



## Equity and Technology Research Alliance

*Principal Investigator*—Dr. Dianne Looker (MSVU) with:  
*Co-investigators* - Dr. Cynthia Alexander (Acadia), Dr. Blye Frank (Dalhousie),  
Dr. Jeff Karabanow (Dalhousie), Dr. Victor Thiessen (Dalhousie)  
<http://techequity.acadiau.ca>



The Equity and Technology Project is a research alliance comprised of community partners, Departments of Education, academics and practitioners in Nunavut and Nova Scotia, Canada. The goal of the study is to better understand how youth are using ICT in schools, and to inform policy and practice around issues of ICT and education.

### Questions we asked:

- How do youth use computers, the Internet and other forms of information and communication technology (ICT)?
- Where do youth use ICT the most; do they have difficulties getting access to computers and the Internet?
- How do they feel about ICT; does it frustrate them or empower them?
  - What skills are they developing and how will these skills benefit them later in life?
- What are the policies and practices around ICTs in education and how can we improve them to maximize youth's experience with the technology?
- What are the challenges facing youth, parents, educators, and policy makers surrounding ICT?

### Differences we examined:

- Male and female students
- Rural and urban students
- First Nations, Inuit, African-Canadian and Caucasian students
  - Nunavut and Nova Scotia students
  - High-speed and Dial-up users
    - Teachers and students

**funding**

This project is funded under the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Initiatives in the New Economy (INE) funding envelope.

### Why is this important?

Canadians, and particularly young Canadians, are often told how important ICT skills and access are as we move towards an ‘information’ based society. However not everyone has equal access to, or the inclination to work with, ICTs. Millions of dollars have been, and are being, invested in providing hardware and software to schools and communities across Canada. This project will identify ways in which these public investments are paying off and identify areas of improvement .

## What we have learned...

To date, some findings include:

- Geographic and cultural contexts affect Canada's northern youth, and also create critical challenges, both methodological and practical, for "outside" researchers who are interested in studying northern issues.
- Those in the north, and those in rural areas (not surprisingly) had the least access to ICTs and high speed connections. This differential access had an expected impact on use and skill development.
- The Internet was used more for social bonding (making connections with similar groups) rather than bridging links with dissimilar groups, among Mi'kmaq, Inuit and African-Canadian youth. Although many saw the Internet as "neutral" in terms of "preserving or destroying their culture," some Inuit and Mi'kmaq students expressed concerns about the damaging effects of the Internet on their culture (i.e. language).
- Nunavut youth are less likely to believe that geographic mobility is required in order to pursue their educational and occupational goals than Nova Scotian youth; important differences exist in the school-work transition and mobility expectations of Nunavut and Nova Scotian youth, with geography, family and community relationships playing a central role.
- In Nunavut, adolescent usage of technology is primarily limited to school accessibility thus reducing the range of ICT activities. In Nova Scotia, however, with "multi-point" accessibility to ICT's, adolescents increase their usage of ICT's for recreational purposes and communicating.
- Gender differentiates ICT usage: males favor game playing, whereas females prefer communicating (e-mailing, instant messaging).
- In the research on the Schools of Education in Nova Scotia, there were significant disparities and knowledge gaps existing in and between Bachelor of Education programs with respect to teaching technology.
- In the project's research on street youth, the key finding has been extremely surprising; street youth interact with computers quite frequently, most importantly using them as a coping mechanism for life on the street as way to "feel connected." This is surprising given the lack of access to ICTs and the daily barriers necessarily bridged to simply get 'online.'

### For information about the research, contact:

Dr. Dianne Looker, MSVU: dianne.looker@msvu.ca (902) 457-5526  
Ted Naylor (Project Manager): ted.naylor@msvu.ca (902)457-5527

## Our Partners

Statistics Canada; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada; Industry Canada; Council of Ministers of Education; Nova Scotia Department of Education; Nunavut Department of Education; Acadia University; ARK and Phoenix House; Black Educators Association; Dalhousie University; Kivalliq Inuit Association; Mount Saint Vincent University; Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute; Department of Education, Australia; Ministry of Education, New Zealand; Canadian Information Processing Society; Nunavut Arctic College; Nova Scotia Community Colleges

PLUS 20 collaborators in seven countries

## How we're getting the message out...

In addition to traditional academic conferences and publishing, the project is using innovative strategies to disseminate the findings back to the communities from which the data came. These activities have included: an international research workshop in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, where invited partners, community members and students provided feedback on initial research results and analysis; a 10-day ICT Summer Institute for Mi'kmaq and African-Nova Scotians at Dalhousie University, where culture and technology were explored by junior high students from across the province; and a unique 3 day community radio broadcast from Eastern Shore District High School in Musquodobit, where students learned about technology through practical application and the content of programming. Upcoming activities for the spring include a Best Practices workshop for teachers, a documentary on teaching technology, and a 5 day radio broadcast in Wolfville, Nova Scotia (for information on Wolfville broadcast contact Fred Campbell fred@ryakuga.org)

Team members are also actively working on individual book chapters for a planned co-edited book on the project data.