



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Mobilizing knowledge to create responsible pathways for Indigenous learners across Ontario's post secondary sector

Type: Innovative Transfer

Project Number: 2019-22 or I1922

Project Lead: Confederation College

Collaborators: The main collaborators include partners from the Centre for Policy in Research in Indigenous Learning (CPRIL, Confederation College), First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), and Trent University. CPRIL has been the coordinating body for the project, leading the reporting, planning and coordination of the project. Furthermore, CPRIL, FNTI, and Trent University have played an advisory role providing leadership and guidance to the wider Steering Committee. Within the past three years, this work has brought together partners from 12 additional post secondary institutions. Involvement and participation ranges across all partnering institutions: Algoma University, Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology, Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology, First Nations Technical Institute, George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Queen's University, Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology, Trent University, Université de Sudbury.

Deliverables for website (if applicable):

- AYAAKWAAMISIIWIN: Creating Pathways for Indigenous Learners Across Ontario colleges, Universities and Indigenous Institutes
- A Toolkit to Support the Creation of Pathways for Indigenous Learners

Project Summary

In 2013, the Centre for Policy and Research in Indigenous Learning (CPRIL), Confederation College, Trent University and the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) undertook a project to create pathways and to support mobility for Indigenous Learners across their partnering institutions. This work has grown to be a strong collaboration of Steering Committee members

who represent a total of fifteen postsecondary institutions from across Ontario. Indigenous ceremony and methodologies such as relationship building, reflection, building a shared understanding, and collaboration, ground the work of the group. Overall, the Pathways for Indigenous Learners Steering Committee seeks to build responsible pathways and partnerships that support Indigenous learners throughout their postsecondary journeys, from one learning community to another. Over 2019/20, the Steering Committee undertook this new project, Mobilizing Knowledge, which aimed to implement and share key findings that have been generated from five years of experience with creating pathways for Indigenous learners. Specifically, this project relied on key findings to develop new and existing pathways, produce resources such as a Pathways Tool Kit, and disseminate knowledge to external groups. Overall, the group was successful in enhancing and finalizing pathways, bringing the total number of pathways to fifteen, in creating a toolkit to facilitate institutions in undertaking their own work on creating and supporting pathways, and in meeting with external groups and individuals from across the province and country.

Project Rationale

While there has been some progress in closing the gap, there remains a differential between Indigenous and non-Indigenous postsecondary enrolment, persistence and completion, which suggests a need for the creation of expanded opportunities and for the breakdown of barriers that Indigenous learners continue to face. Furthermore, while ONCAT has supported the creation of a number of tools to facilitate pathways in Ontario, our research to date indicates that there are continuing obstacles to marketing pathways and monitoring their use, particularly for Indigenous learners. In fact, our extensive consultation with numerous stakeholders in the field of Indigenous education lead to the document “Shifting the Landscape: A Framework for Creating Pathways in Indigenous Education” which proposes that the best way to address many of the identified concerns of these stakeholders (structural challenges, lack of consistent data, problems with engaging and retaining students, institutional inertia, systemic racism) is a comprehensive transformation of the field of Indigenous education. Additionally, findings of the 2017/18 Pathways for Indigenous Learners, Coming Full Circle, project highlight a number of the barriers to implementing pathway plans that many members of the group continue to face. Such barriers include: competing priorities and work plans; a need for more time and resources for implementing pathways; navigating systems of pathways implementation across different institutions; and the need for more capacity building on the importance of creating and supporting pathways for Indigenous learners. Through this phase of the work we aimed to address these challenges by implementing our findings with respect to creating sustainable pathways, by developing usable tools for such implementation and by sharing information with external groups and partners.

Collaborator Contributions

Overall, the Pathways for Indigenous Learners Steering Committee has situated itself as a strong group of partners from across Ontario’s postsecondary system. The group brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous members who have diverse roles and responsibilities across Colleges, Universities and Indigenous Institutes (see additional material upload). Since its inception in 2013, the Pathways for Indigenous Learners projects (e.g. Pathways for Indigenous Learners, Expanding the Circle, and Coming Full Circle) have accomplished a significant amount of work. In particular, work of the project’s Steering Committee has resulted in the establishment of a strong network of diverse partners, identification and implementation of a diversity of pathways (approximately 44 potential pathways identified of

those three are fully implemented and thirteen are nearly implemented), unique articulation agreements that address the specific needs of Indigenous learners, informative reports and resources (e.g. principled position on Pathways for Indigenous Learners – see additional materials upload), formal partnerships for supporting Indigenous learners (e.g. through MOU's), and a shared knowledge and understanding of the barriers and supports to creating pathways for Indigenous learners across Ontario's postsecondary systems.

The roles among the project team vary by Steering Committee partners, the distinctions between Steering Committee members is outlined below:

First Circle partners: In 2013-2016, through relationship building and partnership, the Pathways for Indigenous Learners project emerged between Trent University, First Nations Technical Institute, and Confederation College. First Circle partners act as the Advisory Committee project, providing guidance and direction on the delivery of the project. They also participate as members of the Steering Committee in that they are involved with the creation of pathways and other initiatives as well. Prior to launching this phase of the project, the First Circle team members met in person to confirm the work plan and vision for the year.

Second Circle and Third Circle Partners: From 2016-19 the First Circle of partners grew their model by inviting additional postsecondary institutions to join the project. Second and Third Circle partners make up the Steering Committee.

Overall, partners from First, Second, and Third Circles form the Steering Committee for this project. The Steering Committee provides leadership and recommendations in the decision-making for the implementation of the project. The range of responsibilities of the Steering Committee includes review and implementation of the work plan; exploration of pathways and models, in addition to traditional ones, that will support Indigenous learners to meet their needs and goals; engaging with and communicating to stakeholders in their home institution and supporting and advocating for the sustainability of this projects work.

Lastly, the Vice President and the Project Manager for the Centre for Policy and Research in Indigenous Learning will acted as the coordinating body for this work, and they are responsible for the communication, reporting and accountability to the funder, Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT).

Key Steps

The following are key steps that were taken that worked well for this project:

- Regular in person meetings
- Establishing mechanisms for communication beyond in person meetings (e.g. teleconferences, and regular emails/ check ins)
- Documenting our processes and creating resources to support other institutions in doing similar work

Outcomes

The top three outcomes for this project are as follows:

1) Continuation of implementation and marketing of our pathways for Indigenous Learners
The Pathways for Indigenous Learners Steering Committee has identified a lengthy list of potential pathways. Overall, additional funds provided the Steering Committee with necessary resources and opportunities to continue working towards implementing pathways on their list, and to modify existing pathways to ensure that they are 'responsible pathways'.

-To date through the Pathways for Indigenous Learners project, the Steering Committee has developed and implemented 12 pathways across our partnering institutions. Further to that, additional, pre-existing pathways are being 'enhanced' to include key features of our pathways such as wraparound supports, relationship building, and the breakdown of other barriers that learners may experience.

-The Indigenous learners that pursue our pathways are also an indicator of success. As more pathways are put in place, we will be able to measure the success of our pathways based on the students pursuing pathways, and their experiences and satisfaction. Most recently, we learned about one learner who recently completed their Master's degree after completing one of the pathways developed, which is a validating indicator of success.

2) A toolkit for supporting and creating pathways for Indigenous Learners

The Committee wishes to disseminate this knowledge widely through the development of a templates that will be compiled in a toolkit that can be used to guide institutions in creating and supporting Pathways for Indigenous learners. The group has already developed a number of tools, such as an asset map template which assists institutions in gathering and summarizing information on their ability to support pathways for Indigenous learners, as well as critical documents, such as the Principled Position on Pathways for Indigenous Learners, which outlines a potential principles that postsecondary institutions should follow in order to demonstrate their ability to implement such pathways. This toolkit will provide exemplars of new and previously developed tools and templates and overviews on how to use or implement them.

3) Communication of our pathways for Indigenous learners project with committees, networks, and organizations interested in or doing similar work. Lastly, the Pathways for Indigenous learners Steering Committee sought to mobilize knowledge to external groups and organizations who are involved with transfer and mobility, Indigenous Education, and specifically Pathways for Indigenous learners. To date, findings from this work have resulted in an extensive list of wise practices and lessons learned. The group aimed to communicate these findings widely, and to create opportunities for potential learning on strategies to address some of the barriers they face in regards to implementing and supporting pathways. Overall, the goal of the meeting with external partners will be to harmonize the work that is being done in the province on supporting the transfer and mobility of Indigenous Learners within the postsecondary sector.

Over the past year, the VP CPRIL, and Project Manager CPRIL delivered several across the province and country including the following:

- The Ontario Native Education Counselors Association Conference (ONECA) (May 2019, Sault Ste Marie, Ontario)
- Pathways for Indigenous Learners Steering Committee Meeting with ONCAT partners (August 2019, Toronto, Ontario)
- College's and Institutes Canada Indigenous Education Symposium (November 2019, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan)
- Ministry of Advanced Education (January 2020, Regina, Saskatchewan)
- Pathways for Indigenous Learners Steering Committee meeting with ONCAT partners (February 2020, Toronto, Ontario)

Throughout the past year we have received positive feedback from a number of different groups who were at attendance at our different sessions/ presentations. Indicators of success include positive written feedback that was received at the ONECA conference, requests for copies of our powerpoint presentations, follow up phone calls from participants at our sessions/ presentations, and requests for presentation by session participants (e.g. we had received a

request to present to a team at the Ministry of Advanced Education for the government of Saskatchewan).

Challenges

In this phase of the work we did not experience many challenges as we set out clear objectives. A continued challenge pertains to the competition of priorities and work plans by our project partners. Many of our project partners work on this pathways project as a side project in addition to their core responsibilities/ roles, and as such it is hard to have consistent representation of partners at every meeting as a results of competing priorities. However, over the past 5 years we have established mechanisms to support communication and to offset this challenge. More broadly, other challenges that we have faced include navigating different systems of governance in relation to pathways, and the need for capacity building on transfer and mobility and Indigenous education across post secondary institutions in Ontario. Overall, through the support from ONCAT, development of shareable and user friendly resources, and scheduling a time for in person working sessions, we have been working to address these challenges.

Student Outcomes

- This project benefits student through the following:
- Creation of efficient pathways that students can pursue, which hopefully maximize their education credentials, and minimize funds spent on education within a shorter time frame
- Meeting students' needs in terms of support services through our wrap-around supports models
- Advocating for the increase presence of Indigenous education and pathways across Ontario
- Increasing access to post secondary by identifying and breaking down barriers that may have previously existed

Institutional Outcomes

There are three key deliverables that resulted from this work:

1) Innovative pathways and partnerships for Indigenous learners that seek to provide wrap around supports to students, and breakdown barriers that students may have previously experienced

2) Informative resources, specifically a Pathways for Indigenous Learners tool kit

3) Knowledge mobilization in the form of presentations, workshops and meetings

More broadly, a necessary impact of this project is the amelioration of the legacy of colonialism as it relates to postsecondary education outcomes for Indigenous communities. We are working against the background of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has called for a significant and lasting investment in meaningful forms of education for Indigenous learners through its Calls to Action (2015). Federal and provincial governments across Canada have committed themselves to addressing these Calls.

Every new pathway makes it possible for one more student to successfully achieve their academic goals. The establishment, maintenance, and sustainability of such pathways is therefore critical to such positive outcomes.

Sector or System Implications

One of the most consistently identified barriers to Indigenous learner mobility is a lack of consistent information. This project, by supporting the establishment of formalized networks dedicated to pathways for Indigenous learners, aimed to underpin an information-sharing network that can become the foundation for fully realized support systems. Such systems can lead to increased numbers of students pursuing options that they might otherwise have not been aware of, or able to access. Overall, this work benefits students by aiming to improve these systems by building pathways for students to pursue, capacity building on Indigenous education among diverse institutions across Ontario, identifying and breaking down barriers that students may have previously experienced, and the establishment of a network of educators, and staff within institutions who are committed to supporting students.

Tips/Advice

First, we recommend reviewing our previous report, *Coming Full Circle* (as well as our other *Pathways for Indigenous Learners* reports), and our Framework document, *Shifting the Landscape: A framework for creating pathways in Indigenous Studies*. Additionally, review our toolkit for creating pathways for Indigenous learners, once that is published. This reports have compiled work and perspectives from partners who come from 15 post secondary institutions across Ontario. Overall, we encourage other institutions who are interested in doing this work to set time and resources to meeting in person to build an understanding of one another's institutions, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for partnership, abilities to partner, and to begin relationship building with one another.

Additionally, we strongly recommend that institutions engage with faculty to understand the affinity, or relationships between programs. Lastly, we recommend that institutions connect and meet with learners who may be interested in pursuing certain pathways to understand what their needs, interests and priorities are. We also suggest establishing a wraparound student services plan to support student success.

Tools and Resource

Through the toolkit, we have compiled all of the tools, templates, resources, and processes that have emerged from our work to date into one document that is intended to be shared across the post secondary sector. Broadly, in this toolkit, we have provided an overview of the phases and processes for creating pathways for Indigenous learners. For each phase, we provide details on the tools and resources that we created and relied upon. For instance, we have provided templates of the different tools (e.g. asset maps, information gathering, action planning worksheets, etc), our wrap around supports model, sample articulation agreements, a monitoring tool for assessing pathways, and checklists of steps for each stage of pathways creation. The Toolkit is included as an attachment in the deliverable section. Additionally, we have developed several presentations, varying in length, that have been delivered to diverse audiences such as post-secondary conference attendees, Indigenous education counselors, and professionals from the post-secondary sector of provincial governments. Furthermore, presentations have been shared with individuals from these groups who have requested a copy of our PowerPoint. We have also created a PowerPoint presentation with all members of our Steering Committee that provides an overview of

the Pathways for Indigenous learners work, and outcomes to date from the past five years that partners can share within their respective institutions and networks. A PowerPoint is included as an attachment in the deliverables section.

