultural understanding in business practice. As a result, a symbiotic relationship between co-operative and community must develop to incorporate cultural, traditional economic actions.

The symbiotic relationship between co-operative and community needs to be encouraged as a component of a community development plan that allows for reinhabitation of place. The co-operative provides a means for the community to plan for their future, incorporating many and varied businesses to meet the needs of the community it serves. To ensure an educational pathway for future business leaders within this symbiotic system, a pedagogy of place “must address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation” (McLaren & Giroux, 1990, p. 263). This pathway would allow the community to respond to its economic and natural environment through effective resource management, moving away from traditional understanding of primary business goals such as profit maximization. Unlike the current business educational pathway that focuses on profit maximization and shareholder value, this place-based pedagogical pathway would incorporate existing Indigenous knowledge of place to effectively manage local resources for these isolated communities. As seen in this study, by not incorporating an understanding of place in the business activities of an economic actor, the community is left to the whims of a system focused on profit. All three communities faced intermittent supply chain interruptions or removal of profits from community, hampering the community's ability to plan for their future.

This economic empowerment allows communities to consider what they want their community to become (the narrative of the community) through the goods and services the co-operative supplies. In the case of Old Crow, the co-operative has allowed the community to begin planning to build a winter road<sup>1</sup> to better serve their community's needs. It is not even the action, but the planning, the visioning, and the dreaming that helps to define a community. Without a symbiotic relationship between the economic actors within a community and the community itself, it is not possible for communities to see themselves as empowered to dream and plan for the future. The basic democratic nature of co-operatives allows these communities to have a say in the economic activities of the organization. Co-operatives operate on a one member, one vote principle that ensures membership is the driver of economic activities and shareholders and their capital interests.

The business operations of the community co-operatives represent civic participation and social action by these communities. Williams (2001) presented the following equation in his book: "Place + People = Politics" (p. 3). The relationship between place and the people inhabiting it form the political reality. It is suggested here that economics be added to the equation. Thus, Place + People = Politics + Economics represents communities, *in situ*,<sup>2</sup> finding the means to govern themselves and manage their resources to ensure a sustainable ecology. It is the incorporation of the economics of resource management into Williams' equation that lead us to the need to oppose the existing assumptions in the education system that support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economic in favour of co-operative, local action for community development: "Place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the wellbeing of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 309). As will be shown in the next sections, Freire's (1998) critical pedagogy of the oppressed placed in an Arctic rural context leads us to a revision of Williams' Place + People = Politics to include Economics that supports, and further emphasizes, Gruenewald's critical pedagogy of place within rural and remote communities emphasizing social transformation and reinhabitation of place. Thus, by opposing the current economic paradigm that focuses on individual needs, these communities establish co-operatives that add economic action in order to developing a stronger symbiotic relationship with place.

The specific management and governance skills are required in order for the community co-operatives to provide economic empowerment. Crome and O'Connor (2016) suggest that skills in these areas alone are not enough to manage a co-operative; co-operation is a core virtue. In a genuine system of co-operation, people see the virtues associated with it as part of their deepest sense of themselves, and these virtues are what ties them to their community with enduring bonds of mutual support. These co-operation skills are "fundamentally different from the 'social skills' that serve the short-term interests at issue in temporary contracts that hold sway in what is nowadays known as 'team-working'" (Crome & O'Connor, 2016, p. 30).

Given that co-operative members within these isolated communities need these management and governance skills, they first need educational pathways that will fulfill these requirements. As with any

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<sup>1</sup> Isolated communities in Canada's North lack paved roads, so snow is piled and compacted to make temporary roads, called winter roads, to enable transport trucks to access the community, allowing for less expensive shipping of products to the community.

<sup>2</sup> Meaning in their original place.



business firm, building the necessary skill set in these areas is an ongoing process. What is unique about these Arctic communities is their need to not only develop training plans for management and governance, but to create cultural development education tools that encourage the training of “culture workers” within their economic activities (Freire, 1998). Cultural development tools are needed to integrate the co-operatives’ management and governance activities into the community culture and community narrative. The co-operative business represents a key economic actor within the community that is governed by the community and is a key part of the community’s story. This symbiotic relationship between an economic actor and the community emphasizes the need for cultural development training within the co-operative. The business activities of the co-operative need to focus on community development, including cultural economic expression. Unlike standard firms that focus on profit, the co-operatives’ actors in these Arctic communities help to define the community.

It is difficult for the managers of these co-operatives to effectively meet the needs of their communities if they lack an educational pathway to understand and meet those needs. Simple economic actions focused on individual profit maximization are insufficient to address the symbiotic relationship between the co-op, the community, and the place. Managers and directors of the co-operative interact with community leaders and, in some cases serve in both roles, making the need for political and cultural understanding all the greater. Post-secondary institutions do not currently teach the relevant business skills to meet the needs of these communities, including cultural and political content. Courses on cultural heritage, place-based history, or even the nature of rural or northern life would assist in building a better understanding of the role of business in these communities. Reliance on an understanding of capitalist economic theory focused on profit is a contradiction for these rural and remote Arctic communities and, as a result, community action through co-operative development supplants this goal. The co-operatives’ economic actions lead to a need for education in relation to place, of which culture is a key component for these communities. The development of expertise within the ecosystem of these communities is needed, as opposed to the individual-focused business paradigm currently being taught in most postsecondary institutions. Business leaders must be capable of managing under the influence of place, which can galvanize people in political and economic action aimed at community development. To ensure the social and ecological sustainability of these co-operatives and the wide range of services that they offer, an educational pedagogy of place must be developed and form the basis for business education for these communities.

The isolated nature of these communities does make interaction with post-secondary educational institutions difficult. Standard delivery methods such as in-class lectures and seminars, or even distance education, would be ineffective in delivering a place-based businesses education to people in these communities. The development of a knowledge-sharing exchange program between post-secondary institutions and Indigenous communities could be an effective way to impart the place-based business education needed. Students from isolated communities and urban centres could trade places for a semester. The students could video record their reflections in order to share their experiences with a wider audience, including their fellow students. A student perspective would encourage knowledge dissemination to future business leaders through a peer-to-peer format rather than a traditional lecture format. This form of student exchange would lead to a better understanding of the role of business in isolated communities and the need to include a cultural component to business studies that does not currently exist in traditional business schools. This would require a partnership between communities and post-secondary institutions to assist in the successful placement and education of students.

The results of this study point to a need to further understand the cultural sensitivities that a community-based business must consider when working for and with the community it serves. Within these rural and remote Northern communities, the co-operative businesses take on multiple service-provider roles, making them a key actor, not only in the economic activity of the community, but in the social and cultural life of the community. Further study into the integration and interaction of these firms into Indigenous communities is needed in order to provide educational and business tools guided by a place-based pedagogical pathway that are best suited to the community's needs.

### **Policy Recommendations**

As a community development organization, Arctic Co-operatives Limited and other community co-operatives need to work together in partnership with post-secondary institutions to develop business education curricula that include a place-based cultural component in order to enhance the cultural economic expression of the community through its co-operative. Each co-operative is an autonomous entity that is owned and operated by the Indigenous community, which means that the membership of the co-operative would ensure that local, Indigenous people's needs are met. Each community co-operative would work with a post-secondary institution through Arctic Co-operatives Limited, as their federated service co-operative, to develop a business educational exchange program that would meet their community's specific needs. The community co-operatives would take the lead in identifying the community's needs. The post-secondary institution would provide academic support and direction for the program, and Arctic Co-operatives Limited would assist with the logistics of the program, given their expertise in this area.

It would be detrimental to treat Arctic community co-operatives like a standard firm requiring standard business education to function properly. These Arctic co-operatives are economic expressions of culture within the community, which are based in a rural and remote environment. A business educational policy that builds business skills at the local level is required to ensure that the place-based cultural component of these co-operatives is not lost. Indigenous culture is linked closely to place-based understandings of sustainability and ecology, which means there is a need to develop educational policies that focus on reinhabitation of place, rather than individual profit maximization. Encouraging the development of business educational policies that include a focus on place and culture as drivers of cultural economic action will lead future business leaders down a pedagogical path that differs from the existing profit maximizing paradigm of business education.

Any business educational policy developed for these communities must focus on innovative, local, hands-on approaches to business skills development that include the training of culture workers so that the narrative of the community can be transmitted through economic actions. Standard in-class lecture pedagogy does not allow for cultural economic expression, nor does it actively engage young entrepreneurs within community. While business educational policy must ensure that basic business skills such as accounting, marketing, logistics, governance, and entrepreneurship are effectively taught, there is an additional place-based cultural economic expression requirement within these Arctic co-operative firms that must be addressed. Cultural economic expression must be encouraged at the local level through skills development within the community that focuses on how to live within the community and how to tell the story of the community. Teaching basic business skills can readily override cultural expression through the focus on profit. Teaching business skills within community and

including cultural economic expression as a priority of a business entity will ensure future Indigenous entrepreneurs can express their cultural identity based on place while engaging in economic activity with the end goal of reinhabitation.

### Conclusions

The Vuntut G'witchin First Nations community of Old Crow adopted the co-operative for their community as a means of managing their economic sustainability. Money moving out of the community made it difficult for the community to plan for its future and provide quality goods and services for their residents. Much like the partnership with Air North Airline, the partnership with Arctic Co-operatives Limited and Vuntut G'witchin First Nation looks to build a community rather than take from the community. The partnership aims to tell the economic story of the community, rather than silence the economic ability of the community. The ability of the co-operative model provides democratic economic empowerment to the membership because it allows communities to determine where and how funds will be spent in order to improve their community for future generations.

The community of Naujaat, Nunavut has also developed a strong link between community and the co-operative. Members of the co-operative leadership also work as leaders in the local government. The management, directors, and staff of the co-operative see the role of the co-operative as one of providing for the community. That being said, management noted that there are cultural sensitivities that need to be understood to function effectively in the co-operative and the community. The co-operative members and leaders could benefit from training that incorporates cultural sensitivity and an understanding of the significance of the land as a spiritual, social, and cultural connection to the community. As the community, the land, and the co-operative are inextricably linked, it is not reasonable to work in the one without understanding the significance of the other.

Much like Naujaat, Ulu presents a picture of a community-focused firm that offers a multitude of services for the community. However, Ulu is a small community in comparison to Naujaat, which means there is a smaller pool of people who can meet the skill requirements of the co-operative. While the lack of skills capacity has not stopped the co-operative from successfully offering their community multiple services, providing skills training within the community could improve the co-operative's business and the opportunities available to current residents.

The three co-operatives that participated in this study maintain three key ideas or themed categories in common:

- a. There is a link between the community and the co-operative that needs to be encouraged and developed to keep the benefits of economic activity in the community.
- b. Skills training needs to be developed in order to increase the capacity of community members to meet the co-operative's growing need for business acumen.
- c. Skills training needs to include a cultural component so that individuals who work for the community co-operative, a key part of the community, understand the community.

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