



## **Kindergarten Transitions II: A Scan of Existing Supportive Programs for Aboriginal Children and Families in British Columbia**

### **KEY FINDINGS**

It has been established that in order to ensure successful transitions between early childhood settings and kindergarten for Aboriginal students the following considerations are paramount:

- Integration of culturally appropriate curriculum including Aboriginal languages in both settings.
- Collaboration between Early Childhood Education program staff and school staff.
- Relationship building with community and professional partners.
- Incorporating culturally relevant practices such as ceremonies, singing, dancing and Elder participation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *Kindergarten Transitions II* is a community-based research project that furthers research and insights gained from the previously completed research project entitled *Kindergarten Transitions I*, completed in 2013. The initial project identified challenges affecting the successful transition of Aboriginal children from early childhood settings into kindergarten. It recommended ways of supporting young children during the transition process. The current *Kindergarten Transitions II* project sought to further expand knowledge of existing programs in British Columbia that are supporting early childhood transitions. The purpose of the study was to determine the elements of successful working partnerships between childhood settings and kindergarten and primary schools. It also sought to identify important aspects of building working relationships across systems and cultures.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre

BC Regional Innovation Chair for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development at Vancouver Island University

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to explore the existing transition programs in British Columbia that served Aboriginal children and their families, the community based research team employed a variety of methods to gather knowledge. Through an initial online search approximately 21 programs aimed at supporting Aboriginal children in their transition to kindergarten were identified. Program staff were then contacted by researchers by telephone and invited to participate in a semi-structured interview about their particular program. Ultimately, 14 programs participated in the research project.

## **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

All but one program contacted was off-reserve and only programs existing in British Columbia were included in the study. Funding was not sufficient to allow for a comprehensive study to examine existing programs and their effectiveness and impact. No formal evaluation of programs and services was conducted.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

Findings from this community-based research project reinforced the importance of the following:

- Relationship building and strengthening communication across all stakeholders including families, educators, teachers, administrators and other professional and support agencies at all stages of program/classroom planning, development and implementation.
- Family-centered approaches in all aspects of programs including: outreach, planning, program delivery and assessment/evaluation.
- Culturally inclusive approaches in all aspects of programs – these approaches must include locally relevant language, culture and traditional knowledge and practices.
- Play-based learning experiences to form a strong foundation for holistic child development.
- Collaborative professional development opportunities for ECE's and teachers.
- Formalizing the above 'learnings' in program/school policy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout the interviews conducted with program/service staff the value of relationship building between children, their families and primary school staff was emphasized. Additionally, it was seen that collaboration between program staff and school staff was

essential in creating a successful and positive transition for Aboriginal children. Equally important was the incorporation and integration of cultural values, practices and traditions into the classroom to help ground children. Summarily, this research project highlights that the connections and relationships between early childhood settings and kindergarten programs continue to be informal and somewhat limited.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to further develop Tillicum Lelum's Aboriginal Early Childhood Development program the following have to be implemented:

- Creating and implementing reciprocal policy between the early childhood and school programs that outline mutual expectations related to:
  - Relationship building and communication
  - Aboriginal culture and language inclusiveness
  - Aboriginal family and community engagement and empowerment
  - History and context of Aboriginal families and communities
  - Providing play-based, culturally inclusive programs for young children that focus on healthy, holistic child development.
  
- Formal documentation of the strengths and challenges of transition services and supports could strengthen the quality of existing services.
  - Regular evaluation of all programs and services offered to children and their families.
  - Assessment of learning processes that include (but are not limited to) informing understanding about holistic childhood development such as observations of Aboriginal children and families.

**For more information on this project visit:**

<http://uakn.org/research-project/kindergarten-transitions-ii-a-scan-of-existing-supportive-programs-for-aboriginal-children-and-families-in-british-columbia/>

**ABOUT US:**

**Authors and Affiliations:**

Wendy Beaton and Linda McDonell

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