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Final Paper

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

UAKN Western Regional Research Centre

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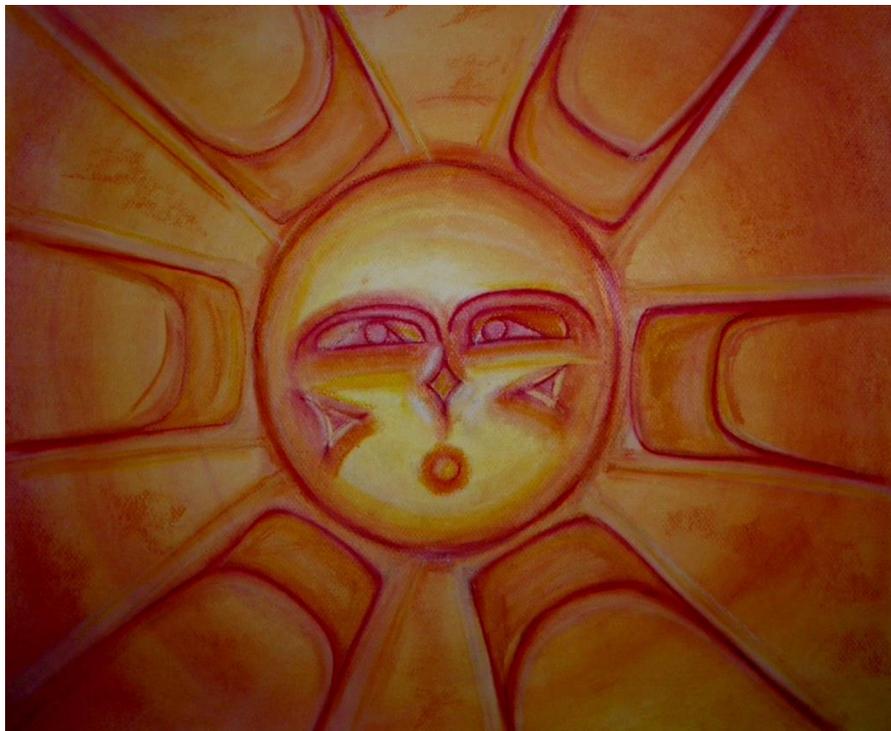
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Kindergarten Transitions II: A Scan of Existing Supportive Programs for Aboriginal Children and Families in British Columbia

An investigation into the existence of transition programs in BC for Aboriginal children and their families.



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Introduction

Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre (Tillicum Lelum) is a non-profit organization established in 1968. During the past forty-five years it has grown to include over forty programs and services including a few that focus on Aboriginal early childhood development (ECD). These programs were developed to address the specific needs of the community but were not developed within the context of an overall ECD strategy.

Background

Tillicum Lelum has recently shifted its organizational focus from intervention to prevention. Over the last two years, the organization has embarked on the creation of an ECD strategic planning process focusing on early childhood development. In 2011, Tillicum Lelum and the BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRIC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) at Vancouver Island University (VIU) partnered to collaborate on a small number of projects. The purpose of the most recent of these projects, *The Transition onto Kindergarten: A Community Approach to Integrating a Child's Fragmented World* (Beaton & McDonell, 2013) (Transitions I) explored and analyzed the research on the topic of how best to support young children during their transition from early childhood settings into kindergarten.

Transitions I described:

- Research that identifies the importance of early childhood experiences to healthy and holistic early childhood development.
- The significance of early experiences for Aboriginal children.
- The affect of transitions from early childhood settings to kindergarten.
- The existing fragmentation of services across the early childhood and public school systems.
- The effects of the fragmentation on both transitions between systems and on healthy child development.

Beaton and McDonell (2013) included potential ways to remediate the issues described and proposed some recommendations and implementation strategies to address the 'discontinuities' across systems.

It was not the purpose of the initial Transition project to identify already existing programs that were supporting early childhood transitions to kindergarten. However, it was recognized that having more information about existing programs in British Columbia could inform the development of present and future services and programs. As a result Tillicum Lelum and VIU's BCRIC for AECD submitted a proposal to the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN) to fund an

investigation into the existence of transition programs in BC; in particular, programs for Aboriginal children and their families.

The UAKN¹ Project objectives were outlined by the authors. It was intended that the project would advance our understanding about:

- Existing partnerships between childhood settings and kindergarten/primary in selected jurisdictions of BC.
- Methods and models utilized to create and maintain successful partnerships
- Elements of successful working partnerships
- Important aspects of building working relationships across systems and cultures

Methodology

The research methodology included a survey of existing transition programs in the province of BC. The survey was carried out through telephone interviews with fourteen programs across the province. This undertaking required three initial steps to identifying the programs. First, programs were identified that support Aboriginal children and their families as they transition to kindergarten. To do this a Google search of BC programs was conducted using the following search terms: kindergarten transition, Aboriginal kindergarten transition, supported kindergarten transition, transitional kindergarten, transition to kindergarten program. A quick scan of each webpage was made, looking for programs that fit the particular criteria including programs that:

- Focus on supporting children as they transition from childcare or home settings into kindergarten.
- Serve Aboriginal children and their families; and
- Are located Urban/off-reserve.

Second, from the initial search 11 programs were identified as fitting the criteria and finally, each were contacted to participate in an interview consisting of a questionnaire (See Appendix A). An additional 10 programs were recommended subsequent to the initial search and invited to participate. Ultimately, a total of 14 programs participated in the interview stage.

It should be noted, that one of the 14 programs is not located off-reserve. The program was recommended and contacted because it is a multi-age childcare and Special Needs service provider that incorporates Aboriginal teachings into music, art, storytelling, taught in both Hul'qumi'num and English.

¹ The UAKN is a Secretariat under the National Association of Friendship Centres. The Friendship Centre Movement, over the last forty years, has been developing a body of knowledge gained by practice that provides the basis for a wide range of programming and services for urban Aboriginal peoples. The UAKN will expand on these practices, and the knowledge gained from them, to systematically explore and share among policy makers the challenges and opportunities experienced by Aboriginal peoples living in Canada's urban centres. (www.uakn.org)

Results & Discussion

Each program examined has unique and valuable aspects. Many focus on relationship building and readying children and their families for school. These efforts are supported through the inclusion of culture, parents, family, and elders; and are strengthened through collaboration and utilizing existing ECD programs relevant to the community. Based on informant comments, it seems the building of collaborative relationships between local school district staff and other programs/services in the community would be strengthened through policy development and articulated commitments by all parties involved. As well, a personal commitment by program coordinators seemed to be a key indicator of a program's ability to go above and beyond its basic objectives and to become a catalyst for truly meeting the needs of children and families.

All of the programs investigated for this project support Aboriginal students transitioning to kindergarten but they do so to varying degrees. Several of the programs are offered by School Districts and are overseen by the District Principal of Aboriginal Education. The remainder are offered by community organizations and overseen by program coordinators and in many cases, parent advisory committees. Numerous interviewees described offering a variety of programs to support kindergarten transition. Among the most common program models being implemented are Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) and Strong Start. In several settings, other models or elements of other models are used to compliment AHS and Strong Start models. The review also identified one of the 14 programs operating within a HUB. More detail about the HUB model is provided in the following program descriptions.

Aboriginal Head Start

"Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) is an early intervention preschool program designed for urban and northern (off-reserve) Aboriginal children in Canada" ("What is AHSUNC?", 2012, para. 1) There are 12 [urban/off reserve] AHS programs that operate under the direction of established Principals & Guidelines and Parent Advisory Councils. AHS programs are based on the following 'Six Components of Aboriginal Head Start,' "Culture and Language; Education and School Readiness; Health Promotion; Nutrition; Social Support; Parent and Family Involvement" ("What is AHSUNC?", 2012, para.4). These components guide the activities and curriculum.

Strong Start BC

"Strong Start BC early learning programs provide school-based early learning services for adults and their young children, aged birth to five at no cost to families." (Strong Start BC Centers, 2012). Parents and caregivers attend and participate in rich learning experiences with their children that assist in preparing for success in Kindergarten (Strong Start BC, 2013).

Other Programs

Many other programs were mentioned in the interviews. These are not specifically Kindergarten Transition Program but various aspects of these programs support

Aboriginal children and their families as they prepare for Kindergarten. These include:

- Welcome to Kindergarten,
- PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters),
- Ready, Set, Learn,
- Handwriting Without Tears,
- Learning Through Play,
- Action Schools,
- Literacy & Movement,
- Moe the Mouse,
- Strengthening Families (Provincial),
- Bringing Tradition Home program,
- Granny and Grandpa Connections Box, and
- Medicine Wheel teachings.

HUB Model

In earlier research undertaken by Tillicum Lelum and VIU, in a document entitled *Learning, Growing and Leading (2012)*, McDonnell & Alphonse state “The idea of centralizing service in a ‘one-stop shop’ has been discussed in the early childhood sector for decades as a way to improve services to families. Further, the idea of providing services in an integrated way has been reflected many times over the years in conversation with both those working with children and families and the families themselves in mainstream and Aboriginal communities” (p.19).

The discussion paper *The Transition into Kindergarten: A Community Approach to Integrating a Child’s Fragmented World (2013)*, recommended the participation in and support for HUB models is ideal because,

Ball (2004) stresses that this model both enhances service provision and strengthens community involvement and engagement... [and is] an important way to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of programs and services. Providing services in the HUB model in Aboriginal communities also strengthens cultural continuity (pp.18-19).

The HUB Model described by Ball and supported by Beaton & McDonnell (2013) in their discussion paper has early childhood care and development (ECCD) at the center and provides a wrap around of supports and services to support family-centredness. The Aboriginal Head Start program and other early years programs and services are the hook, inviting the families in and then the provision of wrap around services support children/families in many other aspects of their life. For example, the HUB provides health services, culture and language, education, child protection and family support, and other supports. All programs in the HUB described by Ball and Beaton & McDonnell are grounded in Aboriginal concepts of wellness and are inclusive of First Nations and Métis cultures.

Interview Responses within the Context of the Recommendations

Interview Responses within the context of the recommendations from *The Transition into Kindergarten: A Community Approach to Integrating a Child's Fragmented World* (Beaton & McDonell, 2013).

To provide a relevant framework for the interview results, the recommendations from the first Transitions document are used to frame the survey responses of the program staff interviewed. The relevant comments from this current project are noted as "Related responses from *Transition II* interviews" (see below). To protect confidentiality, quotes are not attached to names or organizations. Rather they are numbered according to the date of the interview.

Recommendations related to Relationship building and trust:

- 1) Create opportunities for families, ECEs and early childhood programs and services, kindergarten teachers and administrators, and managers to collaborate by sharing information, questions and concerns related to the transition of children from one setting to another.
- 2) With stakeholders identified above, identify ways that schools can strengthen their readiness to receive children into kindergarten as well as identify ways that early childhood settings and the communities can support children, families, and schools in this process.

Related responses from Transition II interviews:

- "I believe the highlights are our relationship with the schools, other community agencies and the school district. This allows us to work closely together for a seamless transition. We also continue to support families after their child is in the regular school system" (respondent no. 1, personal communication, August 16, 2013).
- "We have a policy of inclusivity...we are reliable and [have an] open door policy...[teachers and educators] attend each other's events (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- "Children are on our caseload until age 6... we do assessments and for transition to kindergarten, we encourage the teachers to come the observe child" (respondent no. 4, August 15, 2013).
- "Our staff spend many hours on building relationships with our children, families, school administrators, support staff and kindergarten teachers" (respondent no. 9, personal communication, October 1, 2013).
- "The principal of the school and the daycare manager are key to the program. Families and other staff are all involved" (respondent no. 13, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Recommendations related to *Information sharing*:

- 1) Create opportunities for ECEs and teachers to participate in shared workshops and professional activities to increase understanding across the two settings.
- 2) Bring teachers and ECEs and families together to collaboratively determine both what information can and should be shared across the settings and appropriate processes for exchanging information.
- 3) Establish protocols and procedures for sharing information.

Related responses from *Transitions II* interviews:

- “We encourage parents to read their child’s file and take out what they don’t want to pass on to the kindergarten teacher, such as Ages and Stages or attendance, but we do tell them the Speech Language Assessments must be shared” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- “We hold a transition meeting with any community supports and the family and the school district people who will need to support the child. In this meeting we make a plan for the child to succeed and the parents become familiar with the staff that will be working with their children” (respondent no. 1, personal communication, August 16, 2013).
- Parents are given information about their child’s participation. The parents can share this information with their child’s kindergarten teacher” (respondent no. 10, personal communication, October 4, 2013).
- “If there are extra supports needed, we meet with other professionals with parents/families present. We also invite [service providers/professionals] into our centre for observations and meet with front line staff in order to get their feedback. We advocate strongly for our families. We support their choices and help to ensure the transition to kindergarten is as smooth as possible” (respondent 13, personal communication, October 1, 2013).
- “Front line staff meets with school staff and parents to discuss strategies to support the children as they transition to kindergarten” (respondent no. 13, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Recommendations related to Family and community support:

- 1) Create environments that welcome families both prior to school starting and throughout the school year to support meaningful parent/family involvement. Parents/families can provide valuable information about their child’s experience with the transition to school and can contribute to the teacher’s understandings about the child’s abilities and behaviours.

- 2) Create connections across the broader ECD community and schools to ensure the outreach to children and families is maximized — in particular those children and families who may be at greater risk for vulnerabilities.

Related responses from *Transitions II* interviews:

- “We do goal setting at the beginning with our families, and then support them to reach their goal” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2103).
- “One key element of our program is early intervention. We have a March team meeting with CDC staff, ECE staff, pediatricians, family, and School District. All staff knows which children are transitioning and the therapists involved” (respondent no. 4, personal communication, August 15, 2013).
- “We follow a case-by-case or as needed basis only for outreach. We try to connect with school district but are not always welcome. We have [several] elementary schools, but ECE’s are not see as professionals. This is difficult on relationships” (respondent 4, personal communication, August 15, 2013).
- “The key objectives of our program are building connections between family and school, providing support, building on parent’s knowledge base and providing quality resources. The key elements are providing supports in all areas, providing family workshops, collaboration and partnerships” (respondent no. 5, personal communication, August 29, 2013).
- “We address family and caregiver concerns. We make home visits (or alternate locations that are comfortable for the family)” (respondent 12, personal communication, October 2, 2013).
- “We screen our 4 year olds to see where they are at and where they need to go. Kindergarten teachers visit, attend events, and the 4 year olds visit Kindergarten classrooms. At the parent interview day in May, students and parents meet the Aboriginal Aides from the School District. Others involved include: Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Supported Child Development Worker. Connections are made to the support team to support children and families with the transition to kindergarten.” (respondent no. 13, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Recommendations related to *Culture and language*:

- 1) Create opportunities for ECEs and teachers to participate in shared and individualized professional development activities that increase awareness about history of First Nations people in Canada and the devastating effects of colonization.
- 2) Create opportunities for ECEs and teachers to participate in shared and individualized professional development opportunities that increase knowledge about the importance of First language experiences; and family, community and cultural teachings and traditional practices. Workshops and

- other activities can also build knowledge and skill to support Aboriginal parent, family engagement in these activities.
- 3) Create opportunities for Elders and other respected community members to share their language and traditional knowledge with children and adults in the classroom.
 - 4) Collaborate with family and community to provide locally relevant culture and language experiences in early childhood and kindergarten environments.
 - 5) Identify available community resources to support learning experiences related to Aboriginal culture and language.

Related responses from *Transition II* interviews:

- “Although all 6 components make up our program, we believe the key elements are culture and language, and parent and family involvement. We strongly encourage and welcome parents and families to be a part of our program” (respondent no. 2, personal communication, August 16, 2013).
- “We follow the ...program of our territory, focusing on strengthening cultural identity and promoting a sense of curiosity. We allow each child to make choices” (respondent no. 3, personal communication,).
- “The language teacher goes into kindergarten classes to support the children and the teacher” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- “We include the First Nations Curriculum K - 7, First Nations Crafts Curriculum. In two schools, [the local] Language is offered K through grade 4” (respondent no. 5, personal communication, August 29, 2013).
- Our program is specific to the Aboriginal population. We have ECEs, parents, and Elders involved” (respondent no. 8, personal communication, September 18, 2013).
- “School readiness, routines, and culture. We include elders and ceremonies. For example, smudge and name giving. We are flexible and we value community involvement” (respondent no. 9, personal communication, October 1, 2013).
- “Our program model is Reggio Emilia inspired and very similar to our Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning/teaching. The model is also influenced by Montessori. Certainly the curriculum is strongly influenced by the training of the staff/teachers” (respondent no. 9, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Recommendations related to Alignment in curriculum and teaching strategies:

- 1) Create joint professional development opportunities for ECEs and teachers at which information can be shared about professional and pedagogical approaches to child development, inclusive practice, developing and implementing curriculum and related activities, and working with families.

- 2) Create professional development opportunities to strengthen cultural relevance of curriculum content, and the cultural knowledge, sensitivity and competency of practitioners and professionals.

Related response from *Transitions II* interviews:

While informants did not indicate a high number of shared professional development activities there were a number of ways that ECEs and teachers tried to work together to better align their programs.

- “The language teacher goes into kindergarten classes to support the children and the teacher...we always include each other in events” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- “We have release time so we can develop strategic plans with teachers including attending each other’s events” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- “Regarding the transferring of information, we insist health related information be shared with the kindergarten teacher...” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- Identifying support in all areas, providing family workshops, collaboration and building partnerships...we also work with our kindergarten teachers (respondent no. 5, personal communication, August 29, 2013).

Recommendations related to *School culture*:

- 1) Create joint opportunities for families, ECEs, and teachers to come together to discuss transition processes and related issues; identify what is working and isn’t in their region; and make recommendations toward developing informed and effective transitions from early childhood to kindergarten.

Related responses to *Transition II* interviews

- “[Teachers and ECEs] have a kindergarten transition meeting at the beginning, middle and end of year. [We plan get-to-know-you activities such as] Big Buddy reading with grades 6-7. [The buddies] come to pre-k once a week for an hour. Once a month pre-K goes to the big school to practice skills, i.e. walking in halls, lining up, who are safe people etc. The Big Buddies walk in the pre-K’s at their graduation ceremony” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- The school district administration is on board but [shared programming between ECEs and teachers] are not policy. Kindergarten teachers are not always keen to have [ECEs] in the classroom. Because it is not policy at the district level it can be difficult to provide in-class support. We try different [ECE] staff until the teacher is comfortable but it doesn’t always happen” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).
- “In supporting aboriginal parents, we tell them that it’s ok if their child is not ready. Wait until they are happy and healthy when they go [to Kindergarten] so they can thrive & flourish - otherwise they end up sitting

in the hallways” (respondent no. 3, personal communication, August 22, 2013).

- “We specifically address kindergarten readiness... We meet with kindergarten teachers to find out what is important to them each year and develop our program around their response. The priority this year is socialization” (respondent no. 6, personal communication, September 6, 2013).
- [In our program the children] get to know staff and the [school] building... There is a buddy program with older grades. This helps to increase social responsibility. The [buddies] come and help with snacks and reading with the children” (respondent no. 7, personal communication, September 24, 2013).

Recommendations related to *HUB models*:

- 1) Participate in and support HUB models of service and program delivery.
- 2) Commit to relationship building and information sharing across the ECD and kindergarten/ primary systems.

Related responses to *Transition II* interviews

- “The Friendship Society has a number of different programs with some overlapping which gives our families a lot of opportunity to access other services” (respondent no. 2, personal communication, August 16, 2013).
- “We do outreach to other family programs, like Healthy Families and the adult literacy program. We use Outreach Workers and other programs’ staff to spread the word about our program” (respondent no. 10, personal communication, October 4, 2013).
- “We also have a preschool; housing programs; diabetes program; outreach workers etc. Our programs work both separately and together. We support each other when needed. Within our organization we are grouped together in teams, with a team leader. We aim to have a team meeting once a week” (respondent no. 11, personal communication, October 17, 2013).
- “[We] help families locate what they need, for example, free strollers, diapers, formula etc. from various agencies, and offering support while the family is dealing with MCFD involvement” (respondent no. 11, personal communication, October 17, 2013).
- “The supports look different for every family and often everyone does not use the supports. It is dependent on what the families’ need/want... the expectation is that if you are called on to support a family you will step in and do that. If some are not comfortable with that they we will support them as well...” (respondent no. 13, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Limitations

While the *Kindergarten Transition II: A Scan of Existing Supportive Programs for Aboriginal Children and Families in British Columbia* project provided some excellent information about kindergarten transition activities that currently exist for Aboriginal children, their families and educators (Kindergarten teachers and Early Childhood Educators) there were a number of limitations to both the breadth and the depth of the data collected and its analysis. For example, the funding was not sufficient to allow an in-depth and comprehensive study that would examine current and available programs, services and activities and the strengths and challenges of each. Because of this, it was the intention of the investigators to access evaluations of the various programs and synthesize that information. However, program evaluations were few in number and where they did exist they were informal and generally not publicly available. Voluntary evaluative comments made by individuals in the process of the interview were included in the comments above. Additionally, in some cases, ideas about what was working well and/or the challenges that program leaders were experiencing were implicit in their comments. Therefore, despite the lack of formal evaluation, the information collected is helpful to inform Tillicum Lelum's future project plans.

Summary of Project Learnings

While the project interviews did not include a question about perceived strengths and challenges related to the transition activities undertaken by the various agencies and organizations, the descriptive comments offered by the informants suggested some elements key to successful programs. As well, some challenges were evident. The data thus suggested some important learnings that 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-centred 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 ECEs and teachers.
- Formalizing the above 'learnings' in program/school policy.

Conclusion

Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre and their partners, School District 68 and Vancouver Island University (as well as a host of supportive agencies and organizations) are in the process of developing a transition to kindergarten

program called *Qeq College*. The program is a collaborative venture with a purpose of developing and facilitating culturally relevant and responsive supports to children and family to assist them as they transition from early childhood settings into the school system. Qeq College is expected to begin in the spring of 2014 with an on-site program, using kindergarten classrooms, designed for Aboriginal children and families planned for the summer, 2014. As well, continuing support will be provided throughout the school year (2014-2015). The program will include training for educators and administrators to assist them with program implementation.

As evidenced in the project 'learnings', all programs involved in the research identified relationship building, collaboration, culture and language as crucial in supporting the transition of Aboriginal children to kindergarten. In every interview, relationship building with children, families, and in some cases, primary school staff was listed as a key objective. ECE staff described going over and above to connect with kindergarten teachers in order to support the transition for children. Collaboration between program staff and school staff was expressed as key to increase opportunities for schools to be 'ready' for children. However, comments suggested that collaboration is a challenge when it is not a formalized part of school district policy. Cultural practices such as ceremonies, singing and dancing, and elder participation are also emphasized as contributing to the strengthening of cultural identity. Informants indicated that these activities must be part of the child's experience as he/she transitions into elementary school.

When the UAKN, Transitions II project was first initiated, it was believed there would be some examples of programs and/or services that built reciprocal connections and relationships between early childhood settings and kindergarten programs. It appears these connections remain informal and somewhat limited. However, the programs established appear to be responsive to the needs of the children, families, and educators and consistent with the individual communities and their available resources.

Recommendations related to further development of Tillicum Lelum's AECD program/service delivery include:

- 1) Creating and implementing reciprocal policy between the early childhood and school programs that outline mutual expectations related to:
 - Relationship building and communication across early childhood programs, School District, and other related professionals, programs, and support services;
 - 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.
- 2) Formal documentation of the strengths and challenges of the transition services and supports could strengthen the quality of existing services. For example, improving documentation could assist programs to ensure that future program and service development would meet (and improve capacity to meet) the needs of the children and families served. The information collected in this scan provides an important prompt to Tillicum Lelum and their partners to ensure:
- Regular evaluation of all programs and services offered to children and their families to identify what is working (what to do more of); what is not working (what to do less of); and what to add to build on and continue to improve programs and services. The evaluation processes could examine a variety of aspects of the programs such as: the comfort and satisfaction of children and parents; the ways in which the program supports cultural identity and pride; holistic child development; and the professional development of teachers, early childhood educators, and other professionals.
 - Assessment of learning processes that include (but are not limited to) informing understanding about holistic child development such as observations of Aboriginal children and families, early childhood educators, and teachers about: child readiness for kindergarten programs; holistic child development (socially, emotionally, spiritually, cognitively, and physically); continued progress in all aspects of child development and health; and ongoing positive family engagement with early childhood programs and kindergarten.

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Appendix A
Overview and Questions

Dear _____,

Vancouver Island University's (VIU) Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) and Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre (Tillicum Lelum) are presently working collaboratively on a small project funded by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN). The project builds on earlier collaborative work undertaken by VIU and Tillicum Lelum to produce a discussion paper, "*The Transition to Kindergarten: A Community Approach to Integrating a Child's Fragmented World*" (Beaton & McDonell; 2013). (This document can be found on-line at <http://www.viu.ca/chairaecd/documents/FINAL-KindergartenTransitionPaper-February2013.pdf>.)

The purpose of this new project is to identify programs in British Columbia (BC) that provide transitional supports to Aboriginal children and their families as they move from early childhood settings to Kindergarten. It is intended that the Project will identify:

Existing partnerships between early childhood settings and kindergarten/primary in selected jurisdictions of BC.

Methods and models utilized to create and maintain supportive transitions for Aboriginal children and their families.

Important aspects of building working relationships across systems and cultures.

Presently Tillicum Lelum and its community partners are in the process of developing an *Aboriginal Supported Transition Program* in Nanaimo, BC. We expect that collecting information about what others are doing in the area of transition supports will inform our own program development. In this way we can better ensure that we meet the needs of our children and families in effective and meaningful ways.

The purpose of this email is to determine the following:

The existence of transition supports in your community for Aboriginal children and their families who are moving from early childhood programs/home environments to kindergarten/primary classroom.

Your willingness to answer a few questions in a telephone interview. The interview is expected to take no more than 10-15 minutes and can be arranged at a time that is convenient for you. Alternatively, information can be exchanged by email.

The questions we have are practical in nature and do not ask you to make evaluative comment about your program or those you know about. For your information, the questions are listed below:

1. What are the key objectives of the program?
2. Can you describe the model used for your program and/or can you provide us with written information about the models, approaches or methods used?
3. Is your model based on any other existing program models?
4. What are the key elements of the program (i.e. main tasks, functions of the program principals)?
5. Who is responsible for the program and what supports are in place to administer the program? (For example, who are the key people involved: ECE's? Kindergarten teachers? Parents? Other Professionals? Is there criteria to guide who participates and/or is involved. For example, do you have specific hiring requirements/qualifications? Is your program inclusive of all families or is the service directed specifically to Aboriginal families.
6. What are the key methods of outreach to families and communities?
7. Is your program regularly evaluated? How often? Are those evaluations available to public/researchers etc.?
8. Do you know of other similar programs for Aboriginal children and families at the pre-school, primary level? (Are you able/willing to provide contact information or websites as applicable)

Any other advice or information you can provide regarding your program or you know about would be much appreciated!

Thank-you in advance for your willingness to review this email and consider our request to chat with us about the important work you are doing with children and families in your region.

Please feel free to let us know by replying to this email whether or not you are willing to talk with us. If we do not hear from you we will follow up with a phone call in the next few days.

If you have any questions about the research we are undertaking or require further information please contact Wendy Beaton or Linda McDonell at the numbers provided below.

Warm regards,

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Appendix B

Recommendations from

Beaton, W. & McDonell, L. (2013). *The Transition into Kindergarten: A Community Approach to Integrating a Child's Fragmented World*. Nanaimo, BC: Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre.

Recommendations related to relationship building and trust:

- Create opportunities for families, ECEs and early childhood programs and services, kindergarten teachers and administrators, managers to collaborate by sharing information, questions and concerns related to the transition of children from one setting to another.
- With stakeholders identified above, identify ways that schools can strengthen their readiness to receive children into kindergarten as well as identify ways that early childhood settings and the communities can support children, families, and schools in this process.

Recommendations related to information sharing:

- Create opportunities for ECEs and teachers to participate in shared workshops and professional activities to increase understanding across the two settings.
- Bring teachers and ECEs and families together to collaboratively determine both what information can and should be shared across the settings and appropriate processes for exchanging information.
- Establish protocols and procedures for sharing information.

Recommendations related to family and community support:

- Create environments that welcome families both prior to school starting and throughout the school year to support meaningful parent/family involvement. Parents/families can provide valuable information about their child's experience with the transition to school and can contribute to the teacher's understandings about the child's abilities and behaviours.
- Create connections across the broader ECD community and schools to ensure outreach to children and families is maximized—in particular those children and families who may be at greater risk for vulnerabilities.

Recommendations related to culture and language:

- Create opportunities for ECEs and teachers to participate in shared and individualized professional development activities that increase awareness about history of First Nations people in Canada and the devastating effects of colonization.
- Create opportunities for ECEs and teachers to participate in shared and individualized professional development opportunities that increase knowledge about the importance of First language experiences; and family, community and cultural teachings and traditional practices. Workshops and

other activities can also build knowledge and skill to support Aboriginal parent, family engagement in these activities.

- Create opportunities for Elders and other respected community members to share their language and traditional knowledge with children and adults in the classroom.
- Collaborate with family and community to provide locally relevant culture and language experiences in early childhood and kindergarten environments.
- Identify available community resources to support learning experiences related to Aboriginal culture and language.

Recommendations related to alignment in curriculum and teaching strategies:

- Create joint professional development opportunities for ECEs and teachers at which information can be shared about professional and pedagogical approaches to child development, inclusive practice, developing and implementing curriculum and related activities, and working with families.
- Create professional development opportunities to strengthen cultural relevance of curriculum content, and the cultural knowledge, sensitivity and competency of practitioners and professionals.

Recommendations related to school culture:

- Create joint opportunities for families, ECEs, and teachers to come together to discuss transition processes and related issues; identify what is working and isn't in their region; and make recommendations toward developing informed and effective transitions from early childhood to kindergarten.

Recommendations related to HUB models:

- Participate in and support HUB models of service and program delivery.
- Commit to relationship building and information sharing across the ECD and kindergarten/ primary systems.