

MAR Proposal

Barriers and Issues for Students Transitioning from Rural to Urban Schools

Caroline Chupa

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YORKVILLE
UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education, Yorkville University

Fredericton, New Brunswick

Diane Burt

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Diane Burt

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Abstract

Students experience a range of barriers and issues which can affect academic success when they transition between rural and urban school environments. This is a research proposal for a major academic report in which I intend to identify and critique literature on the experiences of students transitioning between rural and urban schools. Qualitative methodology in the form of reflexive inquiry will be used to broaden and strengthen the inquiry of past research and academic findings. The preliminary literature review suggests that investigating transition approaches, if well designed and implemented, can assist in supporting students moving between schools to create a positive experience that supports academic success. The results from the literature further suggests that research on the importance of communication and relationships within the school community and the classroom could be worthwhile, as these factors might influence academic success and high school completion rates. For my capstone research project, I propose to explore if encouraging educators to reflect and become reflexive in their practice working with transitioning students is an effective strategy for success.

Key Words: transitioning students, communication, educators, qualitative method, academic success, reflexive, reflect, rural, urban, barriers

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Barriers and Issues for Students Transitioning from Rural to Urban Schools

In my role as classroom educator, I have discovered a personal and academic interest in students who transition from a rural classroom environment and experience a variety of barriers and issues which create challenges to academic success and completion. The identification of barriers and issues, as voiced by students and analyzed in a variety of previously conducted research projects and reports, is an important steppingstone towards the design and implementation of changes educators can make in the classroom and school community. Academic success experienced by transitioning students from rural to urban schools is the focus of the major academic report I propose to compose as my capstone project.

In this proposal, I outline a theoretical framework which will align with a critical paradigm that encompasses my epistemology and ontology. This will identify my position as researcher as I incorporate qualitative aspects of research into a reflexive inquiry approach to my research. I intend to use reflexive inquiry and narrative methods to augment a comprehensive literature review. These methods suit my personality and personal approach to academic research.

Description of Inquiry

I propose to research and explore the barriers and issues students face in their transition from rural to urban schools through a review of academic literature. I will address the question of how cultural differences and perspectives of urban teachers and students affect rural transitioning students' academic achievement. This leads to the question of the effect cultural and rural experience have on transitioning student attendance in the school community both in the classroom and in available extra curricular activities. It is important for me to include issues surrounding lower academic achievement and low graduation rates. In a review of theory and

research, I propose to uncover a foundational need for change in our current educational system in Canada in our approach to educating our rural students as they transition to urban schools.

In my role as educator, I have observed students who transition from rural school environments to urban school environments. Many struggles and hurdles transitioning students experience directly affect their academic achievement and social relationships (Halbert & Kaser, 2015). My passion for education and belief that no child should get left behind has me investigating avenues to improve educational experiences for struggling students. I believe curricula should be available and inclusive to all students delivered in differentiated methods of instruction to engage differentiated methods of learning.

Research Questions

My proposed focus for a major academic report is an inquiry of the barriers and issues students experience when transitioning from rural to urban school environments. These barriers and issues will include unpacking approaches to developing classrooms to engage student learning and embrace differences in learning and experiences of rural students. The impact of barriers and issues to academic success and social adjustments experienced by transitioning students is an important aspect of my focus.

My main research question is: how does the student experience of transitioning from rural to urban schools influence academic success and social adjustment? The following sub questions supplement the main research question:

- What barriers impede academic success for transitioning students from rural to urban schools?
- What issues affect students' attendance and school community social adjustment when they transition from rural to urban school environments?

- What are unique barriers and issues experienced by Indigenous student transitions?
- How can educators effectively support non-Indigenous and Indigenous students academically and socially in their rural to urban school transitions?

Theoretical Framework

I am a critical inquiry researcher drawn to a reflexive inquiry approach. I have selected a reflexive paradigm for my research because of the power issues and barriers that influence the experiences of students transitioning from rural to urban environments (Greaves, Kirby, & Reid, 2017). Students transitioning from rural to urban schools are leaving behind the comforts of their communities and entering a school environment with a hierarchy of student performance and social interactions which differ from their previous school experiences. Larger classes, cultural indifference, and unintentional racism are quite often woven into the fabric of school culture. These issues and barriers need to be unpacked and addressed to engage growth and learning for all stakeholders in education.

My ontology and epistemology align with my positionality as an educational leader who proposes to support the academic success of transitioning students. In my outlook on education, I take on a realistic view that students experience education differently in rural and urban schools. It is important for me to identify that cultural and socio-economic aspects affect student academic and social performance and interaction. My personal background as a cisgender, Metis, middle class, urban teacher will influence my critical lens as a researcher, educator, and lifelong learner. I propose to objectively critique and synthesize selected theory and research articles which reflect student voice and experience of transitioning students. Rural student perspective is aimed to provide educators with education theory necessary to reflect upon and become engaged with working towards creating successful transitions for students from rural to urban schools. I

am looking to discover complex components of transitions for teachers to reflect upon and apply to their educational approaches and practices in the classroom and school environment.

Methodology

I propose to conduct my research through reflexive inquiry. My methodology is aligned with a critical paradigm because barriers and issues experienced by transitioning students need to be addressed to support academic success. I will be critically reflecting on my own practices and experiences in conjunction with theory and research of other practitioners. I will use this information to suggest methods and activities for educators to apply to their practices to bring about important change. Literature and past research by other professionals will provide information to support my inquiry. My identified paradigm connects with my endeavours and my teaching practice. The first step of my research is to carry out a critical literature review.

Methods

I will use a qualitative approach to my literature review and incorporate narrative writing. My narrative will be creative and supported by theory and research quotations and paraphrased discoveries. I will review and critique evidence of barriers and issues transitioning students from rural to urban schools' experience (Tennis, 2008). A literature review and synthesis of important discoveries will provide an organized representation of articles, research documents and publications. A reflexive connection will be made between theory and research with current educational practices to support transitioning students from rural to urban schools in academic success in high school.

Literature Sources to be Searched

There are a variety of academic research sources that are available to support my research questions. I propose to begin with the available search engines and avenues available to me

currently. EBSCO and PRO Quest are two sites of research available through the Yorkville University site. On these sites, I am in the process of discovering many articles and scholarly research papers pertaining to barriers and issues experienced by students who transition between different school environments. In addition to these two sites, I propose to retrieve valuable and supportive articles from Google Scholar and Research Gate. I have selected these sources to search for supporting and relevant based on academic credibility. Information available from these sources is reviewed and accepted by scholars and academic peers.

I will include descriptor words imbedded in my research topic and directly relate them to questions that accompany my research focus when I begin to search resource sites. These words will include rural and urban school environments, student academic success, barriers and issues to academic success. I propose to include relevant educational and academic sources from a variety of countries and provinces that are accessible from these sites. I propose to include more Canadian articles and resources to connect to my research questions. Literature will be limited to published dates of 2014 or newer, with a focus on Grades 10 to 12.

I plan to organize literature electronically on One Note and a personal filing system for printed sources. This will allow me to add comments, share with my supervisor and include my supervisor's comments and thoughts on my selections. This will be supplemented with an ongoing reflection journal.

Limitations

Limitations may accompany the results and conclusions of the included articles. Some of the results may be inconsistent due to identified biases and subjectivity. Some authors in a preliminary review admitted to omitting negative responses to interview questions that did not fit into the scope of the research study. Smaller sample groups in a variety of research studies

provide limited generalizations on important factors. Perspectives in focus groups may not have aligned with populations which did not participate. These limitations denote gaps in existing literature for educators to reflect improving their practice when working with transitioning students. Cultural and educational infrastructure differences propose a challenge with the use of international literature with similar demographics, such as Australia and Kenya. I propose to include more Canadian based research and literature in my report to connect evidence domestically to address my research questions. I need to be aware of implicit bias connected with my positionality. I need to ensure I include articles and views which are inclusive to the variety of social and cultural groups represented in the topic of students transitioning. A time restriction of seven weeks may prove to be a limitation to discovering more current and relevant Canadian resources. Limitations to my proposed report will be discussed with a supervisor throughout the research process.

Methods for Applying Literature Results

I propose to engage in a reflexive inquiry approach to applying literature results. A reflexive approach will enable me to represent questions surrounding student transitions between rural and urban schools throughout Canada (Cunliffe, 2003). I will begin with my philosophical assumptions about student transitions and establish my stance through reflection of theory and provide suggestions on applications to improve educational practices which contribute to student barriers and issues to academic success. I will complement this domain with inquiry logics which are important connections to my research questions. My guideline for research will include establishing an original inquiry question, collecting data by researching relevant literature, reflecting on and applying theory to practice found in most colonial-based learning schools and in my own practice and primary activity. My next steps will be to connect key learning

components discovered in the literature. I will supplement this with suggestions to educators to engage these components in educational practices. I will conclude by identifying the importance of researching students transitioning experiences in Canadian school systems.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics are moral guidelines which address how I will do my research (Greaves et al, 2017, p.53). I need to include relevant data and analysis of existing literature. To be fair and just, I need to ethically report data as presented. I will transparently include my thoughts and reflections consistent with reflexive inquiry. In my reporting, I will cite direct quotations and paraphrased thoughts to support my discoveries in theory and research (Bell & Waters, 2018). By keeping clear and accurate notes on literature reviews, I must ensure I do not plagiarize any words or ideas presented by past scholars and authors. I can avoid excess bias by including literature and ideas which represent a variety of views and positions which may not necessarily align with my own positionality as a middle class, Metis educator. This will allow a presentation of different perspectives on components which affect student transitions. This will demonstrate the respect due to published theory and past research which support thoughts and ideas that work towards suggested changes to educational practices that influence the academic success of transitioning students.

I acknowledge my own positionality in my research as an educator with experience working with non-Indigenous and Indigenous students who have transitioned from rural to urban schools. I have an emotional and professional connection with the struggles and successes surrounding the focus of my research. I am sensitive and respectful to diverse culture, cultural practices and family dynamics of students in rural and urban environments. I recognize my sensitivities and biases which sympathizes with struggling students. I will sort through my biases

and sympathies to provide hypothesis and reflections through an objective lens of an educator. I will exercise bracketing to guide my reflections and critique towards a strong level of objectivity and minimize my own personal bias and opinions.

Preliminary Literature Review

I will include two key areas of focus in my literature review. Rural to urban transitions is the first broad area of inquiry. I will present a review of literature on the barriers and issues students face in a variety of communities, provinces and countries. The second area will be more focussed and will examine literature addressing Indigenous students transitioning from rural to urban schools. I will narrow these two topic areas to include academic achievement, attendance trends and social issues. Strategies, structures and support for educators working with and teaching transitioning Indigenous and other learners will supplement a percentage of the literature review.

Rural to Urban Transitions

There are a variety of authors who have examined components of student transitions. My proposed review of literature begins with barriers and issues which exist for all secondary school students. Ogundokun (2011) presented a variety of factors identified by educators and students in Nigeria, as barriers to student learning outcomes. Three basic elements which were identified to be barriers to achievement and success included learning styles, school environment, and test anxiety.

Hess and Copeland (2001) augmented factors with two very important variables which can attribute to transitioning students' experiences in the USA. They noted that a relationship exists between the stress of transitioning from grade to grade and the coping strategies students incorporate. In similar work with students from Turkey, Keklik and Keklik (2013) acknowledged

the importance of identifying factors that contribute to barriers and issues surrounding transitions which exist in a variety of school environments and from grade to grade. Powers, Bowen and Rose (2005) provided dimensions of individual characteristics which affect desired academic results for students in the USA. Their research included important socio-economic factors which cannot be ignored when educators reflect on their practice of working with, and supporting, transitioning students. This lends to the critical reflection of power issues which surround education and student academic success. Langenkamp (2009) focussed on the effects that the power of social relationships has on student academic achievement. This author included socio-economic and curricula factors related to student transitioning that are related to the academic pathways' students engage in their high school, for example, university entry or trades oriented programming.

McCracken and Barcinas (1991) provided differences in characteristics students experience in rural and urban school environments. They provide differences in students' characteristics experienced in rural and urban school environments. Their study provides a background idea of differences which exist in rural and urban schools with reference to curricula approach and socio-economic factors.

Indigenous Inquiry

Literature exists to address and disintegrate barriers and issues experienced by transitioning students. Brenner (2011) aimed to inform educators of interventions and supports for transitioning students. This author defined barriers and issues consistent with previous literature. The results are taken further to suggest activities and practices aimed to lessen the existing gaps in academic achievement and high school completion. Hussain, Domingue, LaFromboise, and Ruedas-Garcia (2018) researched the importance of a sense of belonging for

students who transition from rural to urban school environments. They encompassed a world-wide theoretical perspective when noting the importance of considering the affect of multidimensional factors as opposed to a sum of identified factors which create barriers to academic and social success. Their focus narrows down to culturally specific experiences of Native Americans. The results from this study aim to at noting risk behaviours associated with transitioning students experience in high school. This is consistent with a study by Cooper, Macdonald, Gringart, Ngarritjan Kessariss, and Gray (2018) in Australia.

Cooper et al.'s (2018) work reinforces the importance of examining barriers experienced by Indigenous secondary school students transitioning from rural to urban schools. The focus is on student experiences regarding the impact of education engagement, as well as the educator perspective of the boarding experience, to develop pathways to employment and post secondary education. A sense of belonging and inclusivity were amongst many barriers and issues Indigenous students experienced in their transition. An acknowledgement of these barriers and issues in Australia connect to significant factors which impede academic achievement across the world. Whitley (2014) provided a Canadian perspective of the gaps which exist for Indigenous students transitioning from rural to urban school environments, noting the importance of considering a bioecological model which “proposes that a child’s development is influenced by the dynamic, reciprocal relationships that exist in the environments in which he or she is situated” (Whitley, 2014, p. 2).

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (2010) identified and addressed barriers and issues Indigenous students in Canada have experienced and lends a voice to student experience. Educators can use these factors that affect student transitions to develop bridging programs which employ strategies and approaches to learning which align with cultural and geographic

diversity (Hamel, 2017). Benson (2009) provides examples of specific transition activities to address barriers and issues. His results present a positive perspective to educator support and intervention in a proactive school district. These two literature reviews provide support to educators in their practice of working with the barriers and issues transitioning students experience that affect their academic achievement.

Research Intent

In this proposed Major Academic Report (MAR), I aim to document and describe barriers and issues students experience as they transition from rural to urban schools. My literature review should expand my understanding of the scholarship and research that informs current and new approaches to transitions for students. The MAR will encourage educators to reflect on their current practices and thereby enhance innovation and support for learners who experience barriers and issues in transitions. An investigation into avenues and methods of communications between educators and students is intended to uncover and suggest improved teaching practices. I hope that the recommendations that will emerge from the review and critique of the literature will encourage future inquiry into improved communication and teaching practices that transform academic success experienced by students who transition from rural to urban schools. The goal is for my recommendations to complement current inquiry into improving transitions for Indigenous learners through collaborative inquiry and educators' practice in British Columbia and other provinces across Canada (McGregor, 2019).

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Appendix A: Proposed Timeline

Dates	Time Frame - Task Item
May 6-12	<p>Revise proposal based on previous feedback.</p> <p>Submit draft proposal to supervisor.</p> <p>Discuss/clarify topic, research problem and research question with supervisor (perhaps a phone call or Omni room discussion).</p>
May 12 – 31	<p>Review proposal with supervisor (Diane Burt).</p> <p>Edit and finalize proposal based on supervisor feedback.</p> <p>Submit revised proposal to supervisor.</p> <p>Submit proposal to Capstone Office.</p> <p>Schedule an Omni room discussion with supervising professor (Diane)</p> <p>Possible weekly connection with Diane through email, if possible</p>
June 1– June 7	<p>Conduct initial literature review based on elements of research question.</p> <p>Write and submit introduction, background, problem and significance of study sections.</p>
June 8- June29	<p>Edit first sections based on feedback from supervisor.</p> <p>Sort and categorize literature review material.</p> <p>Establish categories for further analysis.</p> <p>Analyze against the research question.</p> <p>Write and submit the theoretical framework, methodology, methods, researcher's role & limitations, literature review, and abstract sections to supervisor.</p>
June 30-July 7	<p>Edit literature review based on feedback from supervisor.</p> <p>Analyze and discuss the research findings.</p> <p>Write and submit findings and conclusion sections.</p>
July 8-12	<p>Edit final sections based on feedback from supervisor.</p> <p>Submit final revised version to supervisor and make final edits and improvements.</p> <p>Submit Major Academic Report to Capstone Office.</p>