



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Developing Pathways for Indigenous Language Revitalization in Ogwehóweh languages

Type: Pathway Development

Project Number: 2020-26 or P2026

Project Lead: Six Nations Polytechnic

Collaborators: McMaster University, Trent University, University of Waterloo, Western University, Wilfrid Laurier University, York University

Project Summary

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada published its final report, which contained 94 Calls to Action – recommendations for spurring movement toward healing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The sixteenth Call to Action was for “post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.” Although several Ontario universities offer language courses as part of baccalaureate studies, Six Nations Polytechnic (SNP) is the first postsecondary institute to establish an Indigenous language university degree: The Bachelor of Arts in Ogwehóweh Languages (BAOL). The BAOL seeks to further the development of Ogwehóweh cultural understanding within an Ogwehóweh language context. Taught in-person at Six Nations Polytechnic’s campus in Ohsweken, this fully accredited three-year undergraduate degree focuses on Mohawk or Cayuga language and is organized into four streams: language, grammar, lifelong learning, and community engagement.

As other institutions within the province are building their Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Studies adjacent programs to better integrate Indigenous languages, there is limited capacity to offer advanced-level Hodinó:ni languages courses further demonstrating the need to create language speakers. Research shows that when Indigenous language programming is introduced, those courses are regularly highly subscribed, indicating a prevalent student demand.

This project proposes to develop pathways between SNP's Bachelor of Arts in Ogwehoweh Languages and other Indigenous Studies postsecondary programs for language promotion, student mobility, and building relationships according to the Dish with One Spoon.

The benefits to students go much deeper than simply increased educational mobility – for Indigenous learners, particularly. At the institutional level, this project will help universities across Ontario more meaningfully address the sixteenth Call to Action of the Canadian TRC. There are no formal pathways in place or necessary for students interested in transferring from an Indigenous Studies program at an Ontario university into the Bachelor of Arts in Ogwehoweh Languages at Six Nations Polytechnic. At the moment SNP does have a generalized Letter of Permission policy for visiting students interested in taking languages courses.

Six Nations Polytechnic is interested in moving beyond the simple availability and “generic” nature of the policy to (a) raise awareness of the available language and in-language programming, and how it both complements outside degree programs and supports the academic, professional, and cultural needs of Indigenous learners in those programs; and (b) forge clearer, specific pathway agreements with individual universities involved in the delivery of Indigenous Studies curriculum, and especially those whose programs include Indigenous languages and/or a focus on Hodinohsó:ni' Peoples.

Project Rationale

In 2017, Indigenous Institutes (IIs) were recognized as the third pillar of education in Ontario under provincial legislation. This legislation also gave IIs the ability to offer accredited certificates, diplomas, and degrees. However, there is still a lack of understanding within the secondary education sector about this ability.

SNP has offered their Bachelor of Arts in Ogwehoweh Languages (BAOL) since 2016 and has come across challenges in student mobility due to the lack of understanding that our students hold an accredited degree reviewed by PEQAB and the Ministry. Our goal was to communicate our position to as many as possible within the Ontario PSE landscape and offer our language programming on a letter of permission with the goal of more students learning and speaking Indigenous languages thus contributing to their revitalization.

Main Collaborators

The main collaborators have included the Indigenous Studies departments where possible and language departments. The main contacts of each have been the University Unit and Registrar's Office at SNP, Adrienne Lickers (McMaster University), Bonita Lawrence & Susan Dion (York University), Skahendowaneh Swamp & David Newhouse (Trent University), Daniel Bratton (University of Waterloo), Christy Bressette (Western University), and Heidi Northwood (Laurier Brantford).

Outcomes

1. Enhanced understanding of the Indigenous Institutes sector among Ontario universities.
2. Initiated new relationships and expanded collaborative works between SNP and partner universities, which can provide a foundation for additional pilot projects in support of student mobility into and out of the Indigenous Institutes sector.
3. Opened letter of permission pathways to and from SNP

Key Steps

The first step was formulating an invitation to meet as well as marketable materials. Following an acceptance to engage in this project, the Unit Manager - University and Registrar of SNP met with Chairs of Indigenous Studies Departments and their faculty to discuss the project and ways in which they can promote language revitalization in their own institute. Naturally we discussed the Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017 the role of the third pillar and the letter of permission pathway to and from our institute to theirs.

Pathways Created

We have created more accessible letter of permission pathways for SNP students and students of other institutes. For example, York University, lead by Susan Dion, is implementing a new strategy to their letter of permission process to make it more user-friendly.

Incomplete Pathways

We hope to explore partnerships with nearby universities (e.g., McMaster University and Laurier Brantford) that offer language programming as part of their program of study which will allow students to take language courses beyond just the beginner language classes.

Challenges

The challenge of this project has been the need and demand for sectoral awareness about Indigenous Institutes (II) from those in a position of power and authority, such as the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to senior leadership at colleges and universities. This is work to be taken up by these governing bodies due to the already existing drain on human resources within the Indigenous Institutes in addition to the cultural biases that exist within the sector around education credentials from an II that can only be effectively changed by mandates. This work requires challenging a systemic problem within the postsecondary education sector. In general, there is a lack of understanding about the Indigenous Institutes Act of 2017 and what that means for post-secondary; that IIs are the third pillar and therefore require recognition for the IIs and their learners.

Student Benefits

Students at SNP as well as at other universities will benefit from established and clearly identified transfer agreements and pathways between the enumerated university-based Indigenous Studies programs (above) and SNP's BAOL programming. Other important benefits include:

- Improved access to immersive Indigenous language and in-language/language-adjacent programming for Indigenous Studies students at identified universities.
- Clearer relationships and pathways between SNP, as an II-sector institute, and mainstream universities, which will aid not only non-II students through their access to BAOL programming at SNP, but also SNP students who may benefit from clearer relationships between the II and university sector moving forward.
- Increased student-body diversity through heightened "visiting" student presence will benefit both the classroom environment/learning experience and the informal and formal connections students forge with their peers.
- Increased parity between Indigenous and mainstream institutions in terms of credit transfer pathways, from which Indigenous learners (as well as their non-Indigenous peers) will benefit from added educational mobility and a lowering of barriers to Indigenous student success.

Student Credential

This project has made the letter of permission process much easier and more tangible for institutes we've had discussions with.

Student Time Savings

There is no expected time savings from this project as no transfer articulation agreement has been made due to the unique nature of our BAOL and other Indigenous studies programs in their current states. We hope this will be made possible in the future.

Student Financial Savings

At York University, under the supervision of Susan Dion, they have created a more user-friendly letter of permission for students wishing to take an Indigenous languages outside of what is offered regularly at the institute. In addition to these more accessible pathway, they have proposed that the institute will fund this course for students.

Student Flexibility

The major result of the project was creating more user-friendly practices in institutions. This was quite challenging as many institutes risk tuition revenue from the LOP courses.

Student Work Alignment

This project provides students the opportunity to learn within an Indigenous community immersed in Indigenous pedagogy which is beneficial to all learners. From this experience, students gain a better sense of self and their own learning styles enabling them to be even more successful in their future studies.

Institutional Outcomes

- Initiated new relationships and expanded collaborative works between SNP and partner universities, which can provide a foundation for additional pilot projects in support of student mobility into and out of the Indigenous Institutes sector.
- Enhanced understanding of the Indigenous Institutes sector among Ontario universities.

Sector or System Implications

The major finding of this project has been the need and demand for sectoral awareness about Indigenous Institutes (II) from those in a position of power and authority, such as the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to senior leadership at colleges and universities. This is work to be taken up by these governing bodies due to the already existing drain on human resources within the Indigenous Institutes in addition to the cultural biases that exist within the sector around education credentials from an II that can only be effectively changed by mandates. This work requires challenging a systemic problem within the postsecondary education sector. In general, there is a lack of understanding about the Indigenous Institutes Act of 2017 and what that means for post-secondary; that IIs are the third pillar and therefore require recognition for the IIs and their learners. Surprisingly, there is also a lack of understanding about letters of permission and credit transfer in general at other universities.

Tips/Advice

Assign a dedicated lead to these projects that can be 100% present throughout the duration of the project as they are labour intensive in terms of meetings. I say this because we had the project switch hands a couple times and it was difficult to pick up where things left off.

Tools and Resources

After reviewing the current curriculum in SNP's BAOL program, we developed a roster of courses that would be available to students on an LOP. These courses were selected for suitability to the partner institutes program of study within the Indigenous studies program where possible.

