

Educational Transitions and Trajectories for Children and Young People with Autism: A Literature Review

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BACKGROUND

- Educational transitions are major life events that can impact a child's educational and psychological development (Rice et al, 2010)
- Research has indicated that children with ASD experience greater transition difficulties due to social and communication deficits (Forest et al, 2004)
- Transitions can be divided into horizontal or vertical transitions:
 - Horizontal transitions indicate daily movements between settings and situations, for example between home and school
 - Vertical transitions indicate a movement from one level or agency to another, for example the transition between primary and secondary school
- The majority of current research focuses on vertical transitions, although research indicates that horizontal transitions are often of greater concern to parents and families of children with autism
- It is important to identify the current transition experiences and practices of children and young people with autism, as well as the experience of their families, teachers, and other professionals

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Transitions and trajectories have been identified as the focus for the ACoRNS project. Therefore, this literature review aims to:

1. Provide a full review of the current research and evidence on educational transitions and trajectories for children and young people with autism
2. Identify the future research priorities of the ACoRNS and autism community
3. Identify the role of ACoRNS within this area

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the experience of educational transitions for children and young people with autism?
2. What is the parental perspective of educational transitions for children and young people with autism?
3. What is the perspective of teachers and other professionals on the transition process?
4. What strategies and support are in place for the transition process, and which are most effective?

METHOD

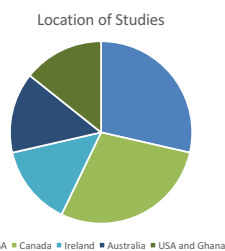
This project is formed of several literature reviews focusing on the various transitions and trajectories. For each literature review, a systematic search of peer-reviewed articles focusing on the specified transition period for children with a diagnosis of autism will be conducted. Relevant articles will be identified and critically evaluated, with a focus on answering the primary research questions.

RESULTS

PRESCHOOL TO PRIMARY

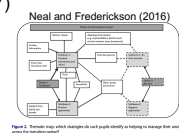
7 studies were identified that focused on the transition between preschool and primary school for children with autism.

- Concerns of Parents
 - Being believed
 - Stigma/labelling
 - Worry about the future
 - Communication with the school
 - Knowledge of system
- Concerns of Teachers
 - Communication between sending and receiving schools
 - Lack of resources and knowledge
 - Administration concerns
 - Exclusion from transition process
- Transition Practices
 - Early planning
 - Collaboration with the family
 - Building a relationship between sending and receiving schools



PRIMARY TO SECONDARY

- Many studies reported negative experiences of transition (Makin et al, 2017; Peters & Brooks, 2016; Dann, 2011) as well as high levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties across the transition period (Mandy et al, 2016)
- Neal and Frederickson (2016) indicated that the transition can be a positive experience, as students valued aspects such as greater routine and more varied lessons
- Makin et al (2017) found that transition success was not related to type of secondary provision or any child-level factors such as verbal ability, anxiety or autism symptoms, but to school and system level factors, such as tensions over school choice, lack of primary preparation and communication between schools
- There are a range of strategies and interventions used:
 - Formal transition interventions (STEP-ASD) (Mandy et al, 2016)
 - Child involvement in transition planning (Makin et al, 2017)
 - Early planning and preparation
 - Practical information and advice (maps of schools, etc.)
 - Support systems and structure (Makin et al, 2017)
 - Timetables, diaries, planners
 - Student buddies and teachers
 - Social skills groups



IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The preliminary results of the literature review indicate that educational transitions can be difficult for children and young people with autism. However, there are several strategies and interventions that can increase the likelihood of a successful transition.

As this project is ongoing, additional literature reviews will focus on the transition from secondary school to further or higher education, the transition from secondary school to post-education, daily transitions, and the educational trajectories of children and young people with autism.

Once complete, these literature reviews will provide a summary of the current research as well as identify gaps in the literature. As part of the ACoRNS network, this research will help to guide future projects, raise awareness of issues related to transitions and trajectories within the autism community, and inform practice.