



Final Report 2015/16

“Pathways for Aboriginal Learners:
Collaborating across Aboriginal Institutes,
Colleges and Universities”

(Project Number: 2014-28)

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This research project entitled “Pathways for Aboriginal Learners: Collaborating Across Aboriginal Institutes, Colleges and Universities” came out of a series of conversations among a community of graduate students, researchers, faculty/professors and administrators working in the field of Indigenous Studies. These individuals shared their lived experiences as Indigenous Peoples, as learners, scholars and educators/advocates who have encountered the public education system across several jurisdictions including Canada, the United States and New Zealand.

As we shared stories about our own experiences and journeying through numerous educational systems there were several points at which our individual accounts converged. The revelations that we shared were often about journeying alone, with few institutional supports that recognized our Indigenous identities and a consistent denial of Indigenous Knowledge(s). While we are certain that these experiences are not unique to us we know that threads in these stories would resonate with Indigenous learners today (personal reflection).

While the landscape in Indigenous postsecondary education has evolved whereby Indigenous Knowledge(s) and ways of being are part of the academy there is more that must be done. In this light, creating pathways for Indigenous learners where they are able to navigate the system and improve their access to education is imperative. We wish to thank our colleagues who provided their advisement so that we could take the steps to pursue this project in a good way:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based upon the successful partnership between the First Nations Technical Institute, Confederation College and Trent University the “Pathways for Aboriginal Learners: Collaborating across Aboriginal Institutes, Colleges and Universities” was developed to increase academic success for Indigenous learners in their post-secondary education. The creation of pathways through transfer and articulation for Indigenous learners enrolled at these institutions was the overarching purpose of this initiative. Environmental Studies, Indigenous Studies and Social Work were the affinity programs that were identified in this Project. In the fall of 2015, a cohort of students who graduated the Aboriginal Community Advocacy Diploma Program (June 2015) at Confederation College transferred into the third year of the Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Studies Program at Trent University as a result of this initiative. They are expected to graduate in 2017.

Indigenous learners were supported via a number of comprehensive “wrap around” strategies including reciprocal outreach between Confederation College and Trent University faculty and staff. As a transition component these learners attended a summer bridging initiative titled “Bishkaa” at Trent University where students engaged in a variety of transition and skill building activities. This cohort of learners were teamed up with Trent University mentors/learning partners and will continue their relationship moving forward.

It was anticipated that identified affinity programs would proceed without difficulty as alignment appeared logical and contained to the field of study. It was clear that the language used in these programs was similar but alignment was not readily found. When the research team decided to try an Indigenous Knowledge(s) approach to the programming by applying the Aboriginal Learning Outcomes (ALO) framework developed at Confederation College the programs lined up immediately. The Aboriginal Learning Outcomes provided the crystallization of these affinity programs in a curriculum mapping exercise so that the articulation agreements could be drawn up. Currently, two other articulation agreements between the College and University are pending.

The research process has provided the partnering institutes with information and data that can be used to develop more pathways with other institutions across the province. In fact, the research must be shared widely to enable other learning institutions to contemplate this work in order to provide Indigenous learners with opportunities. It is important to review this Pathways project as a process that required all partners to become engaged in utilizing all of their individual and collective resources to create seamless pathways. The integration of student support services with academic programming made for a wholistic treatment of pathways. The partnering institutes shared a vision to provide Indigenous learners, no matter where they go to school, with the best opportunities to advance their learning. It was about access to learning and this remains the priority.

The relationships that were developed throughout this partnership grew as a result of open dialogue, common ground and commitment to Indigenous learners. Formal documentation such as the Letter of Intent, Memorandum of Understanding and ceremonial recognition by partnering institutions underscored the substantive work that was the focus of collaboration. There is more work to do

although the foundation has been set. There will be pathways and program accreditation to pursue through Indigenous Leadership courses and curricula that is held among the partnering institutions. There will be ongoing relationship building as full implementation of these initiatives become sustainable as part of the offering of programs and services in postsecondary learning.

Finally, there is a model to create pathways for Indigenous learners that is based on the successful combination of Indigenous Knowledge(s) and ways of knowing that have been utilized to provide assessment and evaluation of academic programs across Aboriginal institutes, colleges and universities. There is engagement whereby Indigenous learners will be asked to provide their advisement on what is working for them as they pursue their studies. It is imperative that this process continues as more Aboriginal institutes, colleges and universities express their interest in expanding this model. This has simply been the first step towards providing Indigenous learners, educators, and communities with a chance to be heard in the wider conversations about pathways.

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