

Naalagiursaniq Tunnganarnirlu (Learning to Listen and be Welcoming):

Engaging Inuit Perspectives on Timimut Ikajuqsivik (Rehabilitation Services) for Children in the Qikiqtani Region of Nunavut

Doctoral research led by Janna MacLachlan with co-researchers Stephanie Nixon, Andrea Andersen, Anita Benoit, Earl Nowgesic and Leetia Janes. Qujannamiik to the 25 Nunavummiut who generously shared their knowledge with us in the project. We are so grateful for what we have learned.

Research Summary

Background

I (Janna) am an occupational therapist who has lived and worked in Nunavut off and on since 2006. All occupational therapists (OTs), physiotherapists (PTs) and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are trained in Southern Canada but aren't taught how Inuit ways of knowing and doing can be represented and respected in services, especially those for children. I wanted to lead a research project that would help address this gap.

This project was completed as part of my doctoral research at the University of Toronto. It was informed by 25 people in 2 communities who shared their knowledge and perspectives. Participants and stakeholders helped with the analysis. I am now sharing results with the public, health professionals and other stakeholders.



Significance and Impact

The lessons learned from this project can help:

- **open space within Southern Canadian OT/PT/SLP practices to welcome Inuit knowledge**, and support it being front and centre.
- **identify opportunities where Inuit and OT/PT/SLP knowledge can come together** for the benefit of children and families.
- **make it visible how many beliefs within OT/PT/SLP practices are just one viewpoint** - not facts, and not the only viewpoint that is legitimate, particularly on Inuit lands.

Key Message #1


To move forward in a good way, participant guidance for OTs, PTs and SLPs can be summarized in four ideas:

- 1) **Naalagiursaniq** (learning to listen)
- 2) **Tunnganarniq** (being welcoming, inclusive and open)
- 3) **Inuuqatigiitsiarniq katujjiqatigiitsiarnirlu** (working well together in respectful relationships)
- 4) **Sivumuaqatigiigni saimmaqatigiinnikkut** (moving forward together in reconciliation)


Key Message #2

While there may be many possible differences between OT/PT/SLP and Inuit beliefs about supporting children (see example in the table), the ultimate action to support a child can be the same. For instance, whether you believe a child is ready to learn to walk because they are 12 months old or because they demonstrate readiness, the same strategies for teaching a child to walk may be useful.

When service providers demonstrate openness and respect the values and beliefs of people they work with, they can share their knowledge in a way that fits with child and family needs. Service providers have a lot of power (perhaps more than they are aware). **Harm can be done when providers believe their ways of thinking and doing are the only ones that are correct.** There are opportunities to remove barriers that prevent Inuit knowledge and approaches about supporting childhood learning and skill building from influencing services. With barriers removed, we can work together, as illustrated in the image on the table by Aija Komagapik.



	Inuit Qaujimajangit (what Inuit know)	Mainstream Canadian OT/PT/SLP services
Belief	Everyone has their own normal.	What is normal can be objectively measured.
Goal	Support children to learn at their own pace.	Help children “catch up” to standardized norms.
Actions	Focus on what the child is ready to learn next. Support children to practice skills they have difficulty with.	Focus on what the child “should” be doing at a certain age.


Illustrations by Aija Komagapik.

A Practice Tool



Imagine you are on your way to help build the fire in the picture. Following primarily Inuit knowledge, you might collect mostly itsutit (Arctic heather) on your way there. Following primarily Southern knowledge, you might collect mostly wood. It is also possible to pick a path where you collect some of both. Gathering resources for the fire is a metaphor for bringing together knowledge to support a child. No matter what a person's path is, OT/PT/SLP can respect that path and support them on it, listening for what is important to them. **People with different perspectives and experiences can bring their knowledge together to achieve a shared goal** of supporting a child. There is no one "best" route to get to the fire. **The best route is the one that supports an individual or family on their unique path.**

Qujannamiik!

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More detailed research information including the complete thesis and articles (as they are published) can be found here: <https://timimutikajuqsivikresearch.ca> Please feel free to contact me at: janna.maclachlan@alum.utoronto.ca