

ASD Academic Transitions:
Trends in Parental Perspective

by

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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 is 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 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-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.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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-Allsopp, Rice, Karapurkar, Doernberg, Boyle, & Murphy, 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 postsecondary ASD academic planning. Academic transitions, however, remain a challenging area for parents and students alike. The recent surge of research on post-secondary transitions completes a significant facet of 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. Through compilation and analysis of existing ASD transitional literature, the following research investigates the existence and possible benefits of trends and relationships between pivotal ASD academic transitional phases.

Problem Statement

The life of an ASD student, like that of any student, is filled with many academic and personal transitions. For most students, transitional challenges are natural and common occurrences. Common transitional challenges compounded by an ASD student's inclination towards ritualistic behavior and difficulties with changes often create unique and complex academic transitional challenges. For example, typical students may not think twice about switching schools and teachers but this shift in environment and routine may be sometimes an ASD student needs to prepare and practice for in order to avoid behavioral meltdowns.

Most ASD transitional research conducted falls into separate and academically or age-delineated categories: home to preschool, preschool to elementary (grades K-5), elementary to secondary (grades 6-12), secondary to post-secondary, or simply general transition strategies. Although all transition studies contribute to their particular category, a general lack of integration between the research literatures exists. The integration of available literature

provides an opportunity to unveil any currently overlooked general trends within and across of ASD transition periods.

The following research seeks to answer to answer the following questions:

1) Do trends exist in parent perspectives regarding ASD academic transitions? 2) Do parent perceptions of the importance of specific transitional program elements evolve or shift during different academic transitional periods? Answers to these questions are an attempt to identify trends across and within critical transition periods which can provide greater insight to the shifting needs of individuals with ASD leading to greater insight in services and program development. Furthermore, the identification of new trends may prepare both the parents of students on the spectrum and the students for future academic transitions.

Purpose

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

1. Identify categorical and 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 between categories 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.

For the purpose of this study, the identified categories are as follows: **early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, and post-secondary education.**

Early childhood education encompasses students who are not yet in elementary education. This category includes the academic level of preschool. The average age range for an early childhood education student is usually before the age of 5. **Elementary and secondary education** encompasses students who are in kindergarten through the 12th grade. This category includes the academic levels of elementary school, middle or junior high school, and high school. The average age range for students within this category is 6 to 18 years old. **Post-secondary education** encompasses students who have completed secondary education. This category includes the academic levels four-year colleges, junior colleges or two-year colleges, and trade schools. The age range for students within this category is 18 and older (U.S. Department of Education, 2012)

Since ASD is widely recognized as a heterogeneous disorder, the uncovering of any possible trends in parental perspective can assist in making the ASD transitions more streamlined, effective, and less confusing for future students and their families.

Definition of Terms

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), also known as pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), consists of a group of developmental disabilities characterized by social, communicative, and behavioral deficits. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2011). The ASD umbrella consists of 5 disorders: Autistic Disorder, Rett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) (American Psychiatric Association [*DSM-IV-TR*], 2000).

Despite falling under the same umbrella category of ASD, clear distinctions between the disorders (Lord, Cook, Leventhal, & Amaral, 2000) have been made. Rett's Disorder and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder are uniquely classified by age-progressive developmental regression. Autistic Disorder (AD) is characterized by the onset of a triad of characteristics by the age of 3: impaired verbal and non-verbal communication skills, deficient social abilities, and repetitive and restrictive behaviors or interests. Individuals diagnosed with AD who have average or above-average IQs are sub-categorized as having '**high-functioning autism**' (HFA) (Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009). **Asperger's Syndrome (AS)**, also known as Asperger's Disorder, has similar traits with HFA with the exception of the absence of significant delays in language or cognitive development. All other disorders that share similar ASD characteristics, but do not fall into a particular PDD category are classified as PDD-NOS (*DSM-IV-TR*, 2000).

For the purpose of this research, the use of the term ASD is meant to reference individuals diagnosed with autistic disorder, PDD-NOS, AS, or HFA. The following information discusses the issues that span the entire academic system (pre-collegiate and post-secondary). As students with ASD approach higher levels of education, a greater concentration of students subcategorized into the HFA and AS area of the ASD spectrum is found. Although ASD is used interchangeably with all of the autism diagnoses through this research, specific subcategories such as HFA or AS will be incorporated as needed.

Transition refers to the process and all issues relating to a student's movement from one academic category to another. The academic grades are separated into the following categories: early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary.

Legislation

The pervasive impact of ASDs is markedly reflected in current federal legislation. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act Amended (ADAA, amended in 2008), Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA, previously Higher Education Act), and Combating Autism Act have helped to establish fundamental models of support for children on the spectrum. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 has had the most significant impact on academic transitions for students with ASD (Stodden & Mruzek, 2010).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally enacted in 1975 as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, is considered the landmark legislation establishing resources and models of support for students with disabilities in the education system. The IDEA was reauthorized in 1997 to focus on transition services that help prepare the students for employment and independent living. Transition services were defined as “...a coordinated set of activities designed with an outcome-oriented process to promote the child’s movement from school to postschool activities” (Etscheidt, 2006). The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA redefined transition services as a “result-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child (p. 28)”. The Act authorizes spending for special education services along with specific parameters to be followed by states accepting the funds.

The IDEA mandates and subsequent revisions have highlighted the importance of transition planning for students with disabilities. Individualized planning for students is addressed through the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IFSP is an IDEA required document to secure early intervention services for children under the age of 3. The IFSP describes the child’s current needs and situation and delineates the intervention and services needed to support the child’s development. The IFSP is developed by a team which consists of the child’s parents, the services coordinator and any other members involved with the intervention process (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Similar to the IFSP, the IEP is a document that describes the special education services needed for children age 3 and beyond. The IEP consists of a variety of requirements such as student evaluation, plan development, progress assessment, and IEP meetings for the IEP team. The IEP team consists of the special education and general education teacher, the parents, school system representative, transitions services agency representative, and specialists who can interpret evaluation results or have other expertise regarding the student (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In an effort to encourage more consistent postsecondary success for students with disabilities, the 2004 revision requires the individualized education program (IEP) to plan for the transition to postsecondary actions and to help the students achieve their postsecondary goals (Etscheidt, 2006).

Although the IEP allows for specific and detailed planning customized for each student's needs, the intensive criteria and multitude of team members often make IEP development a time intensive process often complicated by lack of understanding and comprehension of common goals between parents and other IEP team members. Understanding possible trends in parent perceptions and concerns regarding ASD transitions may be useful in making IEP meetings more efficient by helping the team understand concerns from the parents' point of view.

Significance of Research

A review of the current literature shows the majority of ASD transition research is categorized by academic stages. Specifically, these academic stages fall into the

categories of early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. The parameters of grant and governmental funding, logistical and participant accessibility current literature have generally been categorized by academic stages. Identification of trends among academic transition stages may help to simplify the transition planning process. Although a variety of transition-planning tools are in place, identification of evaluation tools at transitions stages may also impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the transition planning process more seamless.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the current literature reveals a lack of research on trends or variables in parental perception of their children with ASD at different academic transitional stages. Often, transitional research is either conducted on a specific academic or age group, e.g, elementary or junior high level students.

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).

Publications were 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.

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.

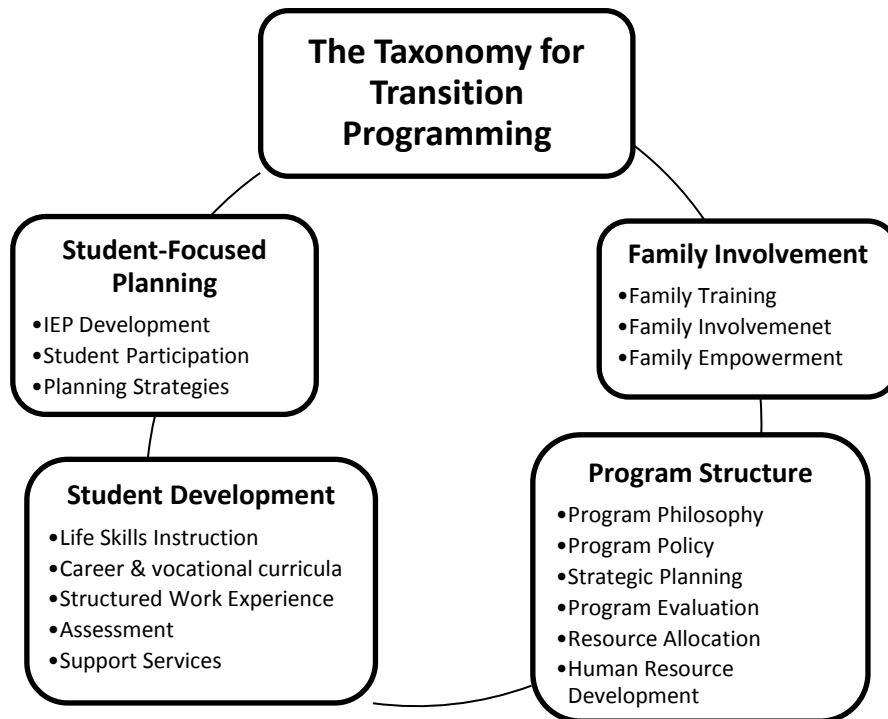
Taxonomy for Transitioning Programming

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 (2003). 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). The diagram below delineates the primary elements within each category.

Figure 1. The Taxonomy for Transition Programming



(Kohler, 2003)

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

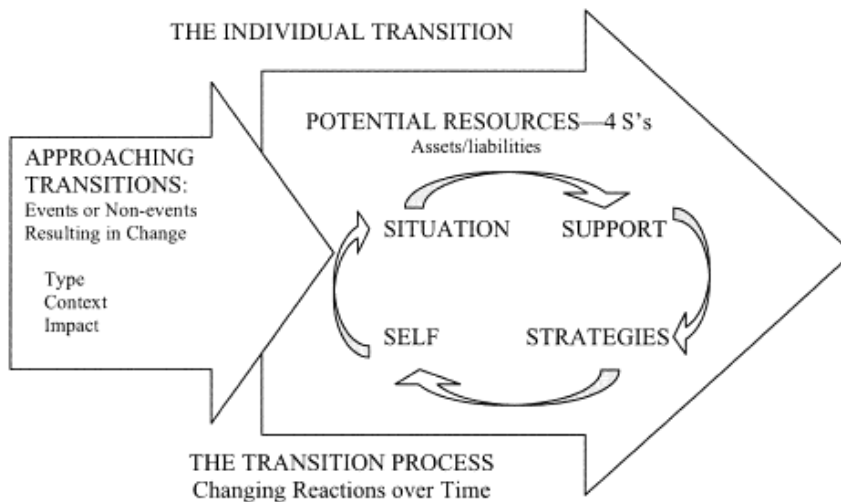
third step is planning transition focused-education, during which plans are develop to incorporate the strengths and address the needs (Kohler, 2003).

Schlossberg Transition Theory

The Schlossberg Transition Theory 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.

Figure 2. THE TRANSITION FRAMEWORK:

The Individual in Transition



(Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2006)

The model 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 postsecondary 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 (Field & Hoffman), further establishing self-determination as a cornerstone element in special education. According to Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & 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).

The theory of self-determination examines the role of intrinsic needs and extrinsic motivations on human choices and goals (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Self-determination theory delineates three necessary elements required for self-determination skills to be translated into success: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Environments that satisfy and support an individual's psychological need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness often create exceptional motivational conditions. Such conditions foster an individual's self-determination skills and maximize the individual's potential for success (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

The process of becoming self-determined is complicated and gradual for all individuals. For most young people, self-determination is a skill that is developed and learned through life experiences and personal insight. Self-awareness and social insight are two key factors that determine the success of self-determination development. The process of becoming self-determined takes time and often requires facilitation from an authority figure (parents, teachers, counselors) to help the young adult navigate and comprehend the concepts self-determination (Fullerton & Coyne, 1999).

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 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).

Although the importance of self-determination development for students with ASD is widely recognized, the process of developing self-determination skills in students with ASD is much more complex. The autism phenotype poses an inherent barrier to the development of self-determination skills. Students on the spectrum often think differently (Fullerton & Coyne, 1999) and encounter socio-emotional challenges that impede their comprehension of self-determination and life planning concepts. Despite the challenges of developing self-determination skills in students with ASD, the impact of self-determination skills on the success of academic transitions is undeniable.

The following review focuses on the current trends in transitional research in each respective academic group: early childhood and elementary school, secondary school, and post-secondary activities.

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 the 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: 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 as follows:

Table 1. Early Childhood Transition Planning

Child's Age	Mandatory actions by the Agency, ie. State Early State service coordinator	Recommendations for effective practice
By 2 years	Transition steps are included on the individualized family service plan (IFSP)	Obtain parental consent/release to exchange information between the sending and receiving agencies.
Between 2 years 3 months and 2 years 9 months	Notify the family of an IFSP/transition conference within the next 3 months	Obtain current medical and developmental information. Discuss with the family the information to be shared about the child: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family priorities and concerns related to the transition • Current developmental

		<p>information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Equipment needs • Current Services
30 days later	An IFSP/transition conference is scheduled at a mutually agreed-on date.	The time and location of the IFSP/transition are determined by the preferences of the family. The conference includes all appropriate agency personnel.
At 2 years 9 months or earlier	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.	Other attendees may include friends or advocated invited by the family, a community preschool teacher, and other agency personnel as appropriate.
2 years 10 months	The assessment plan is completed and signed by the agency and family, beginning the 50-day timeline to the IEP meeting.	Assessments are coordinated with other agencies (e.g., regional center)
By 3 years	An IEP meeting is held to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	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.
At 3 years	The IEP is in effect and services begin as indicated on the IEP.	

(California Department of Education, 2001, p.17-19, 47-48)

The transition from preschool to kindergarten and elementary school is often viewed as a more “natural” transition in that the student 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 will include 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 meeting takes place to reevaluate the needs of the child beginning at 3 years of age and will serve 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 & 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 & 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, Kamens, Corman, DiNardo, Totaro, & Rockoff, 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).

The perspective of an adult with HFA often helps researchers evaluate potential needs of young adults with HFA. Hurlbutt and Chalmers (2002) interviewed three adults with HFA to determine if common themes would emerge. Although limited in scope, the study yields ample guidelines and advice for future post-secondary students and transition program administrators. All three subjects had attended college during the early stages of autism research, thus forcing them to develop their own methods of coping. Common themes were choice of majors and jobs related to their focused interests and the importance of their support system, mainly consisting of family. The generalization and repetition of this study would develop insight into potential transitional issues based on the “hindsight” of adults with HFA.

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 et al. 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.

Studies also show that positive relationships are central to the development of self-determination skills. Since self-determination skills have been proven to have a positive impact on successful transitions, the fostering of positive relationships plays an important role in a successful transition (Field & Hoffman, 2012). Thus, a positive parent-child relationship over the years can help foster strong self-determination skills in an ASD child that will encourage successful transitions in the child's life.

According to the National Research Council (2001), all current ASD intervention programs have some incorporation of the parent component. Research shows that parenting styles utilizing behavioral and psychological controls are shown to have the most prominent and direct impact on a child's

academic achievement (Brown & Shrinidhi, 2008). Although the extent and type of parent involvement varies with each program (NRC, 2001), the combination of incorporating parental controls within ASD intervention programs suggests that parents of ASD students have substantial influence over the child's academic aspirations and perceptions. Moreover, since all of the programs address the needs of young children who have yet to develop the cognitive and reflective skills necessary for introspective personal insight, parental perspectives often become the main source of insight. Thus, the parental perspective on academic transitions for ASD students provides researchers a unique, crucial, and sometimes singular insight into the needs of the ASD student.

Why is the ASD Parent's Perspective Necessary?

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 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 postsecondary ASD transition planning.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methodology utilized in this research. It should be noted that the mixed methodology employed in this study was designed to complement the multi-faceted nature of the research questions. Since the scope of this study requires the analysis of results from a variety of existing literature and studies, the methodology used for this research is a *qualitative meta-study*. A meta-study is a research method that analyses data, methods, theories, and findings of previous researches and studies, and then combines and synthesizes all of the gathered information to formulate new insights and explanations (Paterson, 2001). This methodology was specifically chosen for this study in hopes of uncovering trends and concepts that otherwise would not be uncovered by other research methods and designs. Although a qualitative meta-study may not be the most commonly utilized methodology, this approach an appropriate methodology to help develop theories and explanation in an otherwise overlooked area of ASD study.

Research perspective

A qualitative research perspective was applied throughout this study. A qualitative study, in its most fundamental form, is an attempt to investigate and understand various aspects of human behavior. Although qualitative studies encompass a wide array of research strands, all strands strive to study and interpret phenomena in a naturalistic setting (Denzin, 1994). The parameters of a

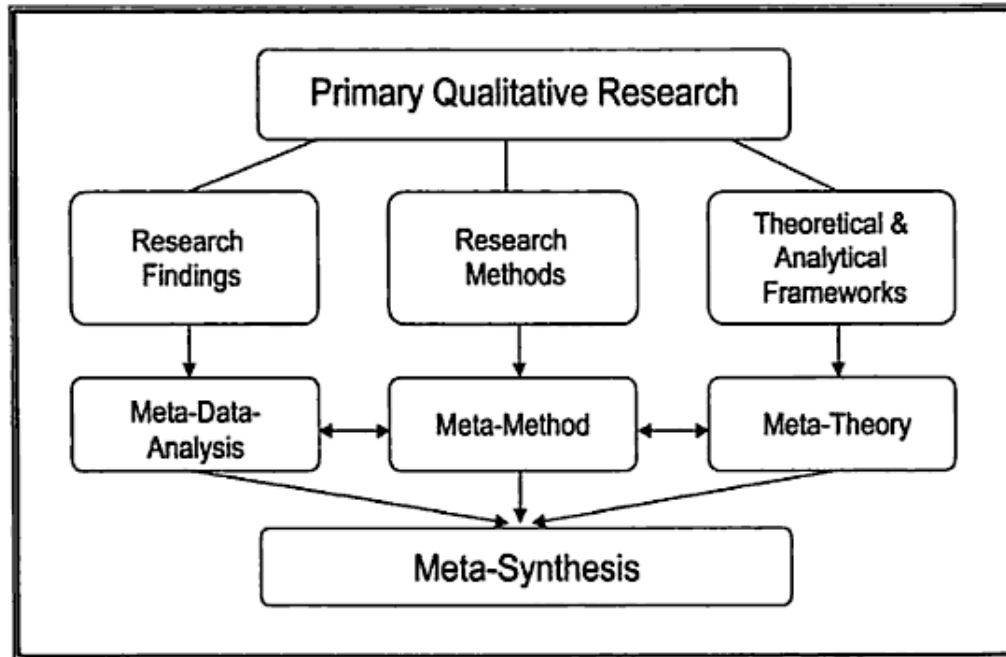
qualitative research perspective are thus appropriately aligned with the research objective of identifying and understanding the phenomena of possible trends in the perspective of parents of ASD students during milestone academic transition periods.

Research Design: Meta-Study Process Outline

To understand the research design for this study, it is first crucial to understand the individual research processes of a meta-study. The first process consists of the **selection and appraisal of primary research**, which is similar to the data collection aspect of an experimental design. Specific criteria are applied to all reviewed primary qualitative research to determine whether or not the research will be considered part of the data pool.

Once data has been collected from primary research, the next few processes are **meta-data-analysis, meta-method, and meta-theory**. These processes identify, compile, and deconstruct comprehensive analytical strategies, methodological characteristics and theoretical frameworks, respectively. The final process is the **meta-synthesis**, which consists of the identification and creation of new theories, trends, and interpretations of a phenomenon based on the information and data acquired from the primary qualitative research.

Figure 3. Meta-Study Outline



(Paterson, 2001)

Selection and Appraisal of Primary Research

Using selection and appraisal of primary research as the method of data collection compliments the overall methodology of meta-study for this research. Choosing this collection method was also a logical evolution from the information yielded from the literature review previously presented in Chapter 2, which yielded an abundance of research on categorically-specific academic transitions. The selection and appraisal of primary research as the data collection method serves as an initial assessment that will enable 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, PScyINFO 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 indicated. 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 has been compiled, the process of meta-data analysis compares and contrasts the data from each individual research. First and foremost, the primary data will be categorized by age and/or academic group to better organize the data for analysis. Next, meta-data analysis will be used to examine and detail the similarities and differences in parental perspective on ASD academic transitions in each article. Recurrent similarities and differences will be documented and categorized for further subsequent analysis. Once all of the articles have been analyzed and documented, hypotheses regarding the nature of the similarities and differences between the articles can be 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 is to determine how the qualitative research methods used in the studies have impacted and influenced the overall results. In addition,

meta-method is 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 consists 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 includes reviewing the primary research and documenting the theoretical perspectives and the main theories used in each article. The next step will be 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 is 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 consists of synthesizing the main insights from the previous procedures of meta-data analysis, meta-method, and meta-theory. There is a two part goal for meta-synthesis for this specific research. The first goal is 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 is to synthesize a theory explaining the phenomenon of the trend or pattern within parental perspectives of ASD academic transitions.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research seeks to answer two questions: 1) Do trends exist in parent perspectives regarding ASD academic transitions? 2) Do parent perceptions of the importance of specific transitional program elements evolve or shift during different academic transitional periods? This chapter identifies any trends in parental perspectives within each academic transition

period. Then the chapter will utilize any trends in parental perspectives to identify and discuss any shifts in importance of transitional program elements throughout the transition periods.

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 (Appendix A). The following table shows the recurring themes in the transition to elementary education articles:

Table 2. Transition to Elementary Education

Meta-Data Analysis	Meta-Theory	Meta-Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are interested in placement in elementary schools • Pre-school teachers are very much part of the transition • Elementary staff not as involved • Transition is structured 	Grounded Theory	Qualitative

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 between the parents and the schools were vital to transition success (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010; Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2004; Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 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.

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 (Appendix B). The following table shows the recurring themes in the transition from elementary to secondary education articles:

Table 3. Transition from Elementary to Secondary Education

Meta-Data Analysis	Meta-Theory	Meta-Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents are interested in social acclimation and peer acceptance• Students' self-esteem and coping skills are important to transition success	Grounded Theory	Qualitative method

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. (Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerri, & Smith, 2006; Dillon & Underwood, 2012).

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 (Appendix C). The following table shows the recurring themes in the transition to post-secondary education articles:

Table 4. Transition to Post-Secondary Education

Meta-Data Analysis	Meta-Theory	Meta-Method
*most parents were unaware of IEP post-secondary transition opponent *independence and social skills a top priority *work potential and preparation a top priority *individual planning very important	Grounded Theory	Qualitative

Similar to the other academic transitions, the meta-theory for the research on transition to post-secondary education is grounded theory and the meta-method is qualitative method. The meta-data analysis of the research on parental perspective of the transition to post-secondary education yielded quite a few recurring issues: most of the parents were interested in the development of the

student's independence and social skills along with work skills development. Although individual planning for post-secondary education was a top-priority, parents were generally not aware of the post-secondary transition element in the IEP (Hanish, 2011; Fox, 2011).

The meta-synthesis of the articles on parental perspective of transition to post-secondary education indicates a trend in which the parents were more interested in the personal development of their child, specifically in the area of social and independence skills. The research conducted on parental perspective of transition to post-secondary education generally utilizes a qualitative methodology and grounded theory.

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. These shifts and trends will be discussed and summarized in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The 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-structuration 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 (Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerri, & Smith, 2006; Dillon & Underwood, 2012). 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).

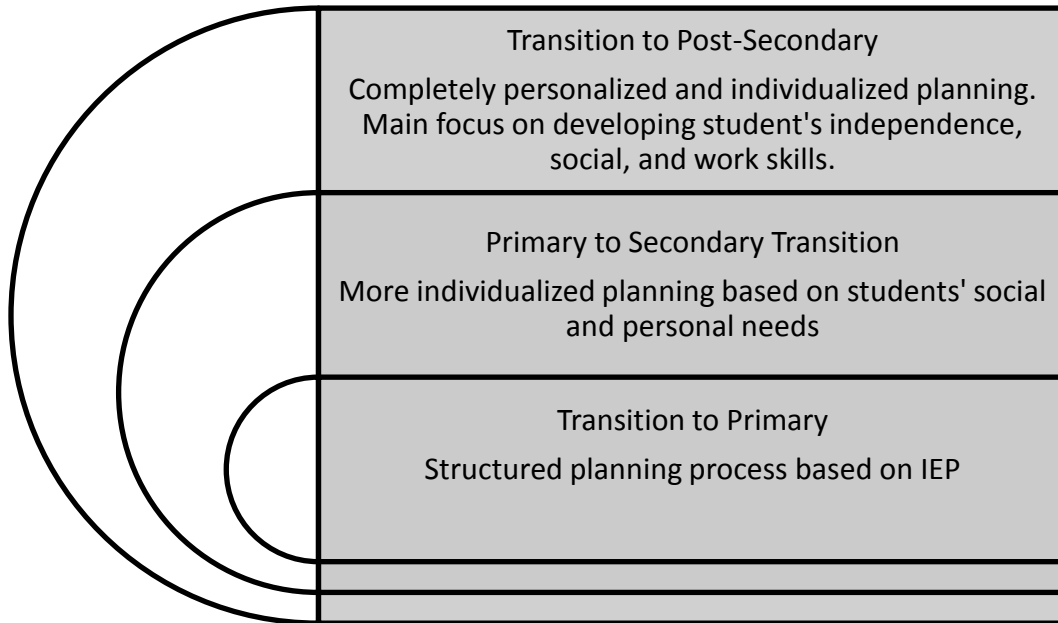
The overall trends across each academic transition period indicate an overall trend in shifts in importance of transitional program elements throughout

the transition periods. In the early education and elementary transition phases, parent perception is mainly focused on securing the basic transitional needs 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 (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 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.

Figure 4. Trends in Parent Perspectives



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 maybe 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.

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APPENDIX A
TRANSITION TO ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Authors	Research Findings	Research Methods	Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks
<p>Transitions: Perspectives from Parents of Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder</p> <p>Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007</p> <p>k/1st/2nd graders</p>	<p>*Transitions that parents considered to be effective were child-centered</p> <p>*communication between school and home was a vital link for successful transitions</p> <p>*preparation for transitions began with an understanding of the child</p> <p>*parents identified barriers to successful transitions</p> <p>*parents understood the different types of transitions but focused on horizontal transitions</p> <p>*parents identified effective transition strategies for their children</p>	<p>Qualitative research</p> <p>Interview and collective case study method</p>	<p>Grounded Theory</p>
<p>Quintero & McIntyre, 2010</p> <p>Kindergarten Transition Preparation: A Comparison of Teacher and Parent Practices for Children with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities</p> <p>Transition into Kindergarten</p>	<p>Preschool teachers engaged in more transition preparation practices than elementary school staff</p> <p>Schools and families engage in a set of standard transition practices</p> <p>Parents wished to have more involvement with elementary school during transition</p>	<p>Qualitative; The Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition questionnaire (FEIT; McIntyre et al. 2007)</p>	<p>Grounded Theory</p>
<p>Forest, Horner, Lewis-Palmer & Todd, 2004</p> <p>Transition for Young Children with Autism From Preschool to Kindergarten</p>	<p>Transition phases and activities rated top importance by parents:</p> <p>*Readiness skills for proposed placements are identified and developed into specific instructional goals for the year</p> <p>*an individual identified as the transition contact person for parents and teachers</p> <p>*classroom visits are arranged by contact person to the multiple placement options that are</p>	<p>Qualitative; Face to face interview using Elements for Transition to Kindergarten (ETK) a 26 item interview developed by authors</p>	<p>Grounded Theory</p>

	identified/multiple placement options are visited *related services for placement are identified Readiness skills for selected placement identified and developed in specific instructional goals for the rest of the year *child visits kindergarten classroom		
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APPENDIX B

TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY EDUCATION

Authors	Research Findings	Research Methods	Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks
<p>Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerri, & Smith, 2006</p>	<p>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</p> <p>What does not work: Change in teachers and teaching styles, different environment, negative teacher attitude and lack of objectivity</p> <p>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 professionals.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Qualitative; Interviews</p>	<p>Grounded Theory</p>
<p>Dillion & Underwood, 2012 Parental Perspectives of Students with ASD Transitionin</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Mixed-methods design that integrated and drew inferences from data captured and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative</p>	<p>Grounded Theory Approach</p>

<p>g from Primary to Secondary School in the UK</p>	<p>transition. Self-coping skills in child is important Communication between parent and school was important</p>	<p>data methodologies. Focused group interviews In-depth interviews</p>	
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APPENDIX C

TRANSITION TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Authors	Research Findings	Research Methods	Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks
Camarena & Sarigiani, 2009 Postsecondary Educational Aspirations of High-Functioning Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Parents	Think a lot about future and college Career preparation is a big purpose of college Independence and personal development, a big concern Perceived obstacles students skills capacity for success; Biggest nonacademic concern-student's social skills and need for peer support and mentoring *recommended supports to help college transition: academic accommodations, coursework curriculum improvements, transition planning/orientation, trained specialists/aides, social skills/peers/mentoring Individualized treatment is a must	Qualitative; Interviews and open ended questions	Grounded Theory; Coding and "constant comparative method" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)
Hanish, 2011 Postsecondary Transition in Individuals on the Autism Spectrum	Postsecondary transitions would help ASD students transition to adulthood Most parents believe the young adults would have an interest in postsecondary education programs *most parents were unaware of IEP post-secondary transition opponent *lack of information regarding transition as a hindrance *parents were almost unanimously interested in postsecondary program for students *importance of program components: structured social activities, employment options, independent living skills, social skills, work skills *overall social and work skill development were most important components	Qualitative; Survey and open ended questions	Grounded theory
Fox, 2011 Expectations and the Post Transition of Young Adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder to Post-Secondary Education	Important/interested topics: *Most think educational opportunities would help students transition to adulthood *most think it is very likely their child will enroll in post-secondary program *Important components in post-secondary programs: Structured social activities Individualized curriculum Focus on employment after completion of program Developing independent, work & social skills *most parents were unaware of IEP post-secondary transition opponent	Qualitative; Survey and Open ended questions	Grounded theory

