



Nunavut

Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework

June 2023







Dedications and acknowledgements

The document is dedicated to the young children of Nunavut.

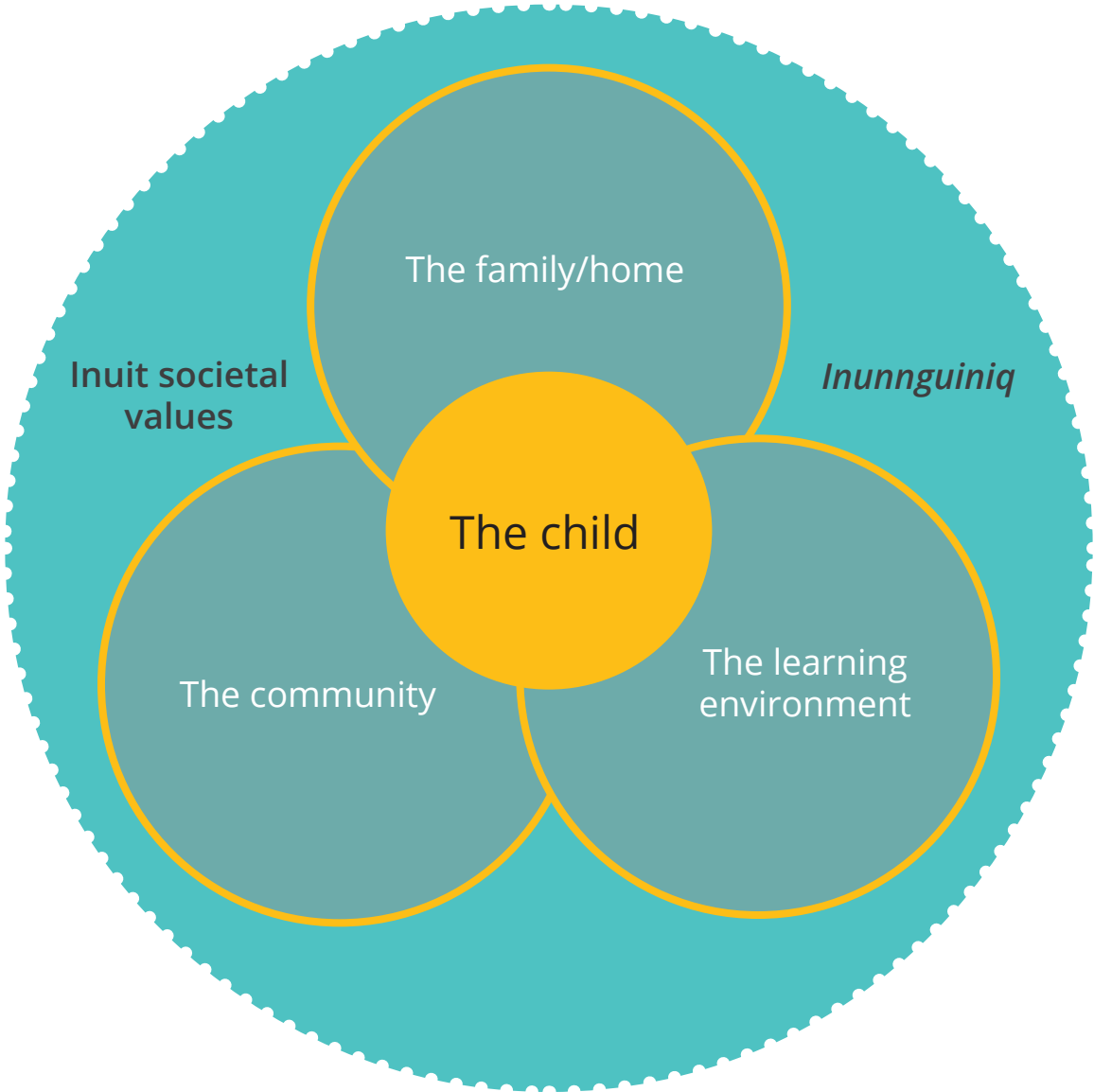
It is also dedicated to all of the adults who play a part in supporting children at home and in the community, including parents and families, Elders, early childhood educators, administrators, and those who care for the young children of Nunavut.





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Nunavut ELCC guiding principles

Introduction

High-quality early learning and child care (ELCC) programs and services are essential for all children and their families across Nunavut. The territory's population is predominantly Inuit, and over half of Nunavummiut identify Inuktitut as their mother tongue.¹ To support self-determination, reconciliation, and cultural revitalization, ELCC programs and services must be grounded in the Inuit worldview and ways of knowing and to be driven by the goals of revitalizing and retaining Inuit language and culture.² Nunavut's geography influences the development and implementation of ELCC programs and services. The needs of small remote communities differ from those of larger, more populated areas. ELCC programs and services must serve the unique needs of each community.

The aim of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* is to present a clear and accessible vision for ELCC in Nunavut that supports the development and delivery of ELCC programs and services across the territory. Whether this takes place in the home, child care settings, community-based programs, or parenting centres in remote or urban communities, all ELCC programs developed and delivered in Nunavut should align with the vision and guiding principles presented in this framework.

There are **two essential pedagogies**, or ways of knowing, that form the framework's foundation.

First, the framework is grounded in **Inuit societal values** and **Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)**. This set of knowledge, values, and beliefs is core to Inuit culture in Nunavut:³

- **Inuuqatigiitsiarniq**: respecting others, relationships, and caring for people.
- **Tunnganarniq**: fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming, and inclusive.
- **Pijitsirniq**: serving and providing for family and/or community.
- **Aajiiqatigiinni**: making decisions through discussion and consensus.
- **Pilimmaksarniq/pijariuqsarniq**: developing skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.
- **Piliriqatigiinni**: working together for a common cause.
- **Qanuqtuurniq**: being innovative and resourceful.
- **Avatittinnik kamatsiarniq**: respecting and caring for the land, animals, and environment.

The framework is also anchored in the values and beliefs of **inunnguiniq**, or the "making of a human being."⁴ Inunnguiniq provides a model that holds the child within their family, community, and learning environment. It promotes a heart-centred approach to ELCC that focuses on nurturing children's compassion, resilience, and ability to learn and grow continually as they develop habits for living a good life. Inunnguiniq is the foundation of Inuit child rearing.



When I learned inunnguiniq from my grandparents, the knowledge could be traced back through many generations. It does not change over time because the knowledge and directions are foundational. Sound teachings last. They are useful today and will be useful in the future. We need to understand inunnguiniq and consider it a gift from our culture and past. We need to keep this precious gift alive. All of the instructions we give to children become alive in them and continue on through them—good or bad.

—Elders Advisory Committee⁵

The Department of Education has engaged in consultation with Inuit organizations to ensure that the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* reflects their vision of childhood in the territory's diverse regions. Article 3 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination."⁶ The Department of Education is also committed to empowering communities and child care centres to determine how best to interpret and implement the framework in ways that support their unique perspectives and experiences.

It is important to note that the development of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* is also informed by the Inuit section of the *Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCC)*. The *IELCC* consistently reinforces the need for ELCC programs and services to be rooted in Inuit language and culture. It also demonstrates the importance of Inuit self-determination in the planning and implementation of programs, and it defines high-quality ELCC programs as flexible, inclusive, and accessible to all children and their families.⁷ It is essential that the development and implementation of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* align with and support the *IELCC* in all areas.

There are **four dimensions** of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework*:

- **The child:** The child is the framework's primary focus. To provide early learning and child care that aligns with its visions and principles, establishing a collective image of children in Nunavut is essential and must include who they are, what their needs are, and how best to serve them.
- **The family/home:** The home is where children begin to learn and grow, and their parents and caregivers are their first teachers. When the guiding principles of the framework are applied, what can early learning in the home look like?
- **The community:** Children are also part of a wider community that plays a role in supporting and nurturing their learning and development. How can Elders, community members, and other partners and stakeholders use the guiding principles of the framework to support young children in their community best?
- **The learning environment:** Early learning and child care in Nunavut is provided in formal and informal settings led by child care providers and early childhood educators. How can these settings use the guiding principles of the framework to design and deliver high-quality, culturally relevant programming for all young children in Nunavut?

Vision statement

All children in Nunavut grow and learn in a nurturing and caring community, build strong and healthy relationships, and develop their own unique gifts and capabilities. High-quality child care programs and services in Nunavut recognize that all children are curious, capable, and competent. These programs and services are responsive to the needs of the whole child, and they centre and build on the territory's land, culture, and languages. These nurturing, heart-centred early learning experiences align with Inuit societal values, IQ, and inunnguiniq, and further, they are the right of every child.

Guiding principles

The four guiding principles of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* aim to support the development and delivery of equitable ELCC programs and services across the territory. This will ensure that all children have access to rich, comprehensive early learning experiences grounded in Inuit societal values, IQ, and inunnguiniq. The goal of these guiding principles is to set a standard for high-quality early learning and child care for which all those working with young children across Nunavut continuously strive. The principles are as follows:

- **Children are curious, capable, and competent.** Children are naturally curious and use their senses to learn about the world around them. When children receive opportunities for *silatunig* (experiencing in the world), they build their skills and understanding and develop their own unique capabilities.⁸ They learn to care for their needs and the needs of others.

When children feel capable, their sense of self is strengthened, and they become competent members of their families and communities. ELCC settings need to provide culturally relevant spaces for children to express their interests and preferences, develop their abilities, and direct their own exploration and discovery.

- **Children have social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions.** High-quality early learning and child care in Nunavut should support the holistic well-being of children as well as address their educational needs.⁹ ELCC work must create opportunities for children to use their minds and bodies in meaningful ways. To support their social and emotional development, ELCC work should also encourage children to connect to and build relationships with their peers and caregivers. By viewing the developing child holistically, “strength in attitude, skill development, thinking, and behaviour” can be achieved.¹⁰
- **Children want to belong and contribute to their families and communities.** Children want to belong, and they continually look for ways to connect with their peers, caregivers, families, and communities in deep, caring relationships. Likewise, children want to contribute to the families and communities to which they belong. They demonstrate this when they are invited to join in daily activities, which also provide them with opportunities to learn by watching others. With experience and maturity, they develop *pijitsirniq* and can begin contributing meaningfully to their families and communities.¹¹

- **Children need to play, experiment, and practise.** Through play, children learn how to be with others in the world.¹² Children can build and practise skills and knowledge and apply their learning in real-world contexts. Play, experimentation, and practice also encourage qanuqtuurniq and allow for innovation and resourcefulness to emerge and flourish. Play is an opportunity for children to express themselves and practise discussion, building consensus, and working toward a common good. It is a way to learn how to be in kind and caring relationships with others and the environment.¹³



Dimensions of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework*

The child

The child is the centre, or the heart, of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework*. Children who are able to grow and learn in a nurturing community can build strong, healthy relationships and develop their own unique gifts and capabilities. When families, early childhood educators, and community members align their practices with *inunnguiniq* and are responsive to the needs of the whole child, the children in their care are able to grow and learn in meaningful ways.¹⁴

Nested within their families and communities, children in Nunavut have an opportunity to connect with Inuit knowledge and societal values and contribute to the revitalization of Inuit language and culture.¹⁵ Accomplishing this in formal and informal ELCC programs and services requires developing a shared image of the child that recognizes and values children as active members of their families and communities. To develop a shared image of the child, we must recognize that children hold distinct yet interconnected domains of their whole self, including the social-emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical domains.¹⁶ To support the child's holistic development, all these domains must be respected and nurtured.

As children make sense of their place in the world and their relationships with all living things, their identities begin to take shape, and their unique gifts and capabilities emerge. We can support

this developing identity by instilling a sense of belonging and by creating opportunities for children to see themselves represented in their communities and to participate meaningfully in the world around them. In serving and providing for others—in practising *pijitsirniq*—children can begin to understand their roles and responsibilities within their community.¹⁷ Building relationships between children, families, early childhood educators, and community members is a vital part of supporting the social-emotional well-being of all children. With a foundation of social and emotional well-being, children can fully engage in the world and learn and grow through their experiences.¹⁸ Strong modelling and rich experiential learning opportunities will help children develop these positive relationships with others.



Other things children were immediately taught about were their family and kinship ties and to be able to work well with others, and most of all, children were encouraged to respect and obey their Elders and all parents in their community. Respect was critical. Children had to want to respect others and be willing to show respect, not only because they were told to do so, but with a free will because they recognized that they could learn more by being in a respectful relationship with those around them.

—Louis Angalik, Arviat¹⁹

Children are born curious, and they engage in the natural processes of *silatuniq* and *tukisiumaniq* (making meaning in life) through observation and participation in the world with others.²⁰ Play is a natural expression of a child's curiosity, and with meaningful planning, support, and communication, children's play can be extended and enriched.²¹ These pedagogies serve as guides for how families, early childhood educators, and community members can connect with children and help them make meaning from their experiences.

As children grow, they want to move their bodies and build strength and confidence through active play and physical movement. Developing these physical skills and competencies helps children move through their world safely and independently. It is important for formal and informal ELCC programs and services to offer ample opportunities for children to engage in regular, vigorous physical activity that supports their healthy growth and development.²² These opportunities should be indoors, outdoors, and on the land, and they should allow students to

participate in Inuit games and develop traditional skills that strengthen their connection to the land.

A child's expression of their spirituality is unique to their lived experiences in the world and to their interactions with others. With a sense of wonder, children seek to discover their connections with all living things. Families, early childhood educators, and community members who support children in formal and informal ELCC programs and services can nurture this emerging spirituality and sense of wonder by helping children develop respectful relationships with and a sense of stewardship for all living things.²³ Recognizing their responsibilities to all living things and their connection to others can help children begin to understand their place in the world.

The developmental importance of infancy through early childhood cannot be overstated. The formative effects that early childhood experiences have on a child's development highlight the need for responsive and nurturing ELCC programs and services for all children. By taking a heart-centred approach to ELCC, all decisions regarding a child are viewed through a lens that considers their holistic health and well-being above all.²⁴

The family/home

The *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* recognizes that the child's learning journey begins in the home and with their family. Their first teachers are their parents and immediate caregivers.²⁵ Parents and caregivers have a responsibility to nurture the child through infancy and early childhood. Inunnguiniq occurs when parents and caregivers, with support from Elders and their community, take on early childhood education as a collective endeavour. Through a heart-centred approach, parents and caregivers nurture children's compassion, resilience, and ability to learn and grow continually as they develop habits for living a good life. Connecting parents and caregivers with valuable resources and networks can help build relationships between the home and the community so children and families can receive the support they need during this critical time in early development.

Initially, an infant is completely dependent on their primary caregivers to meet their needs. Immediate responses to the infant's cues are a form of coregulation by the primary caregivers, one that meets both the physical and emotional needs of the infant.²⁶ When an infant's needs are immediately and consistently addressed, a strong attachment between the infant and primary caregivers can be established.²⁷ Parents and caregivers also discover the individual temperament and particular needs of their child. Each child is unique and reacts differently to food, clothing, people, and new circumstances. Parents and caregivers can learn to understand the child's temperament and personality traits and to guide responsive care.²⁸ Parents and caregivers can also advocate for their child's individual needs as

the child enters formal and informal ELCC spaces outside the home.

Children engage all their senses as they learn from their environment. Their brain grows and builds connections with the information their senses process and by engaging in interactions with their parents and caregivers.²⁹ Parents and caregivers can support this natural learning process by offering a wide range of experiences that stimulate and engage their child in the linguistic and cultural practices of the parents, family, and community.³⁰ Allowing for unstructured play indoors, outdoors, and on the land gives a growing child opportunities to discover their unique strengths and gifts and to understand their place in the world.³¹ The guidance offered to children by parents and caregivers as they grow and develop should focus on encouragement and correcting the behaviour, not the child.³² With firm kindness, children can be guided to learn to live a good life grounded in Inuit knowledge and societal values.³³



The community

The *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* appreciates that high-quality ELCC in Nunavut is the result of the collective work, dedication, and effort of the entire community. Children begin their lives in their families but come to join extended family and the wider community, including formal and informal ELCC programs. All community members who provide services for children and families, including Elders, health-care providers, policy-makers, and those involved in the development and delivery of ELCC programs and services, have a responsibility to use the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework* as a foundation for their work. Together, we must engage in a collaborative process to consider how best to represent and support children and families in Nunavut.

Child rearing is the work of many, and the communication of Inuit societal values and IQ to children in Nunavut is critical to language revitalization and cultural preservation. The work of Elders is instrumental in teaching inunnguiniq and in helping parents and families, together with community partners, guide children to learn how to live a good life. Elders carry knowledge and wisdom that build and sustain children's connection with Inuit values, language, culture, practices, and traditions.³⁴ The role of Elders in the lives of children is crucial, and they must be included and given space in all programs and services for young children so they can transmit knowledge and wisdom that support the developing identity of children in Nunavut.³⁵



As stated in the *Elders in Daycare Reference Guidebook* from the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, “Elders hold traditional knowledge and language that, for a variety of reasons, may not have been passed to their own children or the younger generation. The children learn respect for themselves, others, tools, land, and animals. Children learn respect for Elders and respect for cultural identity from Elders.”³⁶

Taking a heart-centred approach in all matters that affect the child is grounded in the Inuit belief that all thinking stems from the heart.³⁷ This ensures that the emotional well-being of the child is preserved through the child-rearing process. Children rely on the caring adults around them to model inclusive and respectful behaviours. Tunnganarniq is foundational for the child to see all aspects of their emerging identity accepted and embraced. Likewise, inuuqatigiitsiarniq is foundational for the child to live in a community. Only through mutual respect and caring for one another can the deep connections that we all share with one another, all living beings, and the land truly thrive.

The learning environment

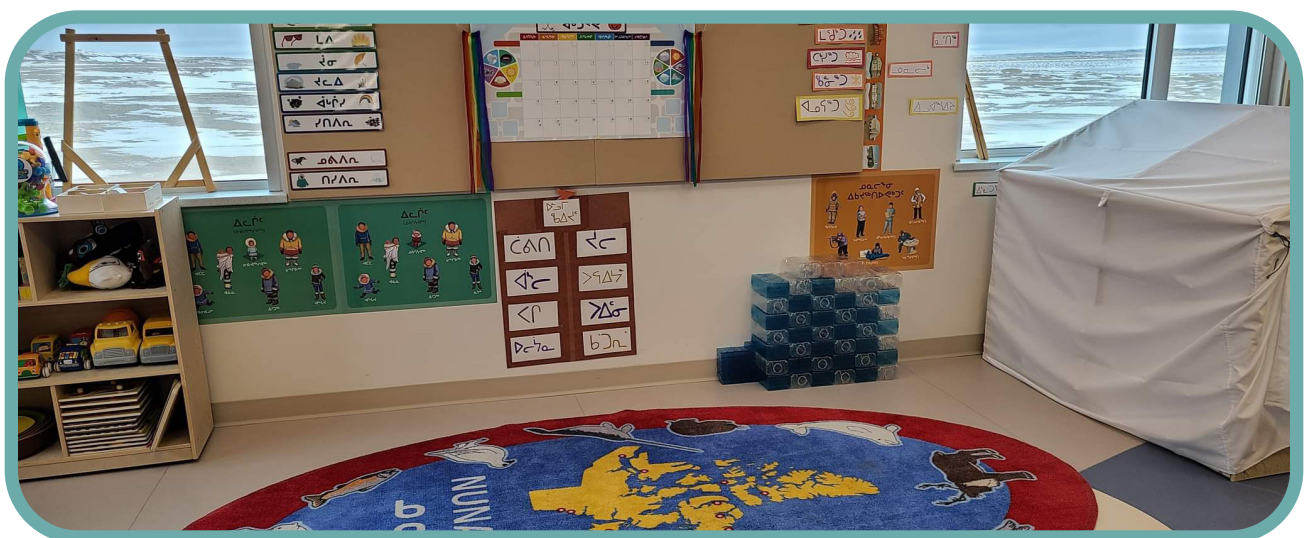
When creating learning environments for children in the territory, we must strive to respond to the developmental needs and interests of all children using Inuit societal values and Inuit language and culture. Early childhood educators, child care providers, and those offering early learning services must create learning environments for young children that include spaces, materials, and learning experiences that support each child's social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual development and that they engage the child through exploration and experimentation.

The revitalization of Inuit language and culture is vital to the design and development of ELCC environments in Nunavut.³⁸ Language revitalization can take place in the home, where parents and families share important knowledge and traditions and are recognized as a child's first teachers. It can take place in community-based programs delivered in spaces that reflect Inuit language and culture. It can also take place in formal ELCC settings where skilled and culturally responsive early childhood educators and child care providers work with children, families,

Elders, community members, and colleagues to shape and deliver ELCC programs and services grounded in inunnguiniq, IQ, and Inuit societal values.

A carefully planned learning environment that supports holistic development encourages children's active participation in daily routines and cultural practices. Effective ELCC environments embrace flexibility and are adaptable and responsive to the needs of specific regions and communities.³⁹ They also employ universal design principles when planning and equipping the learning environment to ensure it will be accessible and inclusive of all children.⁴⁰

The learning environment should be a space where children can build a sense of belonging and where they can contribute in meaningful ways. It is essential that early childhood educators, children, families, and communities work together to shape the learning environment.



Through a process of co-construction, all those who engage with and participate in the learning environment share a role in deciding how to design, equip, and use the space.⁴¹ Co-constructing the learning environment allows children and adults to consider the toys, books, materials, tools, and other artifacts that will be in the space. It encourages collaboration around how to organize the space in ways that are comfortable and functional for everyone. Nunavut is Inuit land. Formal and informal ELCC settings must engage in this process of co-construction and must consider how best to represent and support Inuit values, language, culture, practices, and traditions.

There is a growing consensus that children learn most effectively through play.⁴² Both silatuniq and tukisiumaniq show how experiential learning is the optimal approach to supporting the learning and development of young children. Activities in indoor and outdoor spaces as well as on the land can provide opportunities for children to engage with their surroundings and learn through play. ELCC environments in Nunavut should extend onto the land and into the natural world, where children can develop avatittinnik kamatsiarniq. This will also serve to deepen the connection children and families have to the land.

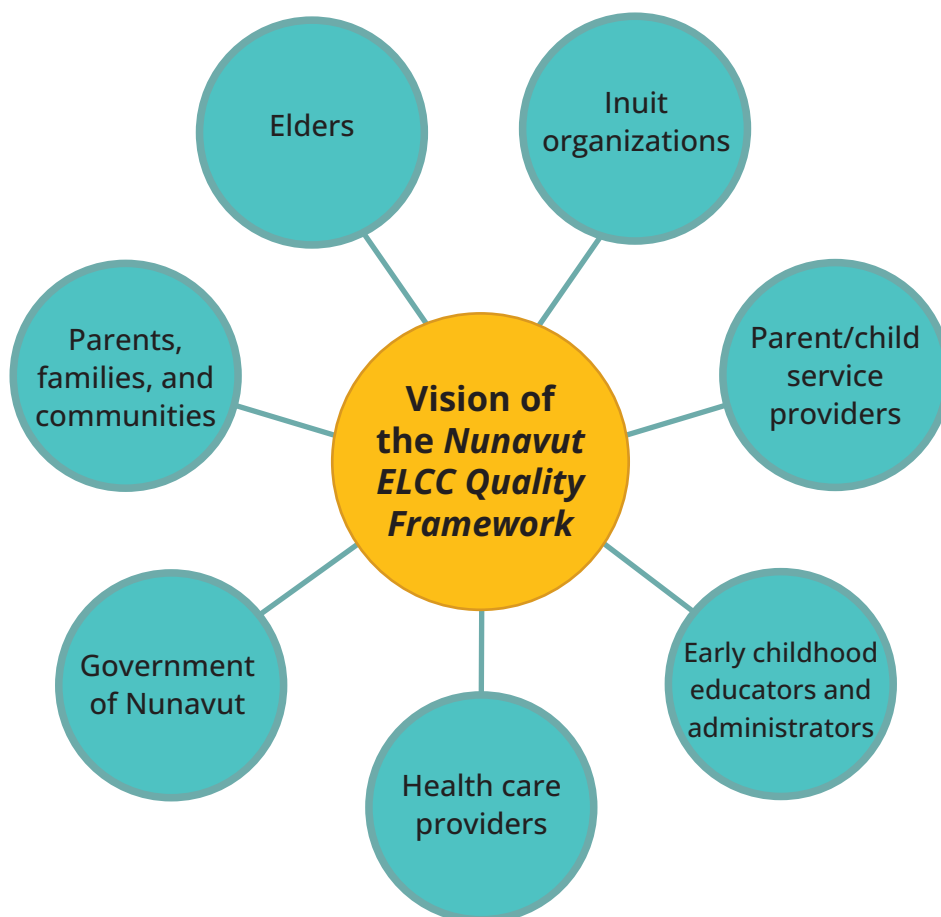
Proper life skills must be carefully developed early in a child's life to ensure the child will carry within them the IQ principle concepts and knowledge. These were considered survival skills. One of the best ways to learn is to learn from your mistakes, being continually encouraged to improve and become more able.

—Louis Angalik, Arviat⁴³

The learning environment plays a critical role in ELCC. Encouraging children, families, early childhood educators, and community members to work together to create spaces that are engaging and meaningful to those who will be using them will ensure that such spaces are welcoming and inclusive places to learn and grow.

Moving forward together

Everyone who interacts with and supports young children in Nunavut should commit to the vision and the guiding principles of the *Nunavut Early Learning and Child Care Quality Framework*. The vision of the framework and its principles will provide direction for future planning and growth, including the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services. Inunnguiniq is the work of an entire community, and this framework envisions a collective approach to providing early learning and child care for young children in a way that encourages the family, the community, and those in the learning environment to engage the child in meaningful learning and growth.⁴⁴



Key documents and resources

The following documents and resources provide important information and support for all those working in ELCC settings in Nunavut.

- *Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework*, Government of Canada, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-early-learning/2018-framework.html>.
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