

# Nunavik childcare centres develop new assessment tool <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

A new way of assessing children's development has travelled from New Zealand's indigenous Maori people to the Inuit of Nunavik.

Called "Learning Stories," this assessment approach shows what children do, not what they didn't do, through photos and stories.

In New Zealand, Maori educators found that it privileged and empowered Maori children instead of looking at the "deficit, problematic Maori child" by celebrating children's learning achievements.

They named the project "Te Whatu Pokeka."

A whatu pokeka is a baby blanket made of muka (fibre) from the harakeke (flax) plant.

"Carefully woven into the inside of the blanket are albatross feathers to provide warmth, comfort, security, and refuge from the elements. The pokeka takes the shape of the child as it learns and grows. It is a metaphor for this project, the development of a curriculum that is determined and shaped by the child," says a document from the New Zealand ministry of education.

When the Kativik Regional Government's childcare section received money from Aboriginal Headstart Canada to look at a better way of assessing the 800 young Inuit children in its childcare centres, the Maori assessment method attracted them.

Nunavik childcares had no assessment that was compatible with Inuit culture, and could "provide us with what is really happening with the children, with the child's interest and ability at heart," said Margaret Gauvin, director of the KRG's employment, training, income support and childcare department,

Assessment techniques were based on meanings "no one can understand," she said.

But the "Learning Stories" rely on words, images and approaches which are familiar - and it uses new technology like digital cameras and computers to bring these together.

Using the "Learning Stories" assessment approach, childcare educators observe their charges carefully, taking a photo of a child in a learning situation and then describing - in Inuttitut - what happened.

Together, the pictures and words describe, document, discuss and plan for children's learning, Gauvin said.

"It puts the child as the focus of the interest and it allows the child to decide what kind of activities to do," she said.

"Learning Stories" also connect children, teachers and parents because they open the door to talking more about learning, adds Carol Rowan, a childcare consultant who worked on the assessment project in Nunavik.

The "Learning Stories" portfolios contain photos, featuring children, and stories, which describe what children, are doing at the childcare centre.

As a plus, the "Learning Stories, which are written, printed and read in the Inuit language and provide a means for documenting Inuit cultural knowledge and making it visible through the portfolios which are on display for parents to see.

Piloted at a childcare centre in Inukjuak, the "Learning Stories" approach resulted in 59 learning stories over seven weeks.

While "Learning Stories" is still under evaluation in Nunavik, Maori say this way of assessment dovetails with the indigenous view of the world where the process is continually emerging and "our understanding is constantly evolving."

-reprinted from the Nunatsiaq Online

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[2]</sup>

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