

Challenges & Opportunities in Transitioning from Early Years to School Age for Children with ASD in Canada

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Transitions from Early Years to School

- It is well known that transitions for children with ASD can be difficult and can lead to confusion and anxiety for child and family
- Planning for transitions is critical

Two Types of Transitions

- **Vertical Transitions:** early intervention programs/ preschool to school age programs; yearly grade changes etc.
- **Horizontal transitions:** movements from one situation to another that occur on a daily or weekly basis and are individual or specific; are not as predictable as vertical transitions.
 - Successful transition planning can result in positive effects on both academic and social skills

Stoner et al. (2007)

- Qualitatively examined the perspectives of parents of young children with ASD concerning transitions (vertical and horizontal).
- Collective case study method through interviews
- Eight participants/ 4 married couples whose children had ASD and were in preschool or primary system;
- Age of children = 6 to 8 years;
- location Midwestern city, US.
- 24 interviews – 3 per person over 9 months

Stoner et al. (2007): Six Themes

1. Effective transitions were child-centred;
2. Communication between school and home was the vital link to success;
3. Successful transitions begin with an understanding of the child;
4. Parents identified barriers to transitions;
5. Parents focused on horizontal transitions the most;
6. Parents identified effective transition strategies

Child-Centred

- Success occurred when education professionals understood their children;
- recognized what worked and what did not for their child; and
- used that knowledge to implement strategies

Communication

- a comprehensive communication plan followed the child from year to year
- the CHILD PROFILE FORM was completed by parents and teachers and given to subsequent teachers
 - establish TRUST between parents and teachers;
 - acknowledge parent input and recognize teacher experience
- a daily communication notebook was used

Understanding the Child

- Successful transitions occurred when the parent and the school worked together to develop a true understanding of the child's individual needs and how s/he deals with transitions

Barriers to Transitions (Stoner et al., 2007)

- lack of communication between child and education professional; between parent and teacher;
- Lack of recognition of the transition strategies;
- Lack of preparation on the part of the educational professional;
- Lack of appropriate training with regards to ASD

Effective Transition Strategies (Stoner et al., 2007)

- Child-centred and based on understanding child's individual needs;
- Using the three step strategy:
 - (1) IDENTIFY;
 - (2) OBSERVE; and
 - (3) EXPLORE
- Using a CHILD PROFILE planning tool
- Focused on Horizontal transitions in the day to day – use of Visual Strategies
- Parent involvement

Challenges reported by some families, service providers, and policy-makers across Canada

- Parents move to a much larger framework in the school system versus the preschool or home/early intervention setting;
- A philosophical change occurs when transitioning to the education system: Parents move from being the “Drivers” of their children’s programs to being “Partners” within a school-centred system

Challenges

- In EI many parents are in control of all aspects of their child's program – in the school the control shifts to the expertise of a school based team;
- Families are coming from an environment where it is all about the level of ASD specific training, experience and skill in the field to one that may be more generalist in nature

Challenges

- Parents are new to the system and may not understand what to expect; what is expected of them; where to get the knowledge to succeed, etc.

Challenges

- Start off on the right foot:
 - Parental Fear: hearing the “war stories” and not the “success stories;”
 - Families may enter the system ready to fight;
 - Possible attitude of school that “they know best” and have done it before;
 - Recognizing and acknowledging this is a two-way relationship – both parties need to come to it with an open mind

Challenges

- TRAINING NEEDS:
 - Need to increase access to ASD specific awareness and training for everyone from educational assistants to administration;
 - Recognition of when one needs assistance and how to get it;
- Many families wish to continue ABA intervention in school – but there are capacity and union issues
 - understanding that collective agreements may play a role in local staffing decisions
 - choosing aides on the basis of seniority rather than skill set that is required;

Challenges

- In BC the MEd funding (\$16,000) is not allocated to the individual child, but to the district who decides how the funds will be best utilized;
- School districts need to clearly explain the allocation of resources to support students with ASD– need for transparency;
- Everyone needs to understand the roles of the teacher, aide, school based team and community agencies/supports

Challenges

- May face a change in some specialized services when enter school;
- Service delivery silos – barriers to outside consultants collaborating effectively with education professionals;
- Transition to a different language between ministries can be confusing for families – Education talks about “education” and Early Years talks about “therapy”

Opportunities reported by some families, service providers, and policy-makers across Canada

- In many provinces they have protocols for transitioning students with special needs to the school system;
- Manitoba, for example, developed a handbook for Parents of children with special need in school called “Working together”
- Protocols and handbook allow parents access to information about the new system and outlines what is expected from schools

Opportunities

- Collaboration between Ministries
- In BC CYSN Framework for Action
 - MCFD, Education, Health
- In BC Youth Transition Protocol
 - MCFD, Health, Education, CLBC, Housing and Social Development
- In BC we have POPARD (Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders)

Opportunities

- Develop terms of reference to use between schools and outside agencies/organizations/service providers with expertise in ASD;
- QUOTE: “schools opening their doors and welcoming enhanced programming from ‘outside’ the traditional teaching realm....that would be amazing.”

Opportunities

- Some districts are engaging in *meaningful consultation* with parents concerning appropriate school-based instruction, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)
- Hewko v BC 2006
- But, there no blanket statement that schools are required to hire ABA-trained aides or incorporate ABA into an IEP
- Schools maintain instructional control over the child and schools have meaningful consultation with the parents and outside consultants
- Some districts are embracing the benefits of providing aides with training in ABA

Opportunities

- EARLY: Starting the transition process early early early
- Identifying children coming into the system early and requiring transition planning to start early (e.g., February in some jurisdictions)

Opportunities

- Overlapping the early intervention program with entrance to school so that the EI agency professionals and school personnel are able to work together in the school environment or vice versa
 - Parents report feeling more comfortable and “heard.”
 - The result is that the parent-school relationship starts off positively

Opportunities

- Providing a structure so that families do not have to tell their story over and over again to multiple professionals (e.g., CHILD PROFILE FORM);
- Training – increase access for ongoing training for all education professionals with regards to ASD
- Address accountability issue. For example, in the training and experience of the education professional

Opportunities

- Connecting families – in one district they bring together the new families with children with ASD entering the system and outline services and what to expect;
- One district has set up a mentor program – family to family and teacher to teacher, etc.

Punch-line – Essentials to Successful Transitions

- Families, outside agencies, teachers, aides, resource teachers, administrators, etc. who are open to ideas and who understand that there is a give and take relationship between families and schools;
- Ongoing communication between parents and educational professionals;
- Child-focused;

Punch-line – Essentials to Successful Transitions

- Developing collaborative and interactive relationships from the start;
- Utilizing visual strategies for both vertical and horizontal transitions;
- Building trust through the acknowledgement of parental expertise of their children

Quote from a Parent

“Don’t forget they are kids first,
not autism”



Reference

Stoner, J.B., Angell, M.E., House, J.J., & Jones Bock, S., (2007). Transitions: Perspectives from parents of young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 19*, 23-39.