ASD Academic Transitions: Trends in Parental Perspective

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Abstract: Academic transitions are a necessary and important part of an ASD student’s life. Parental involvement and perspective is a vital part of each transition planning process. The primary goal of this research was to identify trends in parent perspectives regarding ASD academic transitions through meta-synthesis of current research. The research also seeks to identify shifts in parent perceptions of the importance of specific transitional program elements during different academic transitional periods. Results indicated a clear trend within each academic transition category as well as trends throughout the transition periods. The main trend in parental perspective throughout the transitions is the de-structuration of the transition planning process and increased personalization with the advancement of each academic transition. Possible uses of research results to ease the transition planning process for parents are summarized and discussed.

Over the past two decades, autism has steadily grown into one of the most recognizable developmental disorders. Although autism was previously assumed to be a rare disorder, the reclassification of autism as part of a spectrum of disorders known as the autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in the early 1990’s led to a widespread increase in the prevalence of autism (Yeargin-Allsoppet al., 2003). Recognition of the heterogeneous nature of autism has resulted in the diagnosis of many children not previously thought to be on the spectrum (Lord, Cook, Leventhal, & Amaral, 2000), creating an abrupt surge in ASD students in the academic system.

The transition of these students through the primary and secondary school systems has set precedence for various current academic interventions. As this initial wave of children approach adulthood, a steady increase in the previously overlooked area of post-secondary ASD research has occurred. The development of post-secondary research on ASD students marks a milestone fulfillment of the initial phases of comprehensive preschool to post-secondary ASD academic planning. Academic transitions, however, remain a challenging area for parents and students alike. The recent surge of interest on post-secondary transitions signifies a significant movement toward more comprehensive ASD academic transition research.

Despite all of the successes and advances in ASD academic transitional research, little research has been done on comprehensive early childhood through post-collegiate ASD academic transitioning planning. Currently, a lack of understanding of relationships and interactive connections of the comprehensive academic transitional planning exists across preschool to postsecondary settings.

Detailed analysis and comparison of parent perspectives at different academic phases of transition can be useful in eliminating redundancy in transitional development programs as any characteristic overlaps can be generalized into the transitional programs of other academic groups. Currently, comprehensive ASD transition planning is done at each major academic junction: early childhood classes, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary. Periods of transition are frequently the source of intense levels of stress for parents and students on the spectrum. Parents often start the transition planning process over at each junction, resulting in an enormous amount of continued work and stress (Newsome, 2000).
Current Trends in Transition Research

Over the last 15 years, a paradigm shift has occurred in the perception of transition services for students with disabilities. Early transitional research was more service-focused; the main purpose of transitional services was to shift students from one category of system service to another. Current research has been trending towards what Kohler terms as transition-focused education (1998). Transition-focused education is the result of normalization and individualization, two central and longstanding concepts within special education.

Taxonomy for Transitioning Programming

One of the main frameworks of transition planning for students with disabilities is the Taxonomy for Transitioning Programming: “...a comprehensive, conceptual organization of practices through which transition-focused education and services are developed and delivered” (Kohler & Field, 2003, p. 176). The Taxonomy for Transition Programming is an applied framework of education and collection of transition practices utilized for improving a student’s post-education success (Kohler, 2003). Practices are defined as “...activities and conditions that ensure successful outcome” (2003, p. 3). Although not specific to students diagnosed with ASD, this model is important in understanding the main components involved in transitions for all students with disabilities.

The transition practices are categorized into five different categories: student-focused planning, student development, collaboration, family involvement, and program structure. Within each of the five categories are primary elements, defined as “...primary building blocks of the categories and include specific secondary education and transition practices” (2003, p. 3). Figure 1 delineates the primary elements within each category.

Organizations or schools utilizing the taxonomy framework follow a three step process to develop an effective transitional program. The first step is the transition practices implementation assessment, which is a set of questions asking the users to evaluate the degree to which they are utilizing the taxonomy practices. The second step is the transition practices needs assessment, utilizing the information found in step one to identify strengths and specific needs. The third step is planning transition focused-education, during which plans are developed to incorporate strengths and address needs (Kohler, 2003).

Schlossberg Transition Theory

The Schlossberg Transition Theory (Anderson, Goodman, Schlossberg, & Ebrary, 2006) is a theory on individual human transitions. This theory is unique in its subjective definition of human transitions. The Schlossberg Theory states that change is only a transition if it is perceived by the individual as a transition in their life. Although the theory has mainly been developed and utilized as a guide for young adult and adult transitions, the theory is very relevant to the transition of ASD students of all ages. This theory is clearly applicable in situations where small changes experienced by neurotypical students often translate into drastic transitions for many ASD students. For example, attending a college class that has open seating each week may hardly seem like a transition for a neurotypical student, such a change might seem like a huge transition from assigned seating for a student with ASD because it disrupts their desire for routine. Thus, the change in class seating is a dramatic transition for the ASD student because it is perceived by the student as a major transition.

The model (Figure 2) illustrates the main components of Schlossberg’s Transition theory. A change is categorized as a transition based on type (anticipated, unanticipated, nonevent), context (setting of said change), and impact. Once a change is categorized as a transition by the individual, then the “4 S’s”—situation, support, self, and strategies determine how well the individual will cope with the transition. Examples of situational resources include previous experience, stress level, timing, and duration. Characteristics of the individual (self) such as psychological wellness, emotional fortitude, personal and demographical qualities are also factors in transition process. Access to and availability of support and coping strategies are the two final factors in determining the success of an individual’s ability to cope with transition.
The "4 S’s" are extremely vital in explaining the components key to the success of ASD students during transitions. Most ASD students’ main resource liabilities fall within the “self” category due to their low tolerance for change and transitions. Thus, it becomes crucial to utilize and develop the remaining resources (situation, support, strategies) into assets to increase the coping abilities of the student during the transition. Since parental involvement is a vital part of the ASD student’s life, better understanding of parental perspectives can greatly contribute to situational, supportive, and strategic resources needed during ASD transitions. Although parental involvement is not legally required at the post-secondary level, a majority of post-secondary planning occurs during the secondary years during which parents are very much involved. Even if parents are not legally involved once the student is 18 and older, they are often unofficially involved in the process through constant contact with the student.

**Self-determination Model**

Over the past two decades, increased awareness and disability legislation has highlighted the importance of self-determination for individuals with disabilities (Field & Hoffman, 1999). Research shows that self-determination has a vital impact on academic and personal success for individuals with disabilities, further establishing self-determination as a cornerstone element in special education. According to Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer, self-determination is defined as “...a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable...
and effective are essential to self-determination" (1998, p. 36).

Self-determination is a crucial element in promoting successful transitions for students with and without disabilities (Field & Hoffman, 2012). Research has shown that students with higher self-determination scores were more likely to live life independently after high school (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Students with disabilities who receive self-determination training were also more likely to increase the students' independence and participation in community activities (Sowers & Powers, 1995). Self-determination at all levels, especially at the critical junctures beginning in kindergarten through postsecondary settings, is a key determinant to successful integration throughout the educational system.

**Academic Transitional Trends**

*Early Childhood and Elementary School Transition*

Extensive focus on the importance of early ASD intervention (NRC, 2001) has provided an abundance of literature and research on preschool and elementary ASD students. Crucial developmental transitions take place during these years: from home to preschool, from preschool to kindergarten and from kindergarten to all subsequent elementary school years. The literature on elementary transitions reveals two recurrent elements: utilization of support systems and extensive advance preparation and planning (NRC, 2011).

Three components crucial to successful transitions for families in early childhood special education programs are: individual support for the families to decrease stress, facilitating a team effort between the service agency and the family, and a planned transition process (Brekken & Knowlton, 1990). The transition process from infant services to preschool (IDEA, Part C) and from preschool to kindergarten (IDEA, Part B) is mandated by the IDEA (California Department of Education, 2005). While specific agencies and services may vary from state to state, the general timeline and procedure for early childhood
Transition planning for children with disabilities is described in Table 1.

The transition from preschool to kindergarten and elementary school is often viewed as a more “natural” transition in that the student is already familiar with an academic environment. The timeline to transition from preschool is not legislatively mandated, allowing more flexibility in planning. Thus, transition planning is often done on a local and community level through community organizations, education systems, and local and state agencies. A basic typical transition plan includes a transition timeline, a transition worksheet, survey of local educational agencies, and an evaluation form for kindergarten teachers and parents (California Department of Education, 2005). Once the IEP is in effect, an annual

### TABLE 1

**Early Childhood Transition Planning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Age</th>
<th>Mandatory Actions by the Agency, i.e., State Early State Service Coordinator</th>
<th>Recommendations for Effective Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By 2 years</td>
<td>Transition steps are included on the individualized family service plan (IFSP)</td>
<td>Obtain parental consent/release to exchange information between the sending and receiving agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 2 years 3 months and 2 years 9 months</td>
<td>Notify the family of an IFSP/transition conference within the next 3 months</td>
<td>Obtain current medical and developmental information. Discuss with the family the information to be shared about the child: ● Family priorities and concerns related to the transition ● Current developmental information ● Health ● Equipment needs ● Current Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 days later</td>
<td>An IFSP/transition conference is scheduled at a mutually agreed-on date.</td>
<td>The time and location of the IFSP/transition are determined by the preferences of the family. The conference includes all appropriate agency personnel. Other attendees may include friends or advocated invited by the family, a community preschool teacher, and other agency personnel as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 2 years 9 months or earlier</td>
<td>An IFSP/transition conference is attended by the family and all service agencies involved. Transition steps are developed for ensuring a smooth transition with minimal interruption.</td>
<td>Assessments are coordinated with other agencies (e.g., regional center)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years 10 months</td>
<td>The assessment plan is completed and signed by the agency and family, beginning the 50-day timeline to the IEP meeting.</td>
<td>For children who continue to be eligible for regional center services, the individual program plan can be completed during this meeting at the discretion of the family and regional center representation. Other agency personnel may also attend this meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 3 years</td>
<td>An IEP meeting is held to: ● Close out IFSP ● Review assessment results ● Determine the child’s eligibility for preschool special education and related services ● Discuss the child’s strengths and needs ● Develop goals, objectives, and benchmarks ● Determine related services and placement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
meeting takes place to reevaluate the needs of the child beginning at 3 years of age and serves to develop appropriate transition plans for the student from elementary through secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

**Post-Secondary Transition**

Post-secondary education encompasses a wide array of activities. Taylor and Seltzer (2011) categorized the activities into these groups: post-secondary degree-seeking program, employment (competitive or supported), and adult day services and activities. Their study showed that young adults with ASD but did not have an intellectual disability (ID) were actually three times more likely to not have any post-secondary activities. Although not explicitly defined in the research, many of these young adults without ID would fall into the HFA or AS category. Taylor and Seltzer (2011) also found a lack of appropriate post-secondary services for young adults with ASD who did not have ID.

Roberts’ (2010) model for a post-secondary ASD transition program illustrates the extensive components necessary for a comprehensive transition program. These topics address the day to day transitional needs that students may need on a college campus: career exploration, academic goal setting and preparation, assessing and identifying learning styles, self-advocacy skills, reasonable accommodations, academic supports and interagency collaboration, technology, and time management skills.

Other literature indicate work-transition programs focused on helping students with developmental disabilities (Dolyniuk et al., 2002), have a broader target group than young adults with ASD. Even within the ASD group, only 18% of ASD students without ID were receiving post-secondary services (either employment or academically related) while 86% of ASD young adults with ASD were receiving similar services.

Zager and Alpern (2010) examine the transitional needs of HFA subgroups. Recent research has focused on HFA students who have transitioned to college-level academics with basic support, while another HFA group requiring more intensive modifications not currently implemented are eliminated from college programs. Currently, HFA students needing intensive modifications either remain in a lower-functioning environment or in an inclusive environment with younger students since peers without disabilities have often moved on to college.

The Campus-Based Inclusion Model (CBIM) is introduced as a programming option for HFA students who require comprehensive modifications. The CBIM consists of structured collaboration between a local college and public school that allows high-school students to attend all of their courses on the college campus. This model promotes student acclimation to the college environment with constant support, while maintaining their secondary school courses. The CBIM emphasizes the development of customized programs maintained through individual assessments, naturalistic setting observations, self-efficacy questions, and standardized testing (Zager & Alpern).

**Parental Influence**

The parent component is universally recognized as a cornerstone in ASD development and research (NRC, 2001). The role of parents requires a multifaceted approach in dealing with a child on the spectrum. Although parental involvement influence has been positively encouraged and documented in transitions for young children with ASD (Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007), the importance of the parent component should not be overlooked during any phase of transition planning. Various studies document the significant influence parents have on a child’s educational aspirations and outcomes (Stoner et al., 2007). Parenting characteristics within this sphere of influence include style, control, gender, education, perception, and ethnicity.

The perspective of the ASD parent is unique and separate from the perspective of parents of children with non-ASD disabilities. The pervasive nature of ASD require a breadth and depth of flexibility and specialty services that often sets it apart from other disability services. Research has shown that ASD parents often have different perspectives on academic services due to the heterogeneous nature of the disorder (Parson, Lewis, & Ellins, 2009). Academic transition is a sig-
significant area of difference between ASD parents and parents of children with other disabilities. ASD parents were generally much less satisfied with the current available information and choices available for ASD academic transition planning (Parsons et al., 2009), suggesting a need for improving post-secondary ASD transition planning.

The purpose of this research was to identify and understand trends in family perception of important issues leading to proactively utilize the understanding of existing trends in future developments of ASD transition planning. The specific goals of this study were to:

1. Identify overall trends in family perception of important transition issues through analysis of existing and relevant literature on transition issues for each respective category.
2. Compare and contrast trends and identify possible causes and issues that contribute to similarities or differences in trends.
3. Develop an ASD transitional timeline of identified trends within family perspectives of important issues and use it to delineate possible proactive applications for identified trends to increase the success and ease of ASD transition planning.

Method

The methodology used for this research was a qualitative meta-study. A meta-study is a research method that analyses data, methods, theories, and findings of previous research and studies, and then combines and synthesizes all of the gathered information to formulate new insights and explanations (Paterson, 2001).

Selection and Appraisal of Primary Research

The selection and appraisal of primary research as the data collection method served as an initial assessment that enables this study to build upon existing research to evaluate the need for further in-depth studies on parental perspective of comprehensive ASD academic transitional trends.

Literature utilized in the data collection was obtained via an electronic search of ERIC, PsycINFO and PQDT using the following terms: autism, parental perspective, transition, asperger syndrome, academic transitions, early education, elementary, college, secondary, and post-secondary. An initial review compiled a group of literature with a general focus on parental perspective and ASD academic transitions. A specific set of criteria was applied to this group of literature to evaluate and determine the articles ultimately selected for data collection.

Articles were selected as part of the data collection if they met ALL of the following criteria:

- The participants in the study needed to be parents of students diagnosed with ASD.
- The study needed to be conducted on the perspectives of the parents regarding a period of academic transition for their child. To accommodate the broad interpretation of the term “perspectives”, the criteria is inclusive of studies on parental experiences and concerns regarding academic transitions. The “period of transition” could either be before, during, or after the transition had taken place.
- Within the study, an age specification or academic category must be clearly indi-
cated. A comprehensive age/academic category study can be included if specific statistics were stratified for each category. For example, if a study examines parental perspective of ALL ages, then the study will be utilized only if the study delineates the specific number of students in each age and/or academic group.

- The methodology could be a case study, personal interview, survey, or open-ended questions, with generally a qualitative research perspective.

**Meta-Data Analysis**

After the primary data were compiled, the process of meta-data analysis compared and contrasted the data from each individual research. First and foremost, the primary data was be categorized by age and/or academic group to better organize the data for analysis. Next, meta-data analysis was used to examine and detail the similarities and differences in parental perspective on ASD academic transitions in each article. Recurrent similarities and differences were documented and categorized for further subsequent analysis. Once all of the articles were analyzed and documented, hypotheses regarding the nature of the similarities and differences between the articles were formulated.

**Meta-Method**

Meta-method is defined as the “...study of the epistemological soundness of existing research, as well as the ways the methodological applications may have influenced the findings that are generated” (Paterson, 2001, p. 71). While there are many purposes and uses for meta-method, the main purpose of meta-method for this research was to determine how the qualitative research methods used in the studies have impacted and influenced the overall results. In addition, meta-method was used to understand how methodology may have impacted and shaped research in the specific field of autism transition research. The procedure for meta-method for this study consisted of two parts: first, to look over the primary research reports and document the methodology for data collection and research.
design for each respective report and second, to identify overall trends and themes within the methodology of the primary research.

**Meta-Theory**

Similar to meta-method, meta-theory examines the different theoretical frameworks utilized in each of the primary research articles. One of the main purposes of meta-theory is to evaluate and understand the impact of certain theories on specific bodies of research and phenomena (Paterson, 2001, p. 92). Understanding the role and impact of different theories in a specific area of research can help researchers identify crucial paradigm shifts and trends regarding a specific phenomenon.

The procedure for meta-theory included reviewing the primary research and documenting the theoretical perspectives and the main theories used in each article. The next step was to identify and deduce the main ways the theories and perspectives have impacted the research. The documented theories can then be summarized in a chart, which can be very useful in identifying previously overlooked trends in a specific area of study (Paterson, 2001, p. 96).

**Meta-Synthesis: Data Interpretation**

Meta-synthesis takes the information gathered from the previous three meta-procedures and utilizes it to develop new theories and observations regarding a specific phenomenon. The purpose of meta-synthesis in this research was to evaluate recent literature available on ASD academic transitions as a whole in order to gather new and useful insights and trends that would otherwise be overlooked when evaluating the literature on an individual basis.

The procedure for meta-synthesis consisted of synthesizing the main insights from the previous procedures of meta-data analysis, meta-method, and meta-theory. There was a two part goal for meta-synthesis for this specific research. The first goal was to determine whether or not there is a trend or pattern in parental perspectives of ASD academic transitions based on meta-data analysis, meta-method, and meta-theory. If there is a trend or pattern, then the second goal was to synthesize a theory explaining the phenomenon of the trend or pattern within parental perspectives of ASD academic transitions.

**Results**

**Transition to Elementary Education**

The primary qualitative research gathered three total articles, which was subsequently analyzed for research findings, research methods, and theoretical and analytical frameworks (Table 2). Table 3 shows the recurring themes in the transition to elementary education articles.

The method utilized in all three articles was unanimously qualitative, thus yielding a qualitative meta-method. Identifying a meta-theory among the three articles was a little more challenging. Each article did not readily identify a specific theoretical and analytical framework. Thus, further investigative analysis was applied to identify an appropriate theoretical and analytical framework for each article. Investigative analysis consisted of closely analyzing the wording and purpose of the researcher (Paterson, 2001). It was determined that grounded theory was the theoretical and analytical framework for all of the articles, thus also making grounded theory the meta-theory.

Grounded theory is a research method which develops theory through data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather than developing a hypothesis or theory at the beginning of a research, grounded theory first collects the data. Important and recurring aspects of the collected data are then coded, grouped, and analyzed for trends and information. A theory is then developed based on the analyzed data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each of the articles had utilized a comparative analysis framework along with specific data coding before developing a theory, which clearly indicated grounded theory as the meta-theory.

The meta-data analysis yielded a few recurring trends in parental perspectives of the transition to elementary education. Overall, transition to elementary education follows set standards that generally follow the requirements of the IEP (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010). The parents also indicated that the preschools were generally very involved in the transition process and that communication
TABLE 2
Transition to Elementary Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Transitions: Perspectives from Parents of Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007 k/1st/2nd graders | *Transitions that parents considered to be effective were child-centered  
*communication between school and home was a vital link for successful transitions  
*preparation for transitions began with an understanding of the child  
*parents identified barriers to successful transitions  
*parents understood the different types of transitions but focused on horizontal transitions  
*parents identified effective transition strategies for their children | Qualitative research  
Interview and collective case study method | Grounded Theory |
| Quintero & McIntyre, 2010 | Preschool teachers engaged in more transition preparation practices than elementary school staff | Qualitative; The Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition questionnaire (FEIT; McIntyre et al. 2007) | Grounded Theory |
Parents wished to have more involvement with elementary school during transition | Qualitative; Face to face interview using Elements for Transition to Kindergarten (ETK) a 26 item interview developed by authors | Grounded Theory |

between the parents and the schools were vital to transition success (Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2004; Quintero & McIntyre, 2010; Stoner et al., 2007).

The meta-synthesis of the articles on parental perspective of transition to elementary education indicates that most parents perceive the transition to elementary education as a structured and event supplemented by ample communication between parents and preschool coordinators. The research conducted on parental perspective of transition to elementary education generally utilizes a qualitative methodology and grounded theory.
The primary qualitative research gathered two total articles, which was subsequently analyzed for research findings, research methods, and theoretical and analytical frameworks (Table 4). Table 5 shows the recurring themes in the transition from elementary to secondary education articles:

Transition from Elementary to Secondary Education

The primary qualitative research gathered two total articles, which was subsequently analyzed for research findings, research methods, and theoretical and analytical frameworks (Table 4). Table 5 shows the recurring themes in the transition from elementary to secondary education articles:

Similar to the transition to elementary education, the meta-theory for the research on transition from primary to secondary education is grounded theory. The meta-method is qualitative method, although one study used a mixed qualitative/quantitative method (Dillon & Underwood, 2012), data was only used from the qualitative portion of the study.

The meta-data analysis of the research on parental perspective of transitions from elementary to secondary education yielded a few recurring issues: social and peer acceptance, along with the student’s personal self-esteem and self-coping skills were indicated as major factors in a successful transition (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerri, & Smith, 2006).

TABLE 2—(Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition for Young Children with Autism From Preschool to Kindergarten</td>
<td>*Readiness skills for proposed placements are identified and developed into specific instructional goals for the year</td>
<td>*an individual identified as the transition contact person for parents and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*classroom visits are arranged by contact person to the multiple placement options that are identified/multiple placement options are visited</td>
<td>*related services for placement are identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Readiness skills for selected placement identified and developed in specific instructional goals for the rest of the year</td>
<td>*child visits kindergarten classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3

Transition to Elementary Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-Data Analysis</th>
<th>Meta-Theory</th>
<th>Meta-Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parents are interested in placement in elementary schools</td>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pre-school teachers are very much part of the transition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elementary staff not as involved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transition is structured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## TABLE 4
Transition from Elementary to Secondary Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerri, & Smith, 2006 | **What works:**  
*Enabling the child to take part with encouragement and praise, improving his self esteem*  
*one on one working*  
*familiarizing child with environment*  
*continuity of approach with previous primary placement*  
*instructors with specific ASD experience*  
**What does not work:**  
Change in teachers and teaching styles, different environment, negative teacher attitude and lack of objectivity  
Predominant theme was delays in transition arrangement.  
Excessive delay in placement decision help up the transition process and brought a lot of uncertainty and stress.  
The full range of provision was not explained  
Lack of communication between parents and professionals.  
Need to make placement decision earlier to prepare child for new school.  
Professionals should work together to facilitate communication with parents.  
Parents need to challenge the system more. | Qualitative; Interviews  
Grounded Theory* |
| Dillion & Underwood, 2012 | Transition was problematic in the first year, although there were signs of integration by the second year of secondary school. The establishment of friendship groups and peer acceptance appeared to be the key criteria for successful transition.  
Self-coping skills in child are important  
Communication between parent and school was important | Mixed-methods design that integrated and drew inferences from data captured and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative data methodologies.  
Focused group interviews  
In-depth interviews | Grounded Theory Approach |
The meta-synthesis of the articles on parental perspective of transition from elementary to secondary education indicates a trend in which the parents put more emphasis on the social and personal well-being and interests of the student. The research conducted on parental perspective of transition from elementary to secondary education generally utilizes a qualitative methodology and grounded theory.

**Transition to Post-Secondary Education**

The primary qualitative research gathered three total articles, which was subsequently analyzed for research findings, research methods, and theoretical and analytical frameworks (Table 6). Table 7 shows the recurring themes in the transition to post-secondary education articles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-Data Analysis</th>
<th>Meta-Theory</th>
<th>Meta-Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parents are interested in social acclimation and peer acceptance</td>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Qualitative method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students’ self-esteem and coping skills are important to transition success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results presented above clearly indicate trends in parent perspectives within each academic transition category. The identified trends also reveal several shifts in importance of transitional program elements through the transition periods.

**Discussion**

Results from the meta-synthesis of each academic transition indicate a clear trend within each academic transition category as well as trends throughout the transition periods. The main trend in parental perspective throughout the transitions is the de-structure of the transition planning process and increased personalization with the advancement of each academic transition. Various reasons and issues can explain this trend. A logical explanation for this trend is that it simply mirrors the natural developmental needs progress of the students. Another explanation is that the transition planning process is impacted by legislative mandates.

Despite a high level of parent involvement in transition planning, practices at the preschool to elementary level are rarely individualized (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). Outside of the IDEA mandated IEP meetings, the parents generally engaged in a set standard of transition practices that were less intensive and individualized (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). The introduction of the IEP process seems to provide both parents and schools with a useful and efficient tool that enables transition planning that meets the needs of the student. A structured process may work
more efficiently when the students are at a young age because their demands and needs maybe more homogeneous and less diversified than that of older students. For example, students transitioning to elementary education may have placement concerns while older students may have placement concerns in addition to social skill concerns, independent living skill concerns, and work concerns.

During the transition from elementary to secondary education, parental perspective shifts and broadens to include concerns regarding the student’s social development, self-esteem, and peer relationships (Dillon & Un-
As the transition from elementary to secondary education encompasses the often emotionally and socially tumultuous teenage years, it makes sense for parents to become increasingly focused on academic and social transition issues. Increased student population along with more classroom and schedule shifts are factors that require more student social interaction (The National Autistic Society, 2012), which can further explain parent’s increased interest in student social development skills.

The interest in the development of social and independence skills remain constant factors in parental perspectives during the transition to post-secondary education. The interest in social and independence development expands to encompass a focus on developing work experiences and skills for post school opportunities. In general, the trend in perspectives of parents during postsecondary transitions had a broader focus. Their main concern is regarding the purpose and appropriateness of college and the impact on their future independence (Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009).

The overall trends across each academic transition period indicate an overall trend in shifts in importance of transitional program elements throughout the transition periods. In the early education and elementary transition phases, parent perception is mainly focused on securing the basic transitional needs in social and independence development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fox, 2011 Expectations and the Post Transition of Young Adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder to Post-Secondary Education</td>
<td>*Most think educational opportunities would help students transition to adulthood</td>
<td>Qualitative; Survey and Open ended questions</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 6. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Important/interested topics: Qualitative; Survey and Open ended questions</td>
<td>*Most think educational opportunities would help students transition to adulthood</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Most think it is very likely their child will enroll in post-secondary program</td>
<td>*Important components in post-secondary programs: Structured social activities Individualized curriculum Focus on employment after completion of program Developing independent, work &amp; social skills</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*most parents were unaware of IEP post-secondary transition opponent</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 7

Transition to Post-Secondary Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-Data Analysis</th>
<th>Meta-Theory</th>
<th>Meta-Method</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*most parents were unaware of IEP post-secondary transition opponent</td>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*independence and social skills a top priority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*work potential and preparation a top priority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*individual planning very important</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for the young child. The goal is to develop a comprehensive IEP plan that is generally followed closely and addresses all of the fundamental transitional needs of the young child. The focus of the parent perspectives tend to shift to broader and more individualized issues as the students progress through the academic system: mainly peer interactions and self-esteem issues during secondary school and work and independence skills at the post-secondary level. While there is a post-secondary transition planning element in a student’s IEP plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), the lack of awareness of this transition planning tool among parents (Hanish, 2011; Fox, 2011) may also account for the more individualized transition planning trend currently seen.

Another trend evident throughout the transition periods is that the students’ and parents’ experience in the previous academic environment affected the parent’s perception of the subsequent transition (Dillon & Underwood, 2012). For example, if the student and parent both have positive experiences in elementary school, then the parents were more likely to have positive perceptions of the transition into secondary school. This trend emphasizes the importance of having parents and students having positive transition experiences from the beginning of their academic experience. An explanation for this maybe that parents that encounter fewer challenges from the beginning may assume that all transitions are equally positive and may experience less of the anticipatory stress that parents who otherwise have had negative experiences encounter.

Implications for Parents

The trends uncovered in this research can be beneficial in a variety of ways. It can be used as an outline for parents just starting out in the transition planning process for their child. This way, they are able to anticipate logical changes and expectations with each transition process. Having an outline is also a useful instrument to reassure parents that they are on the right track. Parents may often be unsure or doubtful if the experiences they are encountering are specific to them or a typical part of the planning process. While each family is different, having an outline can be a useful guide for a parent.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although this research begins to address trends in parental perspectives during ASD academic transitions, it is not without limitations. A clear limitation was the small number of articles found that met the standards required to be included in the primary qualitative research. While there were a variety of articles on parental perspectives during transitions, many of these articles were not ASD-exclusive or did not delineate results for specific age categories. Although this is currently a limitation, the availability of more appropriate articles may be a possible avenue for future research.

Another possible aspect for future research is to include parental perspective on transition to post-secondary work environments. Not all ASD students’ transition to post-secondary education systems, thus it would be interesting to see if there are differences between parental perspectives regarding post-secondary education transitions and post-secondary work transitions.

Although there is an abundance of research on ASD transitions, much research is still needed to understand any trends in the overall kindergarten through post-secondary education transitions. This research offers a glimpse into possible trends in parent perspectives during ASD transitions. Hopefully, the results of this research can offer parents involved in the ASD transition planning process some insight and guidance to possible expectations during the process. Since much remains to be researched in this area, the results from this research can serve as a stepping stone for future research opportunities into trends among bigger samples of parents and their perspectives during ASD academic transitions.

References


Brekken, L., & Knowlton, A. (1990). Transition is-


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