



Learning Tailored to Inuit Needs

iSDC Combines Traditional Oral Knowledge with Online Learning to Support Professional Development in Inuit Communities

When Inuit communities in Nunavut identified a skills shortage in frontline social care jobs, iSDC and Tungasuvvingat Inuit developed a new college-level diploma for community support workers. Knowing that many potential students would be unable to attend classes in person, iSDC used the D2L Brightspace platform to design an online learning solution specifically for Inuit learners.

Company

Based in Iqaluit, Nunavut, in northern Canada, iSDC delivers a range of competency-based preemployment skills and skills development training, and specializes in supporting students from Inuit communities in Nunavut and throughout Canada.

AT A GLANCE

Client: Ilanniapaa Skills Development Centre (iSDC)

Learners: 50

Industry: Professional Development

Challenge:

- Help learners prepare for new careers in social care by building on their existing skills.
- Provide flexible competency-based education to help different types of learners achieve their goals.
- Remove barriers to entry for learners who cannot attend classes in person.

Solution:

- D2L's Brightspace platform
- Quizzes
- Game-based learning tools such as Storyboard
- Release conditions

Results:

- Helps oral and visual learners excel by combining traditional Inuit knowledge with modern teaching techniques.
- Harnesses gamification techniques that enable learners to focus on developing real-world competencies.
- Empowers learners to study in their own home, in their own time, and at their own pace with a mobile-friendly online learning platform.
- Eliminates admin work and enables teachers to develop course content quickly.

“Inuit culture puts emphasis on prior learning and experience, and that matches well with the competency-based learning approach that we’re taking with D2L. The goal isn’t to get a high test score, it’s to demonstrate that you have developed your knowledge, skills, and abilities.”

Trish Rennie, Former Technical Coordinator, iSDC

The Challenge

Accredited through the national Indigenous Certification Board of Canada, iSDC’s mission is to help the Inuit community develop their skills in a culturally safe environment.

“We focus on programs for Inuit learners, designed by members of their communities, and built around Inuit societal values,” says Trish Rennie, former technical coordinator at iSDC. “We work with Inuit elders to develop our content, so our courses include knowledge that has traditionally been transferred orally as well as text-based knowledge from books and websites.”

iSDC supports learners across the country, but its main location is in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, Canada’s most northerly territory. To ensure that it was providing the right courses to meet the needs of the local community, iSDC ran a survey, the results of which highlighted a skills shortage in frontline social care jobs across Nunavut.

“We need people who can work at the hospital, at the boarding houses and youth centers, and at shelters,” says Trish Rennie. Helen Roos, iSDC owner and Lead Curriculum Designer and Instructor collaborated with

Tungasuvvingat Inuit in Ottawa and applied for funding from Employment and Social Development Canada. The innovative online learning and work experience placement project is helping to increase the number of Inuit community support workers (CSWs), particularly to go between the Baffin Region of Nunavut and Ottawa: a natural regional corridor of “churn” for some Inuit families.

ONLINE LEARNING REMOVES BARRIERS TO ENTRY

iSDC knew that it would be critical to minimize barriers to entry for the new program. Many potential students already have full-time jobs or family responsibilities, making it difficult for them to find time to study. Moreover, iSDC feared that the need to travel long distances across difficult terrain in a polar climate to attend college would discourage learners in remote communities.

“The program is free, we are able to subsidize travel and childcare, and we pay a living wage to learners while they are on work placement,” says Trish Rennie. “But even with those barriers removed, some people just can’t sit in a lecture every day for eight hours straight. We wanted to build an online learning solution that could empower our learners to study whenever and wherever it works for them.”



The Solution

Helen Roos had seen D2L's Brightspace learning platform in action at other institutions, such as the Virtual High School and some of the other colleges in northern Canada.

"When we started looking seriously at learning management systems, Helen just said, 'I want that one.' When I saw the Brightspace platform and compared it to the previous software product that I'd been using, I remember thinking, 'Oh, this is great.' For example, when I'm building quizzes, I love that it gives me a live preview. As I'm putting in the questions and answers, I can instantly see what the quiz looks like."

Trish Rennie, Formal Technical Coordinator, iSDC

Since adopting the Brightspace platform, iSDC has developed over 100 courses, ranging from foundational subjects, such as computer basics, to more specialized courses in areas including occupational health and food safety.

"We look at everything from the traditional social and cultural and perspectives of Inuit communities," says Trish Rennie. "For example, we're developing

the first program on safe food handling in the Arctic. Food safety is different up here. We don't really have problems with rodents or pests because it's too cold. On the other hand, learning to use a traditional tool like an ulu for food preparation is very different from learning to use a standard kitchen knife."

She adds: "Inuit culture puts emphasis on prior learning and experience, and that matches well with the competency-based learning approach that we're taking with D2L. The goal isn't to get a high test score, it's to demonstrate that you have developed your knowledge, skills, and abilities."

To that end, iSDC is embracing gamification as a key mechanism in its online courses. Working with D2L Creative Services, iSDC has built interactive graphical storyboards featuring Inuit characters, which helps students confront the kind of tough decisions and real-world scenarios they will face during their work placements. In these activities, there are no wrong answers—just a safe place for students to practice their skills and learn.

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Trish Rennie, Former Technical Coordinator, iSDC

The Results

The first cohort of around 50 students has already embarked on the new CSW and management Trainee diploma program, and iSDC has received excellent feedback on its online learning platform. Learners report that they enjoy the flexibility of being able to study in their own homes, which allows them to gain new skills without neglecting their existing work and family responsibilities.

From an accessibility perspective, students appreciate the fact that they get the same rich user experience whether they use the Brightspace platform on a PC, tablet, or smartphone. The user interface has also been designed to support visually impaired users, helping to ensure that iSDC can deliver the same quality of learning for everyone who engages with its services.

The same inclusive attitude applies to different types of learners. iSDC has used the rubric feature in the Brightspace solution to develop a special oral-adapted rubric, allowing students to present their assignments orally rather than writing an essay.

“We even have a journaling course, where we encourage students to write or draw, take photos, or even sing or dance about the topics that are important to their lives and their skills development,” says Trish

Rennie. “The Brightspace platform’s video capabilities let them submit their assignments in whatever form they choose, and our instructors can provide feedback by video too.”

She adds: “The question we’re always asking is how can we be everything to everyone? Every student’s situation is different. D2L is helping us meet so many different needs at once.”

To that end, the Brightspace platform enables iSDC’s instructors to create new course content in a rapid, agile manner, and saves time by automating tasks such as grading quizzes or releasing assignments to students at appropriate points in their learning journey. This helps teachers reduce their admin workload and spend more time focusing on what really matters: their students.

“There’s a saying in the Inuit community that they went from igloo to iPhone in one generation. What we’re trying to do is help people make connections between traditional skills and the modern workplace. D2L has been an excellent partner in helping us deliver engaging, relevant course content in a culturally safe online environment while always viewing skills development from the perspective of Inuit communities and their traditions.”

Trish Rennie, Formal Technical Coordinator, iSDC