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| *Photo Credit: Trent University* | UNESCO Indigenous Education Project  *Indigenous Education at Trent University, Fleming College and the First Nations Technical Institute*  *South-Central Ontario, Canada*  *Jane Gray- Principle Researcher*  *Contributors: Kylie Fox-Peltier, Dan Longboat, Dawn-Lavell Harvard, Mitch Huegenin, Beedahbin Peltier, Stephanie Nelson* |

**Opening Words**

*“Indigenous education… is just good education”*

*-* Professor David Newhouse-

Trent University

Land Acknowledgement (adapted from Trent University , 2018):

*It is respectfully acknowledged that this research is being conducted on the traditional territories of the Mississauga Anishinaabeg and the Haudensaunee. Gratitude is offered to the First Peoples for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relations. May those teachings be honoured in this work.*

*Researcher Introduction: As a researcher in Indigenous Studies, we are taught to introduce ourselves. I am a non-indigenous person, born and raised on Treaty One Anishnaabeg, Nehiyawak and Red River Metis territory in Manitoba and have been living as a student, teacher and community member on Michi Saagiig territory in Ontario for nine years, studying and teaching at Trent University and Fleming College. I have had the privilege of learning from Knowledge Holders, Elders, teachers and scholars, including those interviewed in this paper, who have provided the most brilliant teachings of my academic life. I have also had the privilege of observing the incredible work they do to make all students shine through Indigenous Education both inside and outside of the classroom. I am honoured to have been asked to help with this project. -Jane Gray*

**Introduction to Trent University, Fleming College and the First Nations Technical Institute**

Located on the traditional territories of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples, Trent University, Fleming College and the First Nations Technical Institute have decades of collective experience in delivering post-secondary education for Indigenous and non-indigenous learners. Separately and together, these institutions provide cultural, applied and theoretical knowledges at each stage of post-secondary education that, in turn, connects learners to all aspects of sustainability. In addition, they offer services that provide academic, cultural, financial and social supports that accompany Indigenous students from recruitment through to graduation. A key to the success of all of these post-secondary offerings is their focus on student well-being within a culturally-based approach to education.

Located in Peterborough ([[1]](#endnote-1)Nogojiwanong), Ontario with a satellite campus in Durham Ontario, **Trent University** was established in 1964, and has a student population of 8,940 students, largely undergraduates. (Source: <https://www.trentu.ca/about/trent-numbers>) In 2016 /2017, approximately three percent of the student population declared themselves as Aboriginal (First Nations, Metis or Inuit) (Source: 2017-2020, Trent Strategic Mandate Agreement). In 1969, Trent became the first university in North America to have a department dedicated to the study of Indigenous Peoples, now called the *Chanie Wenjack School of Indigenous Studies*, and will celebrate 50 years in Indigenous Education this year, in 2019. Trent was also the first university in Canada to have an Indigenous Studies PhD program, launched in 1997, and an Indigenous Environmental Studies and Science (IESS) Program, an innovative degree granting program providing students with a BA or B.Sc in IESS. The IESS program seeks to actively engage multiple knowledge systems to address complex environmental issues facing both Indigenous communities and society at large. IESS works with Indigenous Institutes and Community Colleges to create unique pathways of learning for students. IESS is recognized across the country for producing exceptional graduates employed in all levels of government, business and industry, consulting and research agencies, as well as educational institutions and beyond. In addition, Trent recently created the Enweying School of Indigenous Studies, the Trent School of the Environment and the Institute for Indigenous Environmental Studies and Sciences. These represent rich and diverse academic disciplines coming together to provide both collaborative education and research programming.  (D. Longboat, IESS Founder/Director, 2016) IESS also established a program for younger students, from ages 8-15, the Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science Program (TRACKS), that provides workshops and summer camp programs that blend Indigenous Knowledge with math and science curriculum, giving youth their first experience in a university setting.

More recently, Trent has introduced a Bachelor of Indigenous Education program, launched a mandatory Indigenous focused credit requirement for all students across the University and established the position of *Indigenous Pedagogy Designer* at Trent’s Centre for Teaching and Learning. For many years Trent’s *First Peoples House of Learning* (FPHL) has offered a range of academic, financial, counselling, mentoring and cultural support services for Indigenous students as well as events and activities for the broader community. The availability of these services and spaces specifically for Indigenous students has been instrumental in supporting their academic success.

Also located in Peterborough (Nogojiwanong) with satellite campuses in Lindsay and Haliburton, Ontario, **Fleming College** was established in 1967, and in 2018 had an enrollment of 6800 full time and 10,000 part-time students. ( Source: <https://flemingcollege.ca/> ) Enrollment by students declaring as First Nations, Metis or Inuit jumped from 35 in 2010 to 410 in 2018. (Source: Indigenous Student Services, 2018) For over a decade, Fleming College has offered a range of services for Indigenous students across all programs and has steadily increased the numbers of Indigenous Studies courses offered to students across the College. In 2015, Fleming established an *Indigenous Perspectives Designation* in 16 programs ranging from Early Childhood Education, Community and Justice Services and Social Service Worker to Ecosystem Management, Pharmacy Technician and Practical Nursing with learning outcomes approved by both the College and the local Aboriginal Education Council. (Please see Learning Outcomes here: <https://department.flemingcollege.ca/indigenous-studies/ipd-graduate-level-learning-outcomes/>) Fleming has also partnered with Trent University in a transfer agreement for students wishing to enter the Indigenous Bachelor of Education program.

The College houses an *Indigenous Student Services* department that provides students with academic, financial, counselling and mentoring support, regular interaction with Elders and a range of cultural activities and events. Indigenous Student Services is expanding its reach into all aspects of College life. For example, Indigenous health consultations and plant medicines will now be offered as an option through the College’s health services office. Indigenous Student Services is also expanding their outreach activities in First Nations communities, high-schools and community based urban organizations, something that they attribute to the growing enrollment of Indigenous students at the College. (K. Fox-Peltier, personal communication, January, 2019)

The First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), is located in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory in the south of the region and is a First Nation owned and governed accredited educational institute that has been in operation since 1985. For over thirty years, FNTI has been applying Indigenous Knowledge to high school programs, College diploma programs as well as partnership programs with Universities in fields such as social work and public administration. Students come from First Nations communities across Canada and over 2000 students have successfully graduated from FNTI's certificate, diploma and degree programs since its inception. In 2017/18 FNTI posted an 86% student success rate and a 93% employment rate. (Source: FNTI Website)

**Quality Education: Indigenous Pedagogies and Supporting the Whole Student**

***Perspectives from Indigenous Scholars, Educators, Indigenous Student Support Service Providers and the Indspire Student Survey***

*“Indigenous pedagogy has been around forever. The biggest difference is that, through the Indigenous lens there is an emphasis placed on the individual’s growth as a whole person including the spiritual component.”*

*- Mitch Huguenin, Indigenous Pedagogy Designer, Trent University*

**Introduction**

Quality education within these academic institutions is founded on Indigenous pedagogies that are based upon revitalizing language, culture and traditional practices, including through experiential and land- based learning, and bringing these approaches into contemporary contexts for students. Quality education is also strongly connected to supporting the well-being and growth of the whole student and their inter-relationships with all things. This discussion focuses on the experience of Indigenous education as it takes place within western post-secondary academic institutions drawing upon the words of scholars, interviews with educators and Indigenous student service providers and the Indspire student survey. It includes the specific experiences of those working at Trent University and Fleming College who provide culturally based education and holistic student services that, together, support student success. The next stage of the research will focus more specifically on best practices drawing in the work of the First Nations Technical Institute that has a long and successful history of offering academic programs and services directly by and for Indigenous peoples.

*Photo credits: Trent University, Fleming College, Peterborough Examiner*

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**Quality Education: Indigenous Pedagogies**

*“The actual experiences of learning the ways of Creation come when one learns from a real hawk and not from the image of a hawk”.* -John Mohawk, 2010

It is important to start by acknowledging key differences in western and (many) Indigenous approaches to education and knowledge generation more broadly. One approach places value on increasing specialization in a single subject area based on the written word while the other values increasing awareness of the inter-relationships between all things in the natural world, including humans, based on experience. (Battiste (2013) Cajete (2000) Kimmerer (2013)Meyer (2013) Mohawk (2010) Simpson (2014)) As Scholar Winona Wheeler puts it;

*“Education is understood as a lifelong process that emphasizes the whole person.* *It strives for spiritual, mental, and physical balance, and emotional well-being within the context of family and community. Unlike the Western pedagogical model, Cree education is relational.*” (Wheeler, 2005)

Mitch Huguenin is the Indigenous Pedagogy Designer at Trent University’s Centre for Teaching and Learning. He describes the difference between western and Indigenous pedagogies in this way;

*“Indigenous pedagogy has been around forever. The biggest difference is that, through the Indigenous lens there is an emphasis placed on the individual’s growth as a whole person including the spiritual component. In the western lens there is an emphasis placed on growth mentally. Indigenous pedagogy is also emotional growth-spiritual growth.”* (M. Huguenin, personal communication, March 14th, 2019).

Scholar Marie Battiste points out that the use of Indigenous Knowledges in education, particularly when they can be transmitted through Indigenous languages, are also unquestionably tied to success for Indigenous students.

*“Where Aboriginal languages, heritages, and communities are respected, supported and connected to elders and education, educational successes among Aboriginal students can be found.”* (Wilson & Battiste, 2011 in Battiste, p. 146, 2013)

When speaking to educators and service providers about student success they talk both about promoting a student’s growth as a whole person and providing teachings that are grounded in cultural and experiential understandings of ecosystems as well as relationships of human beings to those eco-systems. Fleming College educator, Beedahbin Peltier, emphasizes the importance of language in this teaching process and describes this using the Anishinaabe term *“akinaode*”; *the understanding that people only have a home because of the earth- we are only us because of where we are and this represents a continuation to next generations.” (B. Peltier, personal communication, 2018)* He says that;

*“(In) utilizing Indigenous pedagogy and philosophy (students learn) that all life entities are equal and just as important as themselves and that we are able to do what we can do because of those relationships we have with each other, our communities our knowledge and our environment and to honour those relationships”.* *(B. Peltier, NCCIE, 2018)*

These philosophies are often practiced through the pedagogy of experiential learning. As an example, students at both institutions take part in plant medicine walks to learn about the traditional, medicinal and social dimensions of plants, their Anishinaabe names and their relationships to everything around them or they participate in water walks to learn about the relationship of water to all of life and about practices and ceremonies to sustain water. Learners have opportunities to apply their knowledge to present day issues and to their everyday lives. In the case of Fleming College, this includes the opportunity to not only learn about medicinal plants but also where to find them, how to pick them in a sustainable way, how to prepare traditional medicines and their uses for contemporary ailments, such as diabetes, all guided by an experienced Knowledge Holder. (Indigenous Student Services, Fleming College, 2018) Recalling the teachings of his great grandfather, Beedahbin notes that,

*“Experiential Learning is an avenue to restore some of those practices and share some of those processes of knowing. I know there is use and need to use the classroom setting… but in my experience it’s better to see it in action and experience it in those moments and those places rather than just talking about those places… you go to the source of that knowledge… you go out to the land… (you learn) how entities in an environment work together in a cycle and an evolutionary process and how we are affected by that as people.” ( B. Peltier, NCCIE, 2018)*

In the case of Trent University, in his role as a pedagogy designer, Mitch Huegenin says, as an example, he would encourage faculty to teach plant science by bringing in an Elder to talk about companion planting of corn, beans, and squash, a Haudenosaunee practice that has been carried out for thousands of years, known as the three sisters. He notes that students can, at the same time, reflect on western plant science and use both sets of knowledges to learn why these plants grow so well together. Indigenous pedagogies naturally involve this kind of interdisciplinary learning as students simultaneously receive knowledge in areas western education might define as biology, pharmacology, medicine, environmental science, ecology, linguistics, history and cultural studies and more, drawing in other knowledge systems as well. “*When you’ve got more than one set of eyes looking at a single problem, your chances of solving that problem go up quite a bit. That is what Indigenization is. It’s braiding or weaving the western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge together.” – Mitch Huguenin, 2019.* This creates deeper understandings of students’ relationships with each other and the natural world. As Trent Professor Dan Longboat notes, *“in most western academic institutions it’s just one way of seeing of the world… our way of seeing the world is bringing those four sacred colours of human beings together and the knowledge systems together to create innovative thinking.” (D. Longboat, NCCIE, 2018)*

Education based on Indigenous Knowledges provides a strong foundation for education for sustainable development. Indigenous pedagogies align well with education for Sustainable Development teaching practices, both of which emphasize experiential learning, place-based learning, story-telling and critical reflection (UNESCO, 1997). Indigenous teachings can also easily be connected to United Nations Sustainable Development goals such as Life on the Land, Clean Water and Sanitation, Life Below Water, Climate Action, Peace, Good Health and Well-Being, Sustainable Communities, Reducing Inequality and more. These approaches to education are also strongly supported by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007) that, in turn, connects Indigenous knowledges to sustainability. The UNDRIP points out that, *“respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment.”* (UNDRIP, 2007) Marie Battiste also highlights how there is a vast store of knowledge embedded in language that both supports student success and informs issues of sustainability. She included this in a list of recommendations on Indigenous Education to the Canadian federal government.

*“The first principle of any educational plan constructed on Indigenous knowledge must be to respect Indigenous languages, not just because students have difficulty learning without their first language, but because each language represents a knowledge system that holds a depth of knowing that has not yet been tapped for contemporary education and the future of sustainable development.” (Battiste, from her book “Decolonizing Education, Nourishing the Learning Spirit” p. 146, 2013)*

To understand Indigenous Knowledges as the *original* sustainability, is to understand that Indigenous languages and cultures are living libraries of human interactions with eco-systems over-time. As Deb McGregor says….

*“… the relationship with Creation and its beings was meant to be maintained and enhanced and the knowledge that would ensure this was passed on for generations over thousands of years. The responsibilities that one would assume would ensure the continuation of Creation (or what academics or scientists might call sustainability). This knowledge I call IK. Eurocentric academics, policy makers, scientists and resources managers did not invent this knowledge and have only recently recognized it”* – (McGregor, 2004)

The work of the *World Indigenous Knowledge in Higher Education Consortium* provides further resources that document and describe the importance of culture-based approaches that include experiential, land-based education. In their article, *The Present and Future of Land-based Education in Treaty #3*, Donna Chief & Brendan Smyth, note that;

*“Any Anishinaabe land-based education program must be founded on the principles of mino-bimaadiziwin, generally understood as “a good and balanced life with all of Creation; the way to a good and balanced life” (Acoose, 2011, p. 233), and must empower students to see clearly the multitude of relationships that connect us to the land and water, to each other, to animals, to the spirit world, and to past and future generations. Land-based learning enables students to become critical and creative participants in their own educational journeys and can connect them to a strong sense of identity and community.”* (Chief, Smyth-WINHEC, 2017) Please see <http://winhec.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/WINHEC-Journal-2017.pdf> for the full article)

They relate this approach to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) call for cooperation between educators and governments *“to develop or continue developing innovative curricula that reflect Aboriginal cultures and community realities”* (Erasmus & Dussault, p. 431, 1996) (Ibid)

The importance of these approaches to quality education has been re-iterated across Canada in a collection of hundreds of interviews with Indigenous Educators, Elders, Knowledge Holders and community members amassed by the National Collaborative on Indigenous Education, including those cited from this research study area. (please see: <https://www.nccie.ca/)T>). The interviewees speak to how Indigenous pedagogies are being put into practice in educational institutions across the country consistently pointing out the importance of culture based educational practices that emphasize relational, holistic and experiential learning up to and including evaluations. In his NCCIE interview, Beedahbin Peltier notes that,

“*Within the institution we are required to do certain evaluations but I try to apply Indigenous pedagogy. It would be unrealistic to ask any student- ok now it’s time for a test. I will test you on what our experiences were or what I had said. I’m going to ask you to tell it the way I told it or re-iterate it the way that I had done it. That would be undermining the whole approach of diversity and honoring the student’s own perspective. I ask them explicitly, ‘How are you experiencing it? What are you picking up? How could we do better? Who would be outside of our classroom or places we need to go that would make it better?’” (*B. Peltier, NCCIE, 2018)

When asked about what student success means, the words of Professor Dan Longboat return to the idea of supporting students in seeing their interconnections with everything around them and echo the sentiments of many of the NCCIE interviewees.

*“Because it’s based on traditional teachings, students make connections between head, heart and hands. (That is what is needed) if we are going to make change in any process. The measures of success are when you see the lights come on for students. They connect with the world around them- they see themselves as having a purpose, a duty, a vision. Whatever aspect of the environment that they make a connection with, we ignite that as a form of passion, and then they really want to work to change our relationship with water, or trees or biodiversity, and they are empassioned and empowered learners. Then to see them go on to careers based on that or graduate school to make positive change- that’s the measure of success.”* (D. Longboat, NCCIE, 2018)

While these holistic, relational and experiential approaches to education are seen as beneficial for all students, they are also seen as critical for Indigenous student success. Indigenous students still find themselves in western academic institutions with cultures that are very different from their own and that have a history of denigrating or ignoring the cultures of their families, communities and nations despite being located on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, in an era of reconciliation, many of these same institutions are looking to Indigenous peoples to help them grapple with that history as well as to help them address the sustainability issues of our times. As western Academies undergo this shift in thinking, much pressure is placed on Indigenous students, not only to succeed in a non-Indigenous setting, sometimes far away from home, but also to be the experts in Indigenous culture and history and to be the Knowledge Holders of the future.

**Quality Education: Supporting the Whole Student**

*“An Indigenous student should be able to walk in the door and see themselves authentically represented in every single place.”- Kylie Fox-Peltier*

The experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary institutions has recently been documented in the IndSpire report,*Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: The Student Experience.* (Indspire, 2018) (Please see the full report at <https://indspire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Final-Hard-Copy-Student-Report.pdf> ) The report is a response to Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report that documented the experiences of Indigenous residential school survivors. 150,000 Indigenous children were, for over a century, forceably removed from their families and put into residential schools where their languages and cultural practices were forbidden and where they experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse. (TRC, 2015) The report highlights how any discussion of Indigenous Education in Canada carries with it the legacy of residential schools and four centuries of colonialism. The TRC set out Calls to Action to bring about reconciliation within Canada’s education systems and the Indspire report is a survey of Indigenous students about their current post-secondary experiences. It documents how Indigenous students entering western academic institutions today may still have family or community members that experienced, or continue to experience, the impacts of that history. Students surveyed in the Indspire Report talked about the need for well-trained faculty and staff and culturally- based education and support services as being essential elements in their success. One student described it this way;

*“My experience in post-secondary has not been easy, but I have been successful in achieving my educational goals because of the relational approach and cultural supports that have been made available. Dealing with heavy course content, the elders provided gentle guidance and insight to enhance my understanding and connection to the material. They were also there as a support when life challenges presented and I felt like I couldn’t continue with my education. I had faculty and staff who had a strong understanding of the importance of elders and cultural connections who, when I would go to them to share that I felt like I needed to withdraw, would redirect me to the elders and other supports. I think that at this time it is critically important that postsecondary institutions commit to increasing understanding of indigenous/colonial history and establish an environment founded on cultural humility that encourages individuals to reflect on their own bias and lived experience and how that influences their interactions with others. This is particularly important as many indigenous students are coming from small communities or isolated/rural/remote settings and removed from their natural support networks in their pursuit for higher education.”*  (IndSpire, p. 15, 2018)

As a former Trent student, Mitch Huguenin’s experience reflected many of those surveyed for the IndSpire report. He noted that, for Indigenous students, its often their first time learning about their culture in this kind of environment. “*For some, if they are learning about residential schools, it might be brand new information and for an Indigenous student who might have personal connections to that history, it can be difficult to reconcile those thoughts and feelings.”* ( M. Huguenin, personal communication, March 2019) As a student, he said it was his first time learning about it and he would leave class feeling angry, sad, and wondering why didn’t he know about this before. He said, *“the content can be triggering… to us it’s not history, it’s reality. The other issue is if you identify as Indigenous- you will be seen as the expert in everything Indigenous. Then the teacher will even call on you and as a student that is a huge responsibility- while you are trying to learn- and now also called upon to be an expert.”* (Huguenin, personal communication, March, 2019) Mitch noted that it is especially at this time that students really benefit from having supports in place and having supportive instructors. Trent Education Professor, Nicole Bell, was one of his Instructors at Trent whom he described as “tremendously supportive not just as a student but as an Indigenous learner” and who continued to be a major support and advocate as he went on to his first teaching job after graduation. (Ibid) In her NCCIE interview, Professor Bell talks about the importance of understanding that there is a gap between the Indigenous experience and the non-indigenous experience. She tells her non-Indigenous teacher candidates that they may see Indigenous parents who simply cannot go through the door of a school because of the experience and legacy of the residential school system. She works first on bridging that gap, often by taking students out on the land together, calling education a “healing act”. Her vision of the future is a school system *“where all students can feel validated and celebrated every day.”* (Nicole Bell Interview, NCCIE website, 2018) Professor Dan Longboat notes that part of that process comes through curriculum, part is the method of delivery through the instructor and part is through cultural advisors, together providing cultural continuity throughout the learning journey. (Longboat, personal communication, March 2019)

While there is extensive Indigenous centered academic programming at Trent University and Fleming College, that includes culturally- based teachings and experiential learning, Indigenous students still find themselves having to navigate these larger western academic institutions with mostly non-Indigenous student populations. As students across the country have said, this can be stressful to the point of affecting their academic work. (IndSpire, 2018) Student Support Services designed specifically for Indigenous students are seen as an integral part of a holistic approach to education and are available through Trent’s First Peoples House of Learning (FPHL) and Fleming College’s Indigenous Student Services

Dawn Lavell-Harvard is the Director of the First Peoples House of Learning at **Trent University**. Originally from Wiikwemkoong First Nation, for much of her career she was the President of the Native Women’s Association of Canada and the President of the Ontario Native Women’s Association. She is also an educator who focused her PhD research on what contributes to educational success for aboriginal students, and for aboriginal women in particular. In her research, entitled *“The Power of Silence, the Price of Success; Academic Achievement as Transformational Resistance for Aboriginal Women”,* she re-iterates the importance of culturally based education and support services for students. She points outthat,

“*As traditional Indigenous cultures have been shown to be critical for educational attainment and not a barrier to success (Deyhle, 1989; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000), education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada has evolved substantively over the last few decades moving away from policies of assimilation towards the establishment of programs and institutions designed to foster the academic success of Aboriginal students by supporting the maintenance of healthy cultural identities (see Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997).” ( in D. Harvard, p. 64, 2011)*

Her research echoes the many challenges that face Indigenous students that were highlighted in the Indspire report. These include a lack of understanding or cultural awareness on the part of non-indigenous faculty, a lack of institutional support for Indigenous centered education, faculty and students and a lack of supports for Indigenous women who are often juggling school, work and child care. Her findings identified family and community support, the presence of supportive faculty and staff, institutional commitment, and, in particular, the availability of Aboriginal – specific spaces for students as very important factors in student success within mainstream institutions. (D. Harvard, 2011) (Please see her full thesis at <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1179&context=etd>.)

As Director of First People’s House of Learning, Dawn has been able to apply her findings to her work noting that student success is *“a lot of time not about academic skills. It’s about self- esteem and identity issues and about having someone believe in you.”* (D. Lavell- Harvard, personal communication, March, 2019) She describes FPHL as *“building a supportive community within the Academy*” and *“creating safer spaces both ideologically and physically”* based on relationships where students feel *“welcomed, embraced, loved and appreciated*”. (Ibid) Amongst the many programs offered through FPHL she highlighted the importance of Peer Mentorship that originally started with the Biishkaa program that continues to be offered at Fleming College, and that is now called the “Ishkadewen” program, meaning ‘to light a fire’ in Anishinabemowin. She describes mentorship as a *“deliberate formal building of supportive relationships.”* (Ibid) Other programs offered through FPHL include access to, and teachings within, a Tipi adjacent to the University, a medicine garden, traditional teachings and activities throughout the year including Pine Tree talks given by Elders and Knowledge Holders, Elders Gatherings and an Indigenous Women’s symposium. These help students to recognize themselves within the institution and validate Indigenous ways of knowing within the Academy.

The importance of “safe spaces”, mentorship and supportive relationships were re-iterated by Academic Counselor, Stephanie Nelson who said that, for student success*, “number one is for students to have a safe space to drop into and people who can validate them.”* (Stephanie Nelson, personal communication, March, 2019) Stephanie Nelson describes herself as coming from “many people and many tribes” including Indigenous ancestry and has a background in nursing and counselling. She says that we need to be mindful of where we maybe hindering a student’s learning process by putting everything into a western context. She notes that the Academy’s individualistic performance-based approach and lack of understanding and knowledge about Indigenous history and culture can feel hostile to students. As an example, she hears first hand that Indigenous students are often put in the position of doing the *“emotional labour of being called on to explain the historical context of the issues being discussed in class.”* By contrast, she notes that Indigenous knowledge generation is very process driven and that, *“from an indigenous perspective you don’t learn on your own (but are supported by) Elders, Knowledge keepers, family members…an Indigenous model is very holistic”* (Nelson, personal communication, March 4th, 2019) She highlights the importance of recognizing and being sensitive to the spectrum of student experience from urban to rural and remote and from highly assimilated to steeped in culture. Therefore each experience will be unique. She also highlighted the success and importance of peer-mentorship programs in supporting first year students. (Ibid) The experiences from Trent’s First Peoples House of Learning reflect one of the Indspire Report’s key findings that;

*“Respondents valued access to Indigenous student services and spaces that provide them with a sense of community and support on campus. They repeatedly said it is important to know their culture, speak their language and have access to cultural practices and knowledge specific to their people”. (IndSpire, 2018)*

**Fleming College** has recently begun to document the correlation between the offering of student support services and increasing student enrollment and graduation success. Kylie Fox- Peltier is the Manager of Fleming College’s Indigenous Student Services where she has worked for eight and half years. She has seen many changes over this time. Recruitment activities into communities have expanded, enrollment has increased significantly and services for students are extending out into every aspect of student life. This has been supported by the College’s commitment to the CICan protocol on Indigenous Education. The Protocol was developed in response to the TRC report and commits Canadian Colleges to making Indigenous Education a priority through curriculum, support services, administrative resources and outreach to communities. (Please see the full protocol here. <https://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/policyfocus/indigenous-learners/protocol/>) The changes are in large part due to the efforts of the team at Indigenous Student Services in making strong connections between recruitment, student services and academic success; connections that appear to have a definite correlation to increased enrollment and graduation for Indigenous students. (Source: Indigenous Student Services, Fleming College, 2018)

Starting with recruitment, Kylie talked about how her program is part of a collective of Indigenous recruiters from colleges and universities across Ontario called the *Aboriginal Post-secondary Information Program*. Together they tour communities to encourage Indigenous students to go to any University or College that may best suit their interests and needs. For example, if a student is worried about being homesick, it is better to try to choose a school that is closer to home. She notes that they are non-competitive in this way. She talks about how recruitment activities include games and visiting together with the students so that it is not so intimidating to think about going on to post-secondary education. She feels that jumps in enrollment (noted in the chart below) can be correlated to the presence of an Indigenous Recruiter and these activities. (K. Fox-Peltier, personal communication, January, 2019)

She notes that First Nations communities have also asked that recruiters join in community events throughout the year to build stronger relationships. To that end, Kylie has created a new “Transition’s Advisor” role so that a member of her team can work with local school Enrollment Numbers: Source: Indigenous Student Services, Fleming College, 2018 boards and communities to have an ongoing presence with them throughout the year.

There are many more events and programs offered through Fleming’s Indigenous Student Services programs that help students in navigating financial, health and other services as well as drum socials, hands-on traditional activities and teachings in the tipi that sits adjacent to the College.

Graduation Numbers: Source: Indigenous Student Services, Fleming College, 2018

Services include appointments to see Elders one on one or as part of group discussions.

Kylie talks about her vision for what a post-secondary institution should look like in the future. “*An Indigenous student should be able to walk in the door and see themselves in every single place.…. It’s beyond decolonization… Indigenous People are the identity of our land.”* (Fox- Peltier, personal communication, January, 2019) To this end, she and her colleagues are successfully undertaking new initiatives to make that vision a reality. One of these is providing students with access to Indigenous Health Care Consultations in partnership with Health Services. Part of that initiative is providing students with the opportunity to work with a Knowledge Holder to gather and make plant medicines and also receive a consultation from him. Another is the development of a first of its kind Human Rights Charter for Indigenous students. She envisions an Indigenous presence in every aspect of College life. She feels that as this grows, it is reflected in enrollment data as students are becoming more willing and proud to self-identify as they see themselves better reflected in the College overall. (Ibid) (Please see the video of the opening of the new Indigenous Student Services Space here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYudQ5ChREU> )

**Mentorship Programs**

Of the support services offered to students, many talked about the importance of mentorship programs and Kylie attributes much the success of Fleming students to the “Bishkaa” (Rise Up) program originally started in partnership with Trent University. Kylie has found that **students enrolled in the Bishkaa program have a 100% retention rate** and that the program has contributed to graduation success. The program involves cultural orientation with Traditional activities and Elders before school starts which works to build a cohort of students for the year. The program is centered around “mentors”, who are second- or third-year Indigenous students, who work with “mentees”, the incoming students to be there as a support for them throughout the year. Mentors work full-time during orientation and then several hours a week having up to 5 mentees each. They touch based with the “mentees” weekly, and, prior to exam time, host a retreat at nearby Camp Kawartha, where students can focus on studying or whatever they need to be successful. In addition, Elders are brought in several times a month to meet with students one- one or in groups. Mentors are also Elder’s helpers, giving them the opportunity to learn cultural teachings from them. (K. Fox-Peltier, personal communication, January, 2019) Kylie notes that one unexpected offshoot of the program is that mentors have kept in touch with mentees when they have gone from College to University or other endeavors and that mentees often become mentors the following year. She notes how this has built a broader community that extends beyond students’ time at College. (Kylie Fox-Peltier, personal communication, Jan. 2019)

The mentorship program is one that will be explored in more depth as a best practice as there seems to be a high degree of transferability. The concept for the Biishkaa program originated many years ago with Delbert and Laura Horton of Rainy River. According to Georgie Horton Baptiste, the couple started the mentorship program to provide support to high school students who often were away from their homes and communities while attending high school. Their work eventually led to the establishment of the Seven Generations Institute that today has programs that support Indigenous students from elementary to post-secondary education throughout the Fort Francis, Kenora Ontario region. <http://www.7generations.org/> ( Source: G. Horton-Baptiste, personal communication, February, 2019) The previously referenced Indspire Report also made support for mentorship one of their top recommendations to government calling for “*The strengthening of Indigenous Culture, Identity and Belonging through mentorship on campus and beyond. While more funding is required if Indigenous students are to thrive and be successful in postsecondary settings, the next priority is to meet the cultural needs that strengthen their sense of self and support their community connections during their time in post-secondary.” (Indspire, 2018)* Peer mentorship is not limited to students only. Faculty and Student Support Service providers also benefit from opportunities to gather with their peers. Service providers, such as Kylie Fox-Peltier, would like to so Leadership Circles of peers supported as part of professional development. ( Fox-Peltier, personal communication, March, 2019)

It is clear, from this research, that the foundation for quality education is derived from the care for the well-being of the whole student that requires both culturally based academic opportunities as well as Indigenous focused student services and peer mentoring in particular. Supporting these approaches not only serves to support the growth and success of Indigenous students, but supports education for sustainability for all students.As best practices are explored further in the next stage of the research with a deeper look at Mentorship programs, there will be research on what can be learned from the student experience in a wholly First Nation run and operated institute- the First Nations Technical Institute. This part of the project will also explore how experiences at the three institutions can better support students when they return to their communities. There will be discussion of how partnerships between them can be strengthened even further to support the well-being of all students including in their future careers as a part of life-long learning.

**Closing Story: *From Student to Mentor to Teacher to a Teacher of Teachers***

***A conversation with Mitch Huguenin…***

Mitch Huegenin has, in a short time worn every hat in a post-secondary institution; student, mentor, service provider, teacher and now a teacher of teachers in his current role as Indigenous Pedagogy Designer. He talked about his journey starting with his Metis heritage growing up in the community of Penetanguishine- Georgian Bay and how he did not have a lot of opportunities to engage with culture. He talked about the opportunity to come to Trent University as a student where he took History with emphasis on Indigenous History. *“The opportunity that I had to learn under Indigenous and non-indigenous faculty gave a newfound interest in looking at my own indigeneity.* *(Before) there was a sense of having to conceal one’s identity. Coming to Trent it was encouraged… to speak to those experiences and to be proud of those experiences.”* (Huguenin, personal communication, March 2019) When he finished his undergraduate degree and went on to do a Bachelor’s of Education he met Trent Professor Nicole Bell whom he described as tremendously supportive for him as an Indigenous learner. As noted earlier, she continued to be a supportive advocate as he went on to his first teaching opportunity in course development. He has been developing courses with an Indigenous focus ever since. He also worked with the First Peoples House of Learning leading their mentorship initiatives and felt he learned an enormous amount about providing services to students from the team there. This informed his recent work with Trent’s Bridge Program for students entering University. As he describes it, *“you can come to Trent in August and study very foundational classes and achieve a 1/2 credit.”* (Huguenin, 2019) He worked with Indigenous students serving as a coach or a guide and sat in on classes and guest taught. He helped with everything from transit to web platforms to speaking with faculty. *“It demonstrates that university is challenging but there are a number of phenomenal supports in place and so first year students made connections with FPHL before they even started. It is like a summer camp feeling as everyone becomes close. Then when semester is underway there are friends already made and supports already in place- they’ve already built a foundation.”* (Ibid) Today, Mitch is Indigenous Pedagogy Designer at Trent’s Centre for Teaching and Learning, advising faculty on how to bring Indigenous Pedagogies into their courses. In addition, he teaches 200 students at Durham College all in Indigenous Studies courses that he designed. He attributes the work he does today to his supportive student experience with Indigenous faculty and his work with culturally based student services at Trent.

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1. Nogijiwanong is the Anishinabemowin word for the place where Peterborough is situated. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)