Support for Student Transition

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The purpose of this research was to study middle to high school student transitions from First Nations to provincial schools, and ongoing supports for students. This research included three First Nation participants, 18 years of age or older, who have made a transition from a First Nation school to a provincial high school.

Helping young adolescents make a successful transition into high school is not a new concern for middle level educators. In fact, one of the fundamental functions of the initial level education movement was to articulate young adolescents’ transition into high school (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).

Today, many students have a difficult time making the transition into high school. Approximately six years ago, a colleague and I, along with a receiving school division, pursued improving the existing transition process for First Nations students. Too many times the First Nations high school students fell behind in their classes, and dropped out around September, October or May. For whatever reason students had for dropping out or falling behind, they did not graduate on time or, as has become more common practice, students are graduating high school with a mature twelve diploma.

Students entering high school likely don’t know what to expect when the time is coming, and the parents may not know what to expect if they have no other children in high school. In addition to academic differences, there also exists the impacts of moving from one’s First Nations community and family supports, to often a home placement in an unknown community in which the provincial school exists.

Providing more effective transitions programs that offer opportunities for question and answer sessions for students and parents may be a starting point prior to transition. Both the parents and student should be given knowledge on the students’ choices ad how those choices will affect future educational decisions.

This study used the qualitative approach. I conducted face-to-face interviews with 3 First Nation participants who transitioned from a First Nation to a provincial school. Interviews lasted about 30 minutes and were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed. Data from the method used were analysed using material analysis. The transcripts of the interviews were coded for themes and grouped in patterns.

Implications for practice that developed out of the research will be discussed.