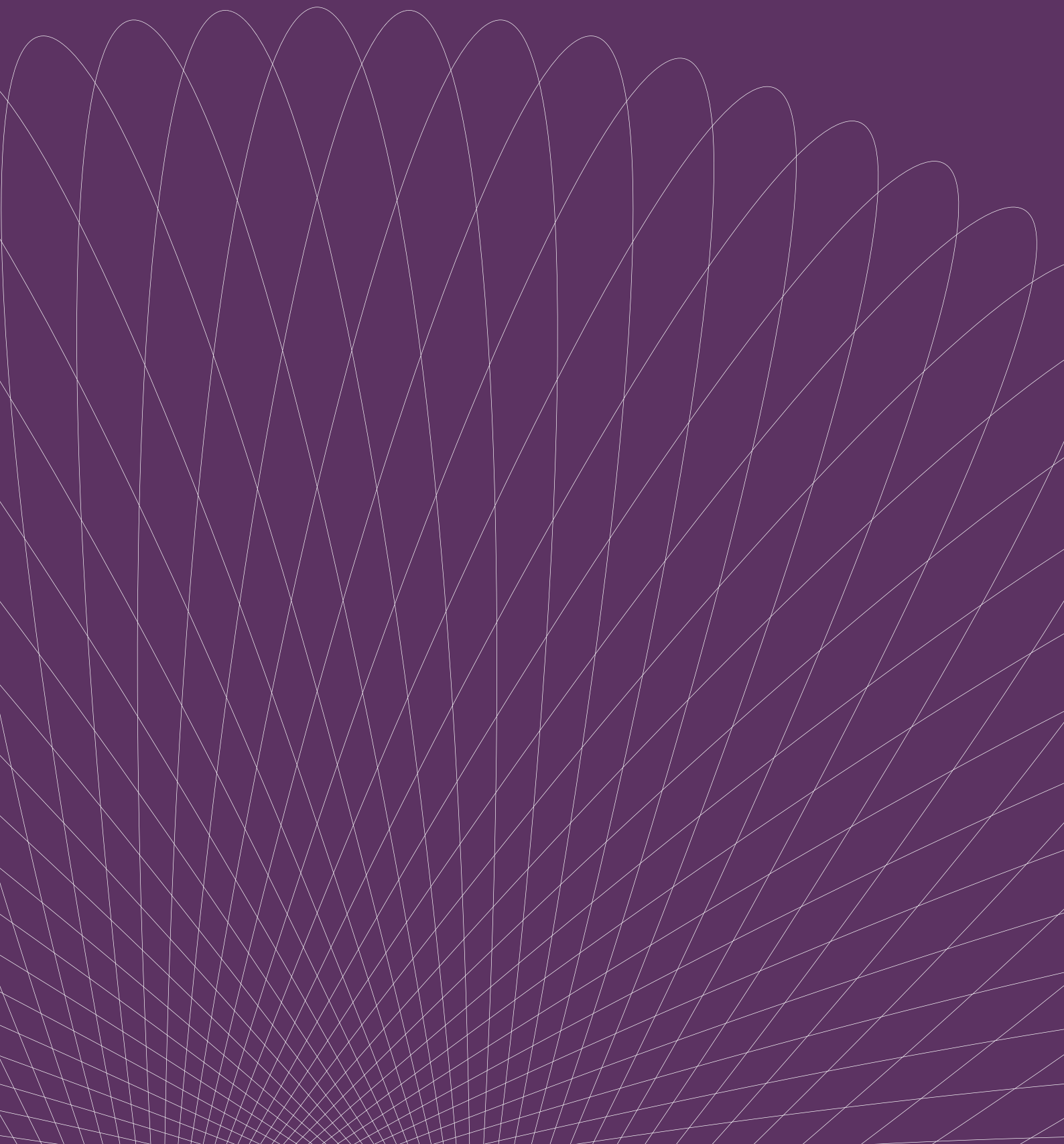
CENTRE FOR AUTISM

MIDDLETOWN

Transitions Volume 2

Research Bulletin Issue No. 14

Supporting the promotion of excellence throughout Northern Ireland and Ireland in the education of children and young people with autism.



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Introduction

This is the fourteenth Research Bulletin produced by Middletown Centre for Autism. The aim of the Centre's Research Bulletins is to provide accessible summaries of relevant peer-reviewed research articles and reviews of literature. The current Research Bulletin contains ten articles related to transitions to help support children and young people with autism. Articles are sourced from a range of peer-reviewed journals from the period 2010 to 2014.

The Bulletin commences with an interview with Damian Milton, MA, PGCert, BA (Hons), Dip (conv), PGCE, Mifl, MBPsS.

Damian is currently studying for a doctorate with the Autism Centre for Educational Research at the University of Birmingham. He is a member of the steering group for this department, a member of the programme board for the Autism Education Trust, and a member of the scientific and advisory committee for Research Autism. Damian has also recently started work for the National Autistic Society as a consultant for their 'Ask Autism' project. Damian holds a number of academic qualifications and a number of years' experience as a lecturer in both FE and HE. Damian's interest in autism began when his son was diagnosed in 2005 with autism at the age of two. Damian was also diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome in 2009 at the age of thirty-six.

Please note that the views represented in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of Middletown Centre for Autism. Reviewers have, where possible, used the original language of the article, which may differ from UK and Ireland usage and the usage of a range of terminologies for autism.

1. As a parent of a child with autism, how could you, your child and the school have been better prepared for his transition to school?

Due to my son's extremely unusual disposition and perception of the world, he seems to have little conceptualisation of future events. On top of this, whatever preparation one has about an upcoming event, until it happens, one can never be sure how one will feel about it. For my son, little could have prepared him for the transition to school, other than making the school environment as friendly to his needs as possible upon arrival.

For me, the biggest mistake that was made in my son's early childhood, was the attitude of health and nursery practitioners, that one had to target certain behaviours and developmental goals in order to capture a fabled 'window of opportunity' for my son's development, and how this put pressure on our family. The expectation to train a child to meet developmental 'milestones' does little to help prepare an autistic child for school, or practitioners and the wider public to gain a better understanding of an autistic disposition.

As the father, much of the time I was treated by practitioners as if I was invisible. Again, this was a major mistake, as I did not develop 'normally' either, and at the time was coming to terms with the possibility that I was also autistic. What both I and the practitioners working with my son at the time could have done with, would have been access to training and training materials that had been designed and delivered by autistic people themselves.

2. As an individual on the autism spectrum, what advice and information do you feel educators need to know when a child with autism is transitioning into their class or school?

Firstly, not to see an autistic person as a set of deficits and impairments, as if they are a broken version of a non-autistic person, and one who needs remediating to act less autistic. One has to work with the autistic person and not against their autism, as if it were something separable to who they are.

3. As you are developing the Ask Autism courses, is it through clearer understanding of autism that educators may be equipped to manage difficulties experienced by children or do we need to provide transition specific training?

To some extent yes, but gaining an understanding of autism in a generalised sense, even when written from a range of insider perspectives, is only the beginning. What is key to supporting the education of any child (or other public services) is a truly person-centred reflective approach. By this, I do not mean imposing one's own ideas of what is good for a person either, but mutually working to increase the autonomy of those one is working with.

Specific training on issues that can arise due to various kinds of transitions can be helpful, yet I would say it would require more autistic input than is often currently the case. Again, due to the diversity of dispositions and needs of those on the spectrum, there is no one-size-fits-all model that one can apply for such circumstances, and training needs to reflect this diversity. It would also be the case that practitioners would need good initial training, before looking into more specific issues such as this one.

4. How do you feel about autism awareness being part of the core Teacher Training Curriculum?

This certainly needs to be the case, although ideally, I would suggest that it be designed and delivered by experienced autistic trainers and writers. When I did a PGCE myself some years ago, I received half a day's training on disability in the classroom. This included a leaflet about Asperger's and Autism, and yet I, did not find the way it was presented was applicable to myself.

5. How can we better support young people as they transition from school into the adult world, whether that is in education or the workforce?

This is a very important question for a number of reasons. Many parents tell tales of woe regarding transition from child to adult services, and like with any major transition, communications between staff handing over responsibilities is vital. All too often simple information is not passed on from one practitioner to the next, partly due to the depersonalised ways in which information is collated. More mutual participation with the autistic person and their family is needed than is all too often the case.

For some autistic people the expectation/ideal of joining the workforce is an unrealistic and, could even be considered to be an, exploitative one at times. Having said that, the majority will be seeking employment in some form, and all now have a right to a continuing education. For people less likely to find meaningful and productive paid work, the focus should not be on 'independence' as it is commonly conceived of in my view, but 'autonomy'. Respecting autonomy, also respects and values 'interdependent' relationships.

For those seeking work, the worst advice is that which is most commonly given. In other words, that one has to imitate someone who is not autistic and learn how to do things one may struggle or find impossible to perform in order to succeed

and gain employment. As a 'universal', this is not truthful, and causes a form of disempowerment, as an autistic person may internalise these 'rules' and believe themselves incapable of employment by not matching up to these ideals.

One way autistic people actually have found work is by being able to prove to people what they are capable of and how much value they can add to an organisation. Thus, despite the lack of pay, work placements where possible can be advantageous. Also, what the autistic academic Dr. Stephen Shore would call the 'portfolio approach', demonstrating to employers more tangible examples of work accomplished in the past.

Finding a niche in the adult world does not come from trying to become something one is not. This can be a significant factor in mental ill-health. Yet, finding one's own path into this world can be daunting and extremely difficult. Often this leads to young adulthood being a highly problematic time for many on the autism spectrum.

I have recently started a project with London South Bank University looking into both student and access to work mentoring for young adults on the autism spectrum. This is highly important research, as it also came from autistic young adults through previous research into the area. It is my view, that the nuanced understandings needed to help people succeed may well need the input of autistic mentors, at least as part of a mentoring team. The autistic presenter Diederick Wieve suggests one of the current issues is the lack of autistic adult role-models available to autistic children to help them to imagine possible futures..

6. From your experience, is student- centred planning a reality or rhetoric?

In some instances good practice in this area makes all the difference to a student. All too often though, education is anything but student-centred!

7. Is a poorly managed transition plan better than no transition plan?

Probably not.

8. In your opinion, why do you feel transitioning is a difficult process for children and young people with a diagnosis of autism?

A difficult question to be succinct about, yet the main issue with transitions, is the lack of predictability and control over the situation. To empower someone takes understanding, which can take a lot of effort and practice. Role-playing scenarios can be useful for some, but for me personally are often useless. Having an outlook on life which tends to be against generalising in some circumstances can be beneficial, yet can be highly stressful in times of unpredictable change.

Some autistic people can appear very 'rigid', yet this is commonly a reaction to stress and uncertainty. As I have grown older, I have learnt many mundane routines to help me with everyday life, which gives me freedom to accept and explore the uncertainties and more abstract ways of perceiving the world, thus saving my attention and energy for things that are of more interest to me.

Imposed transitions and change can be all the more difficult. If however, one feels that one owns the change, or at least has been involved in the decision-making process, this can often help. Although that said, one can also be overwhelmed by an array of choices (if all lead to unpredictable consequences). So, for understanding, information and experience are key, not imitation.

9. What strategies or resources do you feel are of benefit to children and young people with autism within the school and home environment to assist in transitioning?

Access to the work of autistic writers, knowledge that autistic adults exist, and better still, talks from autistic adults would be of benefit.

Effort from those around the autistic person in helping to give information in a clear and understandable way for that individual, so that the autistic person can make informed choices and predict what is being proposed.

To build trust and rapport through an honest relationship and to not break that trust, as once it is broken, it can be very hard to fix.

It should be remembered that many autistic people like to explore and observe. If change is coming from the autistic person themselves, this is often less stressful. What is stressful, is when such attempts are blocked, thus once again, one loses control and predictability.

To support transitions, resources and training can only help a practitioner to a small degree. What is primarily needed is immense effort to build understanding across the divide created by the 'double empathy problem'. It should be remembered though, that this kind of effort is required of autistic people every day, and so to reciprocate that effort may seem difficult, but...

Welcome to my world!

Anxiety Levels in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Making the Transition from Primary to Secondary School

Background

Due to the difficulties encountered by those with autism, heightened anxiety levels has been recognised as a clinical feature, with a perceived link, from previous research from as early as Kanner (1943), between the individual's difficulties with managing change, in this instance the transition from Primary to Secondary School, and his/her insistence on consistency and levels of stress. This anxiety has been expressed in stereotypical routines and the ritualistic behaviour with researchers questioning if these are true expressions of anxiety or simply traits of pervasive developmental disorder.

Research Aims

The research set three questions regarding how the self-reported anxiety levels of a sample of students with ASD:

- Compare with those of the standardised sample prior to the transfer to secondary school
- Compare with those of the standardised sample following the transfer to secondary school
- Prior to transfer to secondary school compare with the same students following transfer with a standardised sample.

Research Method

This study formed part of a wider investigation, which comprised all students with an ASD diagnosis in Scotland. A sampling framework was utilised to select the relevant participants, with the essential criteria being, all must have a diagnosis of ASD, be in their final year of mainstream primary education and be transferring to a mainstream secondary school. From this, eight male students between the ages of 11:3 and 12:4 years were selected. The Spence Children's Anxiety Scale, incorporating 26 items in the areas of panic attack and agoraphobia (PAA), separation anxiety (SA), physical injury (PI) and obsessive compulsive (OC) was administered just prior to the transfer and six months after the students had transferred to secondary school through two questionnaires using a four-point scale response of never, sometimes, often and always.

Research Findings

The students reported significantly higher levels of anxiety prior to the transition, which may be indicative of not being sufficiently prepared, not knowing what to expect, or not knowing where to access support. This could result in the student perceiving difficulties, as after six months, there was a decrease in reported anxiety across three out of the four designated areas. However, it must also be noted that the students' results were higher than their typically developing peers. It could also be argued that self-reported anxiety levels decrease with age and therefore the results stem from holistic development and maturation. The authors feel that their sample size and reliance on one form of data collection hampered the generalisation of their findings, stating that there are individual differences in anxiety levels, as there are individual differences in the students, their circumstances, previous experiences and family support. They call upon others to develop the research into this area and other anxiety-provoking situations for children and young people with autism.

Implications for Practice

(by the authors)

- Students with ASD display a range of behaviours indicating anxiety both prior to and after transition from primary to secondary education.
- Teachers and education professionals need to be aware of individual variability in anxiety and responses to transitioning to a new school, all children are individuals.
- Educators must be aware that students' behaviour may appear different from their peers for much longer than the recognised settling- in time span.
- The area of transition from primary to secondary school, being an anxious time for students with autism, must be more thoroughly researched if we are to allow students the opportunity to achieve.

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Anxiety Levels in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Making the Transition from Primary to Secondary School

- Strategies may need to be employed to support the students' transition including induction days, orientation visits, familiarity with timetables, maps of the school, meeting school staff and other pupils and a buddy system, relaxation techniques while also looking at ways of including and providing support for families, with the door open to the use of cognitive psychotherapy techniques.

FULL REFERENCE
Hannah, E. F. and Topping, K. J. (2012) Anxiety Levels in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Making the Transition from Primary to Secondary School. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, pp 198 -209*

Parental Perspectives of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Transitioning From Primary to Secondary School in the United Kingdom

BACKGROUND

As part of the Special Education Needs and Disability Act, 2001, students with special educational needs may be placed in mainstream/ general education classes as far as their specific skills allow. To facilitate this, schools are tasked to provide an inclusive setting which provides effective learning opportunities for all pupils.

RESEARCH AIMS

This exploratory research study explored the issues and concerns of parents of children with autism as they transferred from mainstream primary (ages 5 – 11 years) to mainstream secondary schools (ages 11 – 16).

- Considering the inclusion policy (Special Education Needs and Disability Act, 2001), this research also investigated whether any concerns raised by the parents were recognised and what key factors led to a successful transfer experience for the child.

RESEARCH METHOD

A convenience sample of 15 parents (14 mothers; 1 father) of children aged 11 – 14 years diagnosed with autism attending main stream school took part in this study. The parents were divided into two groups:

A pre-transition group consisting of nine parents of children aged 11 – 12 years who were about to transition from primary to secondary education facilities
A post-transition group of six parents of children aged 12 – 14 years who had been attending mainstream secondary school for a minimum of 1 academic year.

Each group of parents (pre – transition and post- transition) took part in a two-hour semi structured focus group interview session at Nottingham Trent University at the end of the school year.
The pre- transition group of parents were also invited to complete in-depth interviews at three time points: before the children transitioned to secondary school; eight weeks after the children transitioned to secondary school; and after the first academic year following transition. Each interview was conducted in the parental homes.
To analyse all the information transcribed from the focus groups and interviews, the researchers counted the number of negative and positive statements made by the parents. The researchers also identified similar themes and issues discussed by parents.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Regarding pre – transition into mainstream secondary education the majority of statements made by the parents during focus groups were negative. Parents anticipated that the transition process would be traumatic for both their children and their family as a whole. Good primary school experiences tended to generate cautious optimism, whereas poor experiences generated hopeful responses from some parents, with other parents reporting that the experience could be equally poor or worse because "no one understands".

The parents felt support from their Local Authority was inadequate due to poor communication between the school and home. Parents also reported that for children without a special education needs statement, additional resources and support mechanisms were not always easy to access which impacted on ease of transition between schools.

All the parents reported that they felt there was a lack of understanding of autism in schools. Likewise the parents noted that it was crucial for schools to gain, or show willingness to gain, knowledge and expertise in autism and to forge links with the parents during the transition period.

Particular issues the parents felt the school should be made aware of to improve the transition period included:

- The specific sensory needs of each child which are vital for maximising a child's learning potential
- Understanding that every child and their needs are individual
- Acknowledging that the majority of children with autism think literally and find it difficult to understand the concept of homework (schoolwork that is completed at home)
- The need for continuity of care and strategies i.e. the support strategy should be implemented in every class the child attends. One parent reported that the high turnover of teachers and environments across the school day caused extreme stress anxiety for the child.
- The importance of providing peer support networks to

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Parental Perspectives of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Transitioning From Primary to Secondary School in the United Kingdom

facilitate friendships and reduce episodes of bullying or isolation. Children with autism often find social situations difficult and therefore have trouble making and keeping friends. The literature shows that social skill difficulties are less acceptable among girls. One parent disclosed that her daughter was experiencing increasingly frequent and severe forms of bullying the older she got.

- The importance of structure, one parent noted that her son preferred secondary education because it was more structured and less playful.
- Understanding the impact of the school day on home life. Some children are described as 'behaving appropriately' at school, but exhibit behaviours that challenge at home (or vice versa) which may be due to over stimulation.

Implications for Practice

(by the authors)

- Schools should work with parents and take on board their expertise regarding their child.
- Communication between schools and parents is essential. Regular opportunities for two way communication should be arranged prior to, during and following transition
- School staff should seek further training if applicable to support the needs of their students.
- Schools should facilitate continuity of care for their students with autism, by educating all staff members regarding specific learning, communication, sensory, behaviour needs.
- To ease transition and promote inclusion, schools should facilitate peer support opportunities for all students

FULL REFERENCE

Dillon, G. and Underwood, J. (2012). Parental Perspectives of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Transitioning from Primary to Secondary School in the United Kingdom. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities. 27 (2) p111 – 121.*

Comparing pictorial and video modeling activity schedules during transitions for students with autism spectrum disorders

BACKGROUND

A plethora of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of using visual supports with children and young people with autism. More specifically, pictorial activity schedules which combine photographs, images or drawings in a sequential format have been noted as a promising strategy to assist children with autism during transitions. Current literature also suggests that video modelling as a priming technique is another effective strategy which promotes more successful transitions for children and young people with autism. These strategies have yet to be compared in terms of their relative effectiveness.

RESEARCH AIM

The aim of the current research was to examine the differential effects of static-pictures schedules and video modelling schedules for adolescents with autism during transitions.

RESEARCH METHOD

- Four adolescents with a diagnosis of autism participated in the study. Each student had an identified IEP (Individual Education Plan) objective relating to improving social-behaviour skills. Two experienced special education teachers implemented the research conditions in their respective middle schools.
- Digital static pictures of students engaging in five activities were taken and displayed horizontally in the order of activity occurrence.
- Video clips were taken which showed students engaged in five activities and transitioning independently between tasks. The student and teacher role-played transitioning to videotape each student's performance. • Any inappropriate behaviours were edited out of the video clip.
- An alternating treatments design was used and event recording was employed to measure performance in both baseline and alternating treatments and final intervention phases.
- An independent transition was defined as physically moving from task-to-task within five seconds of a teacher request and without performing targeted inappropriate behaviours. Students participated in 10 transitions daily, 5 using static pictures, 5 using video-modelling. When a student was observed transitioning incorrectly, teachers employed a least-to most prompt hierarchy to encourage correct responding.
- Following the alternating treatments phase, the schedule (i.e. static pictures or video modelling) in which each student met pre-specified criteria was replicated across all sessions. Where both schedules were equally effective, then student and teacher preferences were used to determine which schedule to replicate.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of the current investigation support previous research suggesting that static-picture schedules and video-modelling schedules are an effective support during transitions for young people with autism. Furthermore, results provide preliminary information about how the two visual supports compare. During baseline, as a group students performed 17 (8.5%) independent transitions. When using the static-pictures schedule, students performed 118 (69%) independent transitions. When using the video-modelling schedule, students performed 124 (73%) transitions independently. Three students reached the pre-specified criteria using the static-picture schedule whilst two reached criteria using the video-modelling schedule (one student reached criteria using both types of schedules).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the author)

- Visual schedules which are made up of static pictures or video-modelling clips are an effective antecedent intervention to improve transitioning in young people with autism.
- Data from the current investigation demonstrate that preferences for instructional strategies vary between students. The heterogeneity of these preferences should bring into focus the need for educators to demonstrate flexibility and to adopt research-based practices to address individual challenges for children and young people with autism.
- Previous researchers suggested that static picture schedules and video modelling were similar in their

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Comparing pictorial and video modeling activity schedules during transitions for students with autism spectrum disorders

effectiveness when teaching children with moderate disabilities. The current author identified students with moderate disabilities and attentional problems benefited from the stationary status of relevant features and the absence of motor distractions of the static-picture schedule compared with video modelling.

FULL REFERENCE

Cihak, D.F. (2011). Comparing Pictorial and Video Modeling Activity Schedules During Transitions for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5, p. 433-441.*

Involvement in Transition Planning Meeting Among High School Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

RESEARCH AIM

The authors aimed to ascertain which variables relating to demographics, student characteristics, educational experiences and parental involvement are related to differences in student involvement in transition planning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This was a longitudinal study using data from more than 11,000 transition aged youth receiving special education services. Multiple surveys were used to measure:

- Parental responses.
- School characteristics.
- School programme.
- Teacher responses.
- Student academic performance.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overall, participation was low. 62.5% of students either did not attend transition planning meetings or were present but participated very little. Nevertheless, the more frequently students discussed their plans after high school with a parent, the more likely students were to be involved in transition planning meetings.

Higher socio-economic status, higher functional skills, more social skills, being of older age and having parents with higher expectations of post primary placement determined that individuals were more likely to be active participants in their transition planning. Four variables were identified as effecting student attendance: having higher expressive communication skills, spending a greater percentage of time in inclusive settings, lower parental involvement in school and having more frequent discussions about post-school plans at home. Five variables were identified as effecting student participation: being of Caucasian ethnicity, being older, having higher self-advocacy skills, spending a greater amount of time in a more inclusive education setting and engaging in more frequent discussions at home about post-school plans.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- Participation in transition planning is an authentic way for students to learn and practice self-determination skills.
- Attendance at a transition planning meeting does not necessarily mean that the student is an active participant.
- As transition planning places higher demands on communication and social skills, professionals should aim to make these meetings as accessible as possible for students with autism.
- Parents should be supported and encouraged by professionals to have conversations about post-school plans with their child. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the researchers propose the possibility that the overly involved parents of children with disabilities may inhibit their child's development of self-advocacy skills by interjecting in situations in ways that restricts their child's engagement.
- Professionals should ensure that lower functioning students are afforded the opportunities and supports needed to attend and participate in their own transition planning meetings.
- Students may benefit from technology that can support and enhance their involvement in transition planning meeting. For example, students might wish to record video footage of their interests that could be played during a meeting, or they could lead their own meeting by using PowerPoint.
- In developing transition related instructional materials, parallel materials should be provided to parents in order to increase communication between home and school and also to prompt discussion of post-school plans between parents and children.

FULL REFERENCE

M.M. Griffin; J. Lounds-Taylor; R.C. Urbano and R.M. Hodapp (2013). *Involvement in Transition Planning Meeting Among High School Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Journal of Special Education, 47, p. 256-264.*

Students with Autism in Regular Classes: A Long-term Follow-up Study of a Satellite Class Transition Model.

RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this research was to ascertain if placement access on transition from autism specific satellite classes to more inclusive settings is maintained in the long-term. A further aim of the research was to gather information regarding the academic progress, adaptive functioning and quality of life of satellite class graduates.

RESEARCH METHOD

Satellite classes are autism specific classes for five to six students in mainstream "host" schools. Satellite class programmes incorporated students' individual education goals within a class timetable based on the regular school curriculum. There is particular emphasis on developing communication and socio-emotional understanding which are critical to educational achievement and the development of reciprocal social interaction.

The research was conducted in two stages:

The first stage involved a survey which was sent to families of students who graduated from the satellite class programme. The survey aimed to collect information about the families' experience of the satellite class placement and transition programme, as well as details about how the student has progressed since leaving the programme.

The survey contained open and closed ended questions and asked for information relating to five areas:

- Background information and educational history.
  The transition from satellite to mainstream setting.
  The support received from the mainstream setting.
  The student's current placement and the support provided.
- The satisfaction of parents with the programme and comments on student progress.
- The second stage comprised four in-depth case studies, with the aim of gathering comprehensive, qualitative data for a small group of satellite class graduates who completed the programme 10 years ago. Both parents and students were involved using a questionnaire and structured interview protocol.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The authors found that 89% of students who had transitioned to a mainstream setting remained in similar settings. Additionally, parents rated participation in the programme as positive and beneficial. Parents reported that the main factors they felt were important for successful transition to a more inclusive setting are:

- An autism specific transition programme.
- A focus on social and communication skills.
- Teacher support and knowledge.
- Access to early intervention and other therapies (e.g. OT).
- Parental commitment and involvement.

This research shows that a model where individual education goals using an autism specific curriculum are implemented within a timetable based on the regular curriculum in conjunction with increasing opportunities for integration is an achievable and effective way of successfully preparing students with autism to enter a more inclusive setting.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- Small group teaching in satellite classes provides opportunities to develop receptive language, shared attention, reduced reliance of individual support which may assist the student to eventually be able to participate in mainstream classes.
- When a student begins to show signs in "transition readiness", they may be prepared for transition to a more inclusive placement. "Transition readiness" is judged by the class teachers based on the amount of support that the student requires and whether this is likely to be able to be provided by teachers within a mainstream school. It is also crucial to judge whether the child will be able to cope with the level and type of academic work that is presented in a mainstream setting. Consequently, strategies to teach "transition readiness" need to be introduced in the satellite class. Strategies include a gradual reduction of supports, an expectation of more independent functioning and the development of self-help and communication skills.

Students with Autism in Regular Classes: A Long-term Follow-up Study of a Satellite Class Transition Model.

- Providing children with specific training on social rules and expectations prior to a transition, helps reduce anxiety surrounding the transition. Any programme designed to prepare children for transition to more inclusive settings should focus on developing the child's social, emotional and communication needs.
- Long term outcomes for children with autism are positively affected by the development of social and communication skills, family support, education support, peer support and finding a niche in life. Regular collaboration between special education teachers, mainstream teachers and parents is crucial for a smooth transition.

FULL REFERENCE

E. Keane; F.J. Aldridge; D. Costley and T. Clark (2012). Students with Autism in Regular Classes: A Long-term Follow-up Study of a Satellite Class Transition Model. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16 (10), p. 1001-1017.*

The Use of Video Modeling via a Video iPod and a System of Least Prompts to Improve Transitional Behaviors for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the General Education Classroom

Research Aim

Video Modelling involves a student watching another person performing skills or target behaviours on a video and then performing the behaviours or skills themselves. The aim of this research was to evaluate the efficacy of video modelling delivered by a video iPod and the use of a minimal prompts system to assist elementary-age children with transitioning between locations within the school.

Research Method

Four elementary students aged between six and eight with a diagnosis of autism plus four general education teachers and four paraprofessionals participated in this study. The problem behaviours being targeted during transitions included physical aggression, sitting on the floor and running away (elopement). The study consisted of six strands: pre-training, baseline, the handheld video-modelling intervention, no hand-held video modelling procedures, handheld video-modelling reinstated and maintenance.

Pre-training:
Prior to baseline a pre-training period which consisted of two phases occurred to ensure students could perform the instructions displayed during a video format. In the first phase a model-lead-test procedure was used to instruct the students on using the hand held video device. The teacher modelled the steps required to access the video clip, and tested the student's performance on using the device and accessing the video clips independently. In the second phase, a pre-recorded video of the student performing a familiar two-step task was used. The students were required to turn on the device, watch the video, and follow the instructions. If an error was performed the teacher said "[Name], let's watch the video again" and prompted the student to turn on the device, watch the video and follow the instructions. A least to most hierarchy of prompts was used which consisted of (a) verbal prompt (b) gesture plus verbal explanation (c) modelling plus verbal explanation and (d) physical assistance plus verbal explanation.

Baseline:
Throughout the baseline, the number of independent and assisted transitions from place to place was recorded. Assistance was only provided after target behaviours were displayed. The use of video modelling was not provided at this time.

Handheld video modelling procedures
Students watched a corresponding video of themselves transitioning independently to the desired location. Once the video of transitioning was complete the teacher prompted the student to transition to the required location. Students received verbal praise contingent upon independent transitioning.

No handheld video modelling procedures:
Intervention withdrawal occurred when students transitioned independently 100% of the time during three consecutive sessions. Similar to baseline, the number of independent and assisted transition were recorded during this phase.

Handheld video modelling reinstated:
This phase was reintroduced when a data trend occurred in the opposite therapeutic direction of intervention. The steps were followed as described in the video modelling procedure. Students continued to watch the video clips prior to transitioning within the school on a daily basis.

Maintenance:
Nine weeks after students had reached the acquisition criterion, follow up probes were collected. Similar to baseline, students did not view the video prior to transitioning. Follow up probes were collected to determine if the initial instruction affected the students' performance over time.

Research Findings

During baseline students demonstrated a limited ability in transitioning independently from place to place within the school. The mean number of independent transitions made by students during baseline was 7%. However, when students use the handheld video-device during intervention, the mean percentage of intervention increased to 77%. When the intervention was withdrawn the mean percentage of independent transitions decreased to 36%. This increased to 88% when the video-modelling technique was reinstated, and a mean level of 98% independent transitioning was maintained 9 weeks later. Although prompts were required at times, target behaviours decreased to zero during transitional situations, therefore, the video-modelling and response-based prompting procedures resulted in a functional relation.

The Use of Video Modeling via a Video iPod and a System of Least Prompts to Improve Transitional Behaviors for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the General Education Classroom

A social validity semi-structured interview was carried out with the four general education teachers, and they indicated that using video-modelling procedures by means of a video iPod in a general education classroom to increase transitioning within elementary students with autism was socially acceptable.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- This study demonstrates that the use of video-modelling via a video iPod can result in independent transitioning within school where problematic behaviours previously occurred.
- The use of video modelling via a video iPod device may be useful for transitioning to a wide variety of locations within the school due to the portability of the device. The device allows for consistency across the multiple transitions throughout the school day. Furthermore, the students could re-watch the videos when additional prompts were required. These advantages improve the usefulness of video-modelling via a video iPod as a behaviour change intervention.
- According to the authors, students with autism might experience difficulties in keeping up with peers, and can often become dependent on adults in inclusive class settings. This study demonstrates that video modelling to improve transitions within a general education public school setting can be successful.
- In this study only four students participated, therefore, further research is needed to verify these results across larger samples.

Future video-modelling research is required to examine the impact of this intervention on specific functions of behaviour.

FULL REFERENCE

Cihak, D., Ayres, K.M., and Smith, C. (2010). The use of Video Modelling via a Video iPod and a System of Least Prompts to Improve Transitional Behaviours for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the General Education Classroom. *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions,12(2), p.103-115.*

Transition from School to Adulthood for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder: What We Know and What We Need to Know

BACKGROUND

Young people with autism experience difficulties when transitioning from school to further or higher education and ultimately work and adulthood, with figures for unemployment, irrespective of cognitive ability or academic achievement, ranging from 88.2% to 95.9%. The researchers claim that there appears to be a dearth of research into the preparation for this transition, the supports offered or best practice to follow in order to change the outcomes for students with autism.

RESEARCH AIMS

The authors, through a review of current literature, wish to review the process of transition and identify successful activities, which will influence policy and practice by examining the elements of the transition, impeding behaviours, school curriculum, supported and competitive work, and the participation in Post-Secondary education. This review was made difficult, as there is a scarcity of research in respect to the underlying reasons for challenging behaviour surrounding this transition and how this will affect social development.

RESEARCH METHOD

The authors used several methods to complete this review of current literature:

- The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2(NLTS-2), regarded by many as being the best source of information on current Post-Primary curriculum and transition practices for those with autism. It reviewed outcomes for 922 students with autism between the ages of 13 and 26 years, 84% of whom attended mainstream education, 12 % attended a school dedicated to those with difficulties and 4 % were being educated elsewhere. Many students with autism achieve academically, yet tend to choose learning support classes as they experience difficulty with social and life skills with their typically development peers.
- From an electronic database search, 77 studies were selected for full review to examine the area of autism specific best practice in relation to employment.
- The work of Test el al (2009) was also evaluated, as their work reviewed the literature of transition practices.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The authors assert that for successful inclusion within the Post-Secondary education, adult life or workplace, students need to be prepared with stable behaviour patterns, able to self-manage, have independent living skills, long-term friendships and opportunities for employment. This raises the question, is Post-Primary education supporting the acquisition of such skills? From the NLTS-2, it was found that ultimately students could find themselves isolated from their peer group, heightened by their opting for learning support/special classes, which may in turn lead to a depressed mood, anxiety, lower levels of engagement or participation in their transition planning, heightened levels of inappropriate behaviour and abuse by others. In similar studies, students with autism have reported:

- Lower rates of self-determination and satisfaction
- Preference for activities that do not require social interaction
- Low level of self-autonomy
- Lacking confidence in making choices and decisions
- Dependence on family members
- Few friends

Many students with autism leave Post-Primary education ill prepared for adulthood and social interaction. Students tend to leave Post-Primary education, where they have been less likely to have formed a strong school identity with low in-school participation, resulting in low participation in competitive employment, tendency to work in temporary, low-pay, low skill positions, are frequently laid off and hired, often living within the family home, with no social engagement. Therefore, they have not had the chance to acquire or practice the requisite skills for full inclusion within adulthood, the workforce and the community.

The literature searches all concluded that although there is some good practice being carried out; more thorough research into each area is required.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

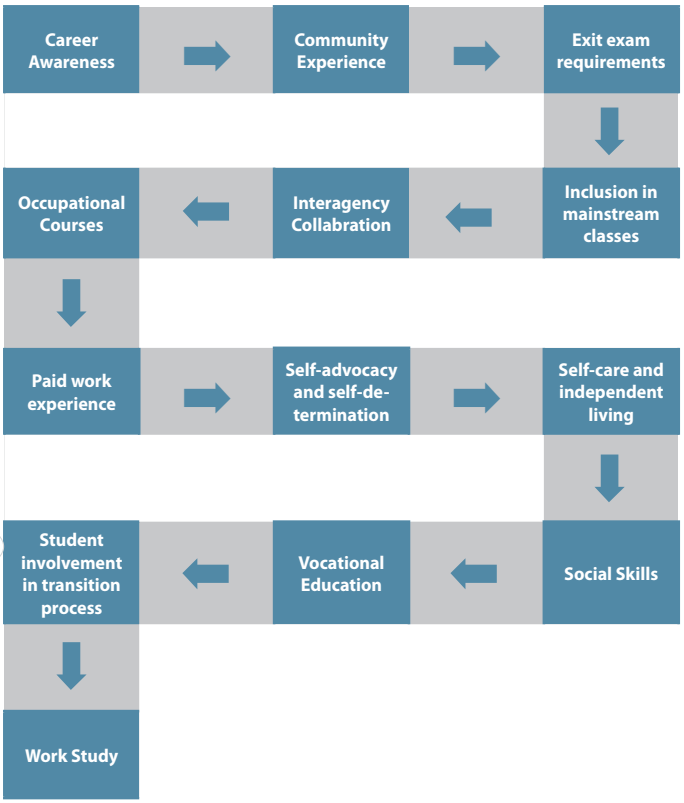
(by the authors)

If the goal of Post-Primary education is to prepare students for life beyond the classroom, including successful employment

Transition from School to Adulthood for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder: What We Know and What We Need to Know

and/or tertiary education, consideration must be given to providing the skills listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Skills to prepare students for life beyond the classroom



- Recognition must be given to the untapped potential of students with autism and earlier interventions designed and implemented, appreciating their individual skill set.
- Set the bar high; offer a range of vocational and academic courses through a variety of media, special/learning support classes and mainstream classes.
- Proficiency with technology can open many avenues for employment and social activities. There is an onus on Post-Primary education to provide this breadth of competence.
- Teach the students the skills they need, whether these are for communication and/or socially appropriate behaviour, to function within a Post school environment.
- Part time paid employment during school years allows for the attainment of the necessary skills needed for full time work, the task skills and social interaction skills. For employers, the more often they experience the positive aspects of employing those with autism, the more likely they are to offer full time, paid career paths. Employers need to appreciate the skill-set of those with autism and see how they could be successfully assimilated and accommodated into their organisation.
- Consideration may have to be given to maintaining the supports offered within schooling with the introduction of education coaches to support the student through special and mainstream classes and on into post-secondary education environments and the workforce.
- Offer means of inclusion into a variety of social and academic activities with the use of peer mentors to enable social acceptance. These peer mentors could also assist the student with autism embark on social skills activities and programmes, allowing for the realisation that school is more than simple academic acquisition.
- Students with autism must not only be encouraged to engage in their own transition process, they must be afforded the necessary skills in preparation.

Throughout the review, the authors have stated that a need for more detailed research into the area of transition from Post-Primary school is required to ensure that young people with autism reach their potential in all aspects of their adult lives.

FULL REFERENCE

Wehman, P., Schall, C., Carr, S., Targett, P., West, M. and Cifu, G. (2014) Transition From School to Adulthood for Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorder: What We Know and What We Need to Know. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 25 (1) p. 30 – 40*

Transition: Preparing Secondary School Leavers on the Autism Spectrum for Life Beyond School

BACKGROUND

The transition from school to adulthood is fraught with significant challenges for all young people, but they are particularly felt by those with High Functioning Autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome (AS). The authors state that the implementation of social skills groups and training before and after leaving school is vital to allow for purposeful education, leisure and work opportunities and the familial and personal benefits that accrue. Failure to attain the necessary friendships and support from students who are cognitively able and who are aware of their differences, can lead to loneliness, isolation, un- and under employment, fewer chances of meaningful romantic relationships and in a heightened state mood and anxiety difficulties.

RESEARCH AIMS

The researchers set out to deliver a programme whereby the focus was on building social skills into transition planning and real life social situations.

The overall aims were:

- To support the young people with transition into university, college or work
- To enable them to meet new people, and to engage and work with them
- To link them with local services and support agencies
- To encourage the young people to develop their independent travel skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

In two separate years, eight participants, six males, two females, were referred to a centre in Edinburgh, eight involved in mainstream education with the other eight coming from a specialist education provision for young people with autism, one individual did not complete the programme. The programme, where opportunities for group, paired and individual activities was offered, ran over eight two-hour sessions with three re-connector sessions also taking place. A variety of activities was included with speakers from Further and Higher Education, the voluntary sector and employment services. Eleven out of the sixteen participants completed an evaluative questionnaire and took part in a paper carousel activity at the end of the programme, to determine if the intervention met their individual expectations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The participants reported achieving:

- Friendship and a sense of belonging, with the chance to know new people, have new social experiences in an environment where they were appreciated and did not feel like an outcast.
- Practical help and advice about application forms, CVs and interview preparation
- Increased confidence and awareness in managing stress and anxiety, while also feeling more at ease disclosing their diagnosis and it may be inferred from this that they were more aware and accepting of their differences.
- Developing independence accessing travel skills, with all participants now being able to travel to the centre confidently.

They also identified the 12 Top Tips for successful transition, which they wanted to share with others with autism.

- Stay calm and have a plan – don't panic
- Work hard on exams
- Try to remain normal as transition is normal
- Have a back-up plan in case your first plan doesn't work out
- Be confident
- Ask questions
- Careers advisors or psychologists can give helpful advice
- Take time out between leaving school and going to college or university (i.e., a gap year) to relax and think about the future. It gives your brain a rest before starting work Work out what you really want to do. You can decide where you want to go.
- You will meet up sometimes with friends you know, sometime after leaving school.
- For people who will be going to university – volunteer work can achieve a successful application
- Apply early.
- From questionnaires completed by the parents of the students, the intervention was rated as effective at assisting their child in his/her transition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the reviewer)

- A naturalistic training setting, intensive teaching and multiple opportunities to practise with peers are all required to promote the fluid use of social skills.

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- To enable generalisation of social skills there is a need for these to have an emotional meaning, otherwise there is a danger of teaching and learning splinter skills.
- Peer acceptance is a vital ingredient for developing social confidence and competence. With the group work approach, in a safe and accepting environment, often the first involvement of positive interaction experienced by the student with HFA/AS.
- Many see working with other peers with HFA/AS beneficial as they have shared experiences from which they can discuss solutions.
- Although the benefits of a social skills group are many, eye contact, conversation skills, the provision of more real life, naturalistic social opportunities is required.
- When devising a model of transition the following should be considered:
    - The experience must be meaningful
    - It must provide a positive and interesting experience
    - Activities need to be built around the tasks of transition with the peer group being supportive

The group work should be based within a community setting, semi-structured and adult facilitated, working towards greater participation and responsibility being taken by the group members.

FULL REFERENCE

Alexander, M. and Inch, W. (2013) Transition: Preparing Secondary School Leavers on the Autism Spectrum for Life Beyond School. *Good Autism Practice, 14 (1) p37 – 46*

Transition to Kindergarten for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Focus Group Study with Ethnically Diverse Parents, Teachers, and Early Intervention Service Providers.

RESEARCH AIMS

Prior to this study there was almost no studies related to kindergarten* transition (TTK) experience of culturally/ethnically diverse families having children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). This study aimed to provide an important initial window into the TTK experience of culturally and linguistically diverse families with children with ASD from a variety of critical frontline stakeholders.

The exploratory study aims to identify salient factors associated with the TTK for children with ASD as well as factors unique to ethnic minority populations.

This study proposed to address the following three broad research questions:

- What positive and negative experiences are associated with the TTK for parents of children with ASD?
- How do participants define a successful transition for their children?
- To what extent do parents' TTK experiences vary according to their cultural values and beliefs?

RESEARCH METHOD

Ecological models are considered to be particularly well suited to research with both multicultural and exceptional populations, including the study of transitions because it frames developmental phenomena as processes rather than discrete events, while accounting for multiple contexts. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory was used because it is dynamic, describing developmental outcomes as a function of ongoing bidirectional interactions between individuals' characteristics and their ecological contexts over time.

Six focus groups (three with ethnically diverse parents, one with kindergarten teachers, and one each with early childhood resource teachers and early intervention providers) were conducted to elicit the experiences of these stakeholders in Ontario, Canada. Eleven families with children with ASD participated in the study. They were grouped linguistically to reflect the most widely spoken languages in Ontario: English, Mandarin and Arabic respectively

Qualitative responses were collected and analysed from ethnically diverse stakeholders involved in the planning and facilitation of transition.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Cultural values and beliefs shape attitudes, behaviours, emphasis placed on various symptoms, age of diagnosis and intervention goals.
- Cultural values and beliefs significantly affect the ways stressors are perceived and experienced and thus affect coping responses during TTK.

Four overarching themes relating to TTK emerged from the focus groups as either impact or potential to impact the effectiveness of TTK: Relationship Building, Communication, Knowledge, and Support. They are respectively summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Focus Group Emerging Themes and Subthemes.

Theme	Subthemes
Relationship building	Relationships between stakeholders
	Building of trust/rapport between teachers and parents
	Cultural differences in handling parent/teacher relationship
	Adversarial relationships
	Effective collaboration
Communication	Advocacy
	Frequency of communication
	Language barriers
	Cultural differences
	Openness of teachers to suggestions from parents
	Lack of communication
	Changes in communication style/frequency between EI and school
	Content of communication
	Communication from administration to teachers about incoming students with ASD
Knowledge	Need for parental and teacher knowledge
	Teacher specific knowledge needs
	Parent specific knowledge needs
Support	Parental supports
	Lack of supports and knowledge about supports
	Difficulty accessing services and support
	Formal supports
	Informal supports
	Teacher supports
	Administrative support
	Educational supports

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While these themes were relevant for all groups, for parents who were relatively recent immigrants and for whom English was not a first language the difficulties were magnified. Both parents and teachers expressed the desire to meet informally prior to the beginning of the kindergarten. Teachers acknowledged this rarely happened but when it did it contributed to positive TTK.

The role of the principal was identified as important, with best TTK occurring when everybody was collaborative. Additionally, the relationship between the setting from which the child was coming and the receiving school was important.

As previous research has demonstrated TTK needs to be viewed as a process rather than a discrete event beginning one year before and continuing well after the new school year has begun.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the authors)

- Inconsistency and challenges at all levels seem to be the hallmark of the TTK experience for all participants in this study although that does not appear to be unique to these participants.
- Not speaking the dominant language and coming from non-mainstream cultural backgrounds magnified difficulties.

The authors made four concluding implications for practice to supplement those already found in literature:

- The need for all school boards to plan and develop a comprehensive and consistent TTK to kindergarten process.
- The TTK plan needs to build in time and money to allow teachers to attend all relevant TTK meetings including observational visit to EI settings and the home to determine appropriate expectations as well as establishing positive communication and developing a trusting relationship. This is particularly important where ASD is concerned.
- All participants agreed that teachers require additional pre and in-service training in understanding ASD and educational interventions for this population.
- The authors call for Eurocentric values to be revaluated and new culturally responsive ways of individualising the TTK process to be found. Then teachers will be able to determine the most effective way to adapt their recommendations to the value system of the family.

Although the current study provides some valuable insights into the understanding of TTK for families with children of ASD, much research remains to be done.

FULL REFERENCE

Starr, M. E., Martini, T. S., Kuo, B.C.H. (2014). Transition to Kindergarten for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Focus Group Study with Ethnically Diverse Parents, Teachers, and Early Intervention Service Providers. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities.* [On-line] UK: Available http://foa.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/04/30/1088357614532497 [accessed 05/08/2014]

The Experience of Transitioning Two Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome in Academically Focussed High Schools

RESEARCH AIMS

Children and young people with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) are increasingly encouraged into inclusive learning environments, particularly those with a high academic focus. While these pupils may be intelligent enough to manage the content of the work in these schools, the extent to which students cope with the "hidden curriculum" of an academic high school is uncertain. The aim of the study was to look at the perceptions of key stakeholders (pupils, parents, class teachers, and school management staff) in the transition of two students with Asperger's Syndrome into two academically focussed high schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative case study methodology employing semi-structured interviews was carried out at two schools (both high schools considered to have a highly academic focus) following the first year of transition to that school. Eight individual interviews were carried out (four for each school) with a member of school management (school executive), a classroom teacher, a student with Asperger's Syndrome, and their parent/carer. Thematic analysis of transcribed interviews was conducted to identify emerging themes in the data.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Analysis of the data revealed four broad themes, and three subcategories of transition support type.

1. ***Awareness, Knowledge and Understanding of students with AS at the school***
   Although staff in both schools were aware of pupils with autism at the school; there was a difference between the level of knowledge, experience and understanding of autism between the management staff across the two schools. This affected the level of support available to the child.
2. ***Types of Transition Procedures***
   The main focus across both schools was on physical transition procedures (maps of the building etc). Both parents indicated that they were not informed of school procedures to aid transition. Interventions put in place by schools to encourage social transitioning (clubs, safe haven room etc) were not used by either pupil. In one case, parents had provided a list of strategies to assist social transition, however there was no evidence of these being utilised.
3. ***Internal Transitioning***
   Neither school management nor class teachers indicated having any procedures in place to assist transition between lessons, or during break-times. There was also variability in terms of the perceived need to prepare pupils for transition between year groups.
4. ***Involvement of Others in Transitioning***
   The extent of parental involvement in transition process was variable, and in both cases pupil involvement was not evident. An over-reliance on parents to initiate transition processes was identified.

The three types of transition subcategory were, physical, academic and social transitions.

Physical transition strategies tended to be the main focus for all adults involved. Schools prioritised academic transitions (organisation of study materials, homework etc.), whereas parents were less concerned about this. Finally, social transitioning was the area with least supportive provision, yet was perceived as most needed by pupils. No specific social skills instruction was provided.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(by the reviewer)

The main implication for practice arising from the paper is that there was a lack of commonality or structured protocol across schools for how to engage in an effective transition programme. For future practice:

- Structured approaches to transitions would be useful in schools in order to reduce variability of what individual students may receive in terms of provision or support;
- Increased responsibility for the transition process should be placed on schools, in order to reduce parental stress, and to account for parents who may have limited self-advocacy skills;
- A minimum level of pupil participation in the transition planning process should be established;
- Further thought should be given to social transitioning processes, and the pro-active teaching of social interaction skills appropriate to the learning environment should be considered.

FULL REFERENCE

Dixon, R. and Tanner, K. (2013). The Experience of Transitioning Two Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome in Academically Focussed High Schools. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 37, p. 28-48.*

Conclusion

It is clear, both from the articles reviewed and from the excellent insights from Damian Milton, that transition is a critical time in the life of the student with autism. Anxiety can develop as the result of a poorly managed transition and can extend to an anxiety that is present throughout the student's school life.

The articles reviewed provide some interesting insights and strategies into facilitating a stress free transition; these include:
Individualised transition programmes that allow for a student's unique profile of support needs, including sensory needs.
The use of peers in supporting students as they make their transitions

Using hand held media devices to support video modelling and visual cues; these can support transitioning between tasks as well as transitioning between life stages
The use of small transition groups in schools facilitating a gradual transition.

There is also a responsibility on post-primary schools to provide comprehensive support for the transition into adult life; support in social situations and building up social confidence is highlighted as being of particular importance.

Middletown Centre welcomes the views and suggestions of the autism community. Please email research@middletownautism.com if you have any comments on this bulletin or have any suggestions for future bulletins.

NOTES

Your Opinion

The Centre trusts that you have found this Research Bulletin informative. It would be appreciated if you would take a few minutes to provide the Centre with feedback in relation to this bulletin by clicking on the survey link below.

» Survey for Transitions Volume 2

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