

The Experiences of Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Transitioning from
Preschool to Kindergarten: A Qualitative Exploration

Alyssa Raposo

A Thesis

In the Department

of

Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Child Studies at

Concordia University

Montreal, QC, Canada

September 2024

© Alyssa Raposo, 2024

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Alyssa Raposo

Entitled: The Experiences of Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Transitioning
from Preschool to Kindergarten: A Qualitative Exploration

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Child Studies

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Date of examination: September 13th, 2024

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Saul Carliner

_____ Examiner
Dr. Harriet Petrakos

_____ Examiner
Dr. Elsa Lo

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Miranda D'Amico

Approved by _____
Dr. Sandra Chang-Kredl, Graduate Program Director

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science

Abstract

The Experiences of Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Transitioning from Preschool to Kindergarten: A Qualitative Exploration

Alyssa Raposo

The transition from preschool to kindergarten is a very exciting time in a child's life (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). This transition introduces the students to new changes in their environment, where they are exposed to new teachers, classmates, and responsibilities (Yamuchi, 2020). These new changes can affect children behaviourally, socially, and emotionally since preschool and kindergarten have very different dynamics. Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) tend to have more difficulty transitioning to kindergarten compared to neurotypical children, causing them to be more vulnerable during this change (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). This study explored the experiences of ten (10) parents with children with ASD during their children's transition to kindergarten from preschool. A semi-structured interview was used to understand their perspectives and the experiences of their child's transition to kindergarten. These questions explored their thoughts and feelings about their child's transitions, challenges, and successes. The findings found that participants had a lot of support from their child's daycare, but as they went to kindergarten, the amount of support decreased significantly. Participants who experienced successful transitions were due to the collaboration between parents, daycare, and school personnel, as well as intensive support and understanding of the child's needs. Several challenges included unsupportive teachers, a lack of resources from elementary schools, and unrepresentative IEPs. This study underscores the importance of collaboration among kindergarten teachers, parents, and daycare educators to facilitate the successful transition of children with ASD and assist children in preparation for kindergarten.

Acknowledgements

This extended journey has finally come to an end, and I would like to thank several people in helping me complete this thesis. First, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Miranda D'Amico, whose patience, knowledge, encouragement, and support helped me finish this thesis. Dr. D'Amico's kind heart and profound knowledge have helped guide me in this process and made it a pleasure and privilege to work with. I would like to extend my thanks to my committee members, Dr. Harriet Petrakos and Dr. Elsa Lo, who provided me with their insight and suggestions to guide me on the right track.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the parents who participated in my study. Without their participation, this thesis would not have been possible. Thank you for sharing your experiences and providing valuable perspectives.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends. To my parents, thank you for all that you have done for me and for giving me your support. To my partner, Anthony, thank you for your utmost encouragement and support and for always pushing me never to give up. To my best friends, Victoria and Katrina, thank you for your constant encouragement and support throughout this process and for listening to me discuss my ideas and thesis.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vii
List of Appendices	viii
Introduction.....	1
Transition to Kindergarten.....	2
Strategies for a Successful Transition to Kindergarten with Children with ASD.	10
Methodology.....	13
Setting and Recruitment.....	13
Participants.....	14
Procedure	16
Results.....	17
Qualitative Analysis.....	17
Findings	18
Children and families’ experiences at daycare.	19
Children and families’ experiences in kindergarten.	23
Children and families transition to school experience.	24
Variables that led to a successful transition.	27
The relationship between parent and teacher.....	31
Challenges that children and their families experience during the transition to kindergarten..	34

Discussion..... 43

 Limitations and Future Directions 53

 Implications and Conclusion..... 55

References..... 58

Appendices.....63

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....	14
---	----

List of Appendices

Appendix A.....	63
<i>Parental Consent Form</i>	
Appendix B.....	66
<i>Demographic Form</i>	
Appendix C.....	67
<i>Interview Questions</i>	
Appendix D.....	72
<i>Sample of Participant 1's Interview Transcript</i>	
Appendix E.....	75
<i>Sample of First Cycle coding</i>	

Introduction

The transition from preschool to kindergarten is a very exciting time in a child's life (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). This transition introduces the students to new changes in their environment, where they are exposed to new teachers, classmates, and responsibilities (Yamuchi, 2020). These new changes can affect children behaviourally, socially, and emotionally since preschool and kindergarten have very different dynamics. Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) tend to have more difficulty transitioning to kindergarten compared to neurotypical children, causing them to be more vulnerable during this change (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). They may have trouble with this change of environment or dynamics since they may be inflexible with their routines and tend to insist on sameness (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The prevalence rate for ASD has increased over the years to 1 in 44 children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). As more children with ASD enter the school system, it is essential that they have the support and resources to have a smooth transition (Fontil et al., 2020).

Transitioning to kindergarten from preschool may be challenging for children with ASD and their families (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). The families of children with ASD face challenges advocating for their children's needs and the stress of a new environment (Fontil et al., 2020). This is why it is imperative to understand their experiences to provide the proper support they need during this transition. A successful transition to kindergarten helps children integrate better into their new environment and decreases their social behavioural problems (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). This allows children to have more positive relationships with their peers and teachers.

It is crucial for children to have a successful and positive transition, as this affects their academic performances throughout elementary school.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of families with children with ASD during the children's transition to kindergarten from preschool. This study's aim was to better understand the families' perspectives on their experiences with their children's transition. The aim was to gain insight into families' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. This study can help educators and school board personnel better understand the challenges that families and children with ASD experience during their transitions to kindergarten. This can inform educators on how to prepare these children better to create a smoother, more positive transition for them and their families. This study explored the following research questions: 1. How do families' experiences with preschool compare to their experiences with the transition to kindergarten? 2. How do children with ASD experience their transition to kindergarten? 3. How do families with children with ASD experience and navigate their child's transition to kindergarten, and how are they impacted by this process? This study uses a phenomenological research approach. This research approach was chosen because the main focus is on the experiences of transitioning from preschool to kindergarten in families with children with ASD. Each family interviewed has gone through that transitional experience with their child with ASD. Their experiences were analyzed to provide an in-depth understanding of what they have gone through and the thoughts and feelings they had throughout.

Transition to Kindergarten

Transitioning to kindergarten is a significant period in a child's life as they experience many new changes in their new environment (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Depending on how the child adapts to their new environment, these new changes can affect their behaviour and

academic success in kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). In a study on how teachers viewed issues during the transition to kindergarten, it was found that only 50% of students had a successful transition, while the other half had problems adjusting to their new school (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000).

Children may have difficulties transitioning to kindergarten because of the immense difference between preschool and kindergarten (Yamuchi, 2020). According to Yamuchi's (2020) study that examined the difference between preschool and kindergarten through the teachers' perspectives, it was expressed that the differences in curriculum were potentially causing trouble transitioning to kindergarten. Preschool educators indicated that in preschool, they focus on children's social skills and development as part of their curriculum. This type of focus changes drastically in kindergarten, where teachers tend to focus on children's academic skills. Another difference explained by preschool teachers is that they are free to choose the program that fits the children's abilities and can put more emphasis on teaching through play (Yamuchi, 2020). Whereas kindergarten teachers must follow the school curriculum and meet specific learning goals, resulting in much less play. These differences make transitioning to kindergarten harder for some children to adapt (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). According to teachers, behavioural problems are the main issues that children have transitioning to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000).

Children may have difficulty adjusting to a new school due to separation anxiety and new changes (Wong et al., 2016). In Wong et al.'s (2016) study on the children's perspectives of their transition to school, the researchers looked at stress during the transition to school. They found that children had many stressors during this transition, including separation anxiety from their parents. They also felt stressed adapting to the new routines and a new school while making

new friends. It can be difficult for children to adjust to a new school due to the potential stress of adapting to a new environment as they encounter social stress like bullying and having fights with their friends.

One way to have a successful transition is to prepare children better to transition to kindergarten through pre-kindergarten programs by managing their behaviours and improving social skills (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). These programs help children build better relationships with their friends and teachers, which makes adjusting to kindergarten easier. A strong support system also helps children successfully transition to kindergarten (Wong et al., 2016). When teachers and parents listen to children's concerns and collaborate to build a strong support system, children will feel less stressed about the new challenges of starting school and be more confident. Another way to help children with their transition is through the collaboration of preschool and kindergarten teachers (Purtell et al., 2020). According to Purtell et al. (2020), the likelihood of a successful transition increases when preschool and kindergarten teachers collaborate to create individualized educational plans for each student. An ideal way to achieve this is by having the kindergarten teachers visit the preschool teacher's class to get to know the children and better prepare for their needs for kindergarten. However, due to many restraints and limitations existing in the school system, such as lack of time and resources, many teachers do not often collaborate to implement these practices and interventions (Fontil et al., 2020). Often, schools do not seem to enforce interventions on successful transitions as they usually wait to see how a child is performing during their transition and then only intervene if needed. This approach can result in less successful transitions. An additional way to adjust to their new environment is by previewing their teachers and what they will be learning before transitioning to school. D'Amico et al. (2021) conducted a study on the effects of a program that was designed

to help children transition to school better. The program “Countdown to Kindergarten” was made to meet the needs of the families and children transitioning to kindergarten and provide resources for those in need. It gave families and their children a preview of what kindergarten will be like. They gave a preview of the school routines, their teachers, and the types of subjects they would learn. The results showed that teachers found this program positively impacted the children’s readiness for kindergarten and improved their social and emotional skills. The children’s transition was more successful as they were already familiar with what to expect in kindergarten. Targeted interventions like this one can help children transition more smoothly to kindergarten.

Transition to Kindergarten Among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Transitioning to kindergarten from preschool is difficult for children, but it is especially difficult for children with autism spectrum disorder (Forest et al., 2004). Individuals with ASD have deficits in social communication and interaction (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and they can have difficulty conversing and responding to social interactions with their peers. Connecting with peers is an important part of school and can support a successful transition (Marsh et al., 2017). However, it is harder for children with ASD to make friends, which is why social interaction skills can also be beneficial as a transition intervention (Chen et al., 2020). Children with ASD may also have deficits in developing and maintaining relationships, therefore causing difficulty making and interacting with new friends in kindergarten (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). As children with ASD have difficulty with changes in their routines and interests, the environmental and social changes of the school, teachers and peers could cause the transition to be suboptimal (Fontil et al., 2020). Alongside this, their difficulties in communication may cause children with ASD not to build positive relationships with their teachers, which is key to a successful transition (Kim, 2022).

Fontil and Petrakos (2015) studied the experiences of Canadian and immigrant families with children with ASD and interviewed parents of children with ASD before and after their children transitioned to kindergarten to understand their experiences and challenges. The researchers found that one of the challenges children with ASD have during their transition is the lack of classroom support. Elementary schools lack the funds and resources to provide specialized educators to support these children with their difficulties. Not only do the students lack the proper support from the school, but teachers have also expressed that they do not receive help to support their students with ASD (Fontil et al., 2020). Another issue Fontil and Petrakos (2015) found through their interviews with parents was that schools do not seem to have much experience helping children with special needs. This affects how they provide children with ASD the proper education and resources they need to succeed. Ultimately, as children with ASD enter kindergarten and receive fewer one-on-one services, face many transitions throughout the day, and deal with more complex socializing among peers, this can have a negative effect on their transition to kindergarten (Fontil et al., 2020). In some instances, though teachers claim not to receive support from their school to aid their students with special needs, current and future teachers do tend to also lack knowledge and education on children with ASD (Fontil et al., 2020; Jellinek et al., 2022). Jellinek et al. (2022) studied preservice teachers' perspectives on the transition to kindergarten for children with ASD, wanting to understand preservice teachers' knowledge and understanding of children with ASD and what type of practices should be in place to help ASD students with the transition. The researchers found that the preservice teachers had many misconceptions about ASD and did not have a lot of knowledge about children with ASD. Many of the preservice teachers believed that ASD was only an intellectual disability, and some of them believed that medication could be used to lessen the symptoms. They also did not

know who would be responsible for the transition process. The misconceptions and misunderstandings that these preservice teachers had can lead to children with ASD not receiving the right support for their transition. In the same study, those participants who had higher education and took special education courses had much more knowledge than those with other teaching degrees. Research has shown that there is a lack of understanding of the transition strategies that should be in place when educating teachers, which may cause issues during a child with ASD's transition to kindergarten (Chen et al., 2020). Educating teachers-to-be in their university courses or before they start teaching children with ASD can better prepare them in their classrooms. They will then be able to provide adequate support to their students when they transition to kindergarten (Jellinek et al., 2022).

Family Experiences During the Transition to Kindergarten

Apart from children experiencing a challenging transition, the children's families may also experience their own set of limitations and challenges (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Parents often feel additional stress due to their children's transition because of the new school environment and teachers (Starr et al., 2016). Parents with children with ASD face additional challenges with their children's transition because they often need to advocate for their children's needs consistently while lacking adequate support (Fontil et al., 2020). Parents have expressed the differences they experienced between their child's preschool versus their elementary school, and one major difference was how preschool and kindergarten teachers communicated with the family (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999; Yamauchi, 2020). Fontil and Petrakos' (2015) study found that the parents of children with ASD had better and more positive relationships with their children's preschool teachers as compared to their children's kindergarten teachers. This type of relationship then helped the parents feel

more comfortable approaching the preschool teacher to address their children's educational learning and support (Fontil and Petrakos, 2015). Some of the parents interviewed also indicated they felt they were supported more by daycare workers and felt less judgment talking about their child's needs compared to their child's kindergarten teacher. Similarly, in Starr et al.'s (2016) study on the transition to kindergarten for children with ASD, the researchers conducted a focus group among parents and teachers, and they found that parents often feel disconnected from their children's elementary school. The focus group findings indicated that parents felt that they did not have much communication with the school and felt that they had to watch what they said to not negatively affect their child's programming and school experience.

Additionally, if there is a language barrier between the parent and the school, it makes it harder to advocate for their child and express their needs and concerns (Starr et al., 2016). Kim's (2022) study on Korean American parents with children with ASD transitioning to kindergarten also found a challenge in building relationships with their child's teacher due to linguistic barriers. Parents were given a survey to assess the challenges they faced with their child's transition as Korean immigrants. Due to cultural and language barriers, they found it difficult to understand American school systems, which made them reluctant to be more vocal about their child's needs and take on a more active role in their child's school life. Even though many of the parents lived in the United States for over ten years and spoke English, they still felt as if there was a language barrier regarding advocating for their child's education.

Children with ASD usually have accommodations and intervention plans that they need to follow to be successful at school (Fontil et al., 2020). Children with ASD often receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) when they start school, which outlines the goals and objectives of the child for that given school year (Ruble et al., 2010). An IEP is a plan given to

all children receiving special education services. It is used to help teachers and school personnel understand the child's needs regarding resources and support and outlines how they can achieve their goals. When children with ASD transition to kindergarten, it makes many parents nervous since they are unsure if their children will receive the support they need (Fontil et al., 2020). In the study by Stoner et al. (2007), parents reported that their children only received their IEPs 6-8 weeks after the start of school, and many school personnel had not reviewed their child's IEP. The participants emphasized that an individualized approach to their child's transition is beneficial; however, if the school professionals did not read the IEP, parents were concerned that their children might not be accommodated for their unique needs. Although IEPs are important in supporting children with ASD, studies have shown there needs to be an improvement in how we develop a child's IEP to fit their individual needs best (Ruble et al., 2010; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010).

McIntyre et al.'s (2010) study on family concerns regarding the kindergarten transition of children with special needs compared to the general population gave 132 parents and caregivers a survey with questions on kindergarten transition. The researchers found that parents of children with special needs were more concerned about their child's behaviour and preparedness for kindergarten when compared to parents of children in general education. Thus, it is essential for teachers to provide proper support and accommodations for children, especially special needs children, in order for them to have a successful transition. However, many parents feel that schools are not providing this type of support for their children (Starr et al., 2016). Many parents feel that schools do not have enough resources and lack support staff that can offer extra help in the classroom to ensure their child transitions properly (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). Parents also have felt that their children's schools do not provide the same resources and educational

opportunities as their daycares did for them in preschool. In Fontil and Petrakos' (2015) study, parents claimed they felt guilty and believed that they did not do enough for their children when they lacked support from the school. Parents were also worried about teachers' knowledge and experience with children with ASD since many parents did not receive any help or additional support from their child's teachers during their child's transition and had an overall negative experience. However, the children who received support before their transition had a very positive experience as they had an easier time adapting to their classes. Marsh et al.'s (2017) study on the transition to kindergarten for children with ASD suggests that when children receive school-based behavioural interventions and support, they develop better language and cognitive skills.

Strategies for a Successful Transition to Kindergarten with Children with ASD.

Denkyirah and Agbeke (2010) conducted a study on strategies for children with ASD transitioning to kindergarten, where they gave surveys to 306 preschool teachers to determine the best strategies that can help children with ASD transition to kindergarten successfully. The research found that teachers and parents should collaborate to discuss ways to support their children and help solve any other possible problems. Teachers and parents should prepare for the transition beforehand so they can identify any challenges their child may face and know how to resolve them. Denkyirah and Agbeke (2010) also stated that school intervention programs should be introduced to help parents and children with their transition process. These strategies can help families lessen their worries, along with increasing the chances of the child having a successful transition to kindergarten. This would also allow parents the opportunity to build relationships with the school and be more involved in their children's transition. However, despite these strategies being shown to be beneficial to both children and their parents, they are not

implemented as often as they should be (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Forest et al., 2004).

Quintero and McIntyre (2011) also studied kindergarten transition preparation for children with ASD, surveying 96 parents and teachers. The researchers found that even if a transition practice was implemented, the plan was very generic and often did not fit each child's needs. The parents of these children stated that kindergarten teachers attempted to help the children settle into their classes at the beginning of the school year; however, they did not continue to implement any transition interventions during the rest of the school year. Parents also reported that teachers did not schedule regular meetings with them to discuss their child's well-being or adjustment to kindergarten. Similar to Pianta et al.'s (2001) study on kindergarten transition intervention, the study looked at how collaboration between parents and the school can be improved to better support children's transition to school. The study's results indicated that when families and schools collaborate, this improves the children's transition to kindergarten, and they adjust better to their new school. The study's results further suggest that when parents and educators collaborate before the child's transition to school, the children are better prepared academically and socially. The study's transition intervention also improved parents' and teachers' communication, which allowed them to discuss the children's progress and how to support their needs best. By doing this, it improves the level of support the child will receive during their transition. As the families and teachers learned to trust each other, the parents were more likely to participate in their child's transition with the school if they felt like they could trust the school personnel to support their children's learning.

Another strategy that can increase transition success is when families and teachers collaborate and communicate well. Parents feel that building relationships with their child's teachers is crucial to ensure a successful transition to kindergarten (Kim, 2020). In Starr et al.'s

(2016) study, parents who were able to establish relationships with school staff in their child's new school experienced less stress and worries about the transition than did parents who were not able to establish a relationship. Parents were pleased when they met their child's teacher before the school year to get to know them and discuss ways to help their child's learning and behavioural needs. This is one way to help families with children with ASD during their kindergarten transition. Communication between parents and teachers is what they both believe is important and essential to the success of their child's transition (Chen et al., 2020). In a study by Stoner et al. (2007) on the perspectives of parents and educators regarding the transitions of young children with ASD, the results indicated that parents and teachers felt that communication between the two parties is crucial for a child's successful transition. As they interviewed parents, they found that those who had a positive and open relationship with their child's school felt more confident and supported during this transition. Some parents had to advocate for their children's needs to ensure they received the proper support. Parents felt like they constantly needed to advocate for their children to transition successfully to ensure that the school provided them with services. Both parents and teachers believe that discussing the child's character and ensuring they receive the proper type of support can better help the teacher support their child during their transition to kindergarten (Marsh et al., 2017). However, these implications and types of communication are not implemented often. Parents also stated that parental involvement in their child's transitions is a factor in successful transition (Stoner et al., 2007). Those who were not as involved often had a more difficult transition.

Based on the above review, this study aims to understand families' experiences during their child's transition to kindergarten. The transition to kindergarten can be a stressful time for families with children with autism. Parents have expressed their concerns over the lack of

resources, support, and relationships from their child's school, which makes it difficult to have a successful transition (Star et al., 2016; Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). Research seems to indicate that parent-teacher relationships and the collaboration between teachers, schools and parents can increase the possibility of having a successful transition to kindergarten (Quintero & McIntre, 2011; Denkyriah & Agbeke, 2010).

The Present Study

The study focused on the following research questions: 1. How do families' experiences with preschool compare to their experiences with the transition to kindergarten? 2. How do children with ASD experience their transition to kindergarten? 3. How do families with children with ASD experience and navigate their child's transition to kindergarten, and how are they impacted by this process?

Methodology

Setting and Recruitment

Participants were recruited through Facebook and emails sent to various organizations. Potential participants from a non-profit centre for children with autism were emailed explaining the purpose of the study. They were asked if they would like to participate. A digital poster providing the study details was posted on Facebook, and the posts were posted on Facebook groups for parents with children with autism. Interested parents contacted the primary researcher through Facebook or email and were provided more details, and their questions were answered. Once a parent agreed to participate in the study, they were sent a consent form (see Appendix A) and a demographic form (see Appendix B) that was to be filled out before the study took part. Participants were from the greater Montreal, Quebec area and interested parents were sent a

Zoom link with the date and time that was convenient for them to do the interview. Participants chose to be in any location they liked as long as they had access to Zoom.

Participants

Table 1 provides detailed demographic information for all the participants. Participants were ten parents of children with ASD who live in various neighbourhoods and attended different schools in Montreal. Eligible participants for this study were parents of a child with autism who had gone through the transition from preschool to kindergarten within the past five years and who were diagnosed with ASD prior to going to kindergarten. Nine out of ten of the participants were mothers, and one was a father. There were 11 children who participated in this study; one participant (Participant 4) spoke about her experiences with her two children in one interview. Nine out of ten participating children were in a daycare preschool class and transitioned to a kindergarten class in an elementary school, but one participating child went to a preschool class in an elementary school and then transitioned to kindergarten within the same school. In Quebec, there are English and French school boards, where these schools teach primarily in either English or French. Three of the participating children attended school primarily in French, seven children attended school primarily in English, and one child attended school on an Indigenous reserve.

The participants participated in the study voluntarily and could withdraw at any time. To protect their identities, pseudonyms were used to replace the participants' and their children's names. Participants were named Participant 1-10, and their children were named Child 1-11.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
--	----------	------------

Gender			
Male		1	10.0
Female		9	90.0
Highest Education			
High School		0	0
College		3	30.0
Bachelor's degree		4	40.0
Master's degree		3	30.0
Number of people in household			
3		3	30.0
4		6	60.0
5+		1	10.0
Employment status			
Full-time		7	70.0
Part-time		1	10.0
Unemployed		0	0
Student		2	20.0
Gender of participant's children			
Male		5	45.45
Female		6	54.55

Age of diagnosis

2	3	27.27
3	1	9.09
4	6	54.55
5	1	9.09

Procedure

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The interview questions were prepared beforehand and were used as a guide (as seen in Appendix C). These questions were modified from Fontil's (2011) interview questions, which asked the participants about their experiences with their child's transition from preschool to kindergarten. Additional questions were about their feelings and concerns about their child's experiences in both preschool and kindergarten.

The interviews were done through Zoom on a computer or laptop and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Participants did their interviews at their homes. On the day of the interview, parents were read the terms of the study again and were informed that they were allowed to withdraw at any given time. A series of questions about their child's transition to kindergarten and their challenges were asked. They were asked about the support their child with autism received and if the change from preschool to kindergarten affected them and their child, their thoughts and feelings during this transition, and how they felt about their child's teacher. The interviews were audio recorded on Zoom and later transcribed using Microsoft Word. Once the interview was completed, the parents were asked if they had any final questions regarding the interview and study.

A therapeutic approach to interviewing was used to form a connection with the participants (Glesne, 2011). This allowed the parents to feel more comfortable when the tone was set correctly to create a safe environment that allowed them to feel comfortable talking about their experiences and feelings since some of the information they shared may have been sensitive or triggered sadness and concern to them.

Member checking was also used to ensure the interviews' reliability, validity, and intended results. Throughout the interviews, member checking was used by paraphrasing the participants' explanations of their experiences and asking them questions to make sure that it was correct and that it was the information that they intended to share (Maxwell, 2013). This allowed for any corrections that needed to be made to correct implications or misconceptions about their experiences and to have a more accurate and valid understanding of the participants' perspectives of their child's transition to kindergarten. Member-checking was also used to ensure the participants were comfortable throughout the interviews.

Results

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the semi-structured parent interviews was done to explore the research questions: 1. How do families' experiences with preschool compare to their experiences with the transition to kindergarten? 2. How do children with ASD experience their transition to kindergarten? 3. How do families with children with ASD experience and navigate their child's transition to kindergarten, and how are they impacted by this process?

The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed through Microsoft Word; a sample of a transcript can be seen in Appendix D. The transcriptions of each interview were coded using the open coding method for the first cycle of coding. Open coding is a combined

method of in vivo coding and processing coding (Saldana, 2016). Using in vivo coding, the data were coded and analyzed using the participants' exact words. Participants' explanations of their actions were coded through process coding, as seen in Appendix E. In the first phase of coding, codes were selected from the participants' interviews based on their relevance to answering the research questions. Once these codes were obtained, pattern coding was used in the second coding cycle to group similar codes among all participants' transcripts together to find a pattern among them (Saldana, 2016). Codes that had similarities were grouped together and analyzed to find the similarities between all participants' transcripts, which led to the findings of the major themes of this data. The major themes found in the dataset are discussed below.

Findings

The findings to address the research questions are further classified as themes which emerge from the data collection. The following themes were: (a) children and families' experience at daycare, (b) children and families' experience in kindergarten, (c) children's experiences with the transition to kindergarten, (d) variables that led to a successful transition, (e) the relationship between parent and teacher, (f) challenges that children and their families experience during the transition to kindergarten. The first research question, how do families' experiences with preschool compare to their experiences with the transition to kindergarten, was answered through themes A and B. The second research question, how do children with ASD experience their transition to kindergarten, was answered by themes C and D. Lastly, the third research question how do families with children with ASD experience and navigate their child's transition to kindergarten and how are they impacted by this process, was answered through theme E and F.

Overall, all families and their children had a positive experience during preschool/daycare, but when they transitioned to kindergarten, this is where differences between the participants emerged. Most children had a positive transition to school; however, many of the children's needs were not supported throughout kindergarten. To note one participant (Participant 3), their child did preschool in an elementary school, not in a daycare. There were a few differences between Participant 3's child and the other participants due to the child transitioning from one class to another class within the same elementary school.

Q. 1 How do families' experiences with preschool compare to their experiences with the transition to kindergarten?

This question was answered through the themes of children's and families' experiences at daycare (a) and children's and families' experiences in kindergarten (b).

Children and families' experiences at daycare. All the participants and their children had a very positive experience in their last year of daycare. Participants explained how they felt supported and found the daycare to be very helpful in providing the right resources for their child. Participants felt they could always count on the daycare for help. "Any question you could ask, any help you need, they would provide it right away," said Participant 4. "During daycare, we were lucky because we had a lot of support," said Participant 2. When asked how the daycare supported the child's needs, Participant 2 said, "The daycare was excellent. They did everything they could." Other examples of how daycare supported participants were that many daycares incorporated what the child was learning in their ABA or occupational therapy into their daily activities. Participant 5 emphasized how great the daycare educator was in applying what was being done in their child's (Child 6) therapy sessions to their class activities. Participant 5 said:

Yeah, his teacher was amazing for that, actually. She took a really vested interest in his therapy.... He did speech and occupational. And so, in terms of occupational therapy, his occupational therapist would recommend things that would help. And so, his teacher actually would buy those things out of pocket. So, adapted scissors or something like that, she would go ahead and buy those so that he could do activities with all of the other kids. And then, in terms of speech, there's a popular Quebecois brand. They're kind of like board games. They're called platcoque, but they're specifically for speech, developing speech and language, and they're a bit expensive, but she bought a whole bunch of them. And so, she would try playing those with him at daycare as well, so that she was trying to incorporate what we were doing in therapy inside the daycare. So, she was really good for that. She was good for trying to pay extra attention to his observations. So, writing down any new words he might have been saying or something like that. So that was helpful.

Other participants' daycare experiences described the educators as going above and beyond to incorporate the child's therapy into the classroom activities to help them advance. Participant 6 expressed how the daycare would buy all the tools needed for her child with his motor disability and accommodate his needs. "They had rearranged the furniture and the layout of the classroom in order for him to move around easily." Participant 6 also said, "They modified everything for him but also incorporated the things he loves." Participant 4's daycare provided extra space for their child to do their therapy. "The daycare gave (Child 2) and interventionists a place to work." "They organized everything." Participant 2 explained how her daycare would follow up on her child's behaviour and what type of interventions they could do to help with his needs. Participant 2 shared, "It was a great team. They were trying to talk to us all the time about the interventions

to apply with him, to follow up on his behaviour, and all his needs. They adapted the room. They included the lady that was shadowing him.”

Participants also exclaimed how the daycare accepted their children’s needs and felt happy sending them there. “I felt supported and respected,” said Participant 1. Participant 9 shared how her child’s daycare understood what her child needed and what she had difficulty with. “They were calm and understanding that it would take her longer to get ready,” said Participant 9. “They were okay with her sensitivities”. Participant 9 further explained how they understood her child’s capacity to do certain tasks given that she would not always get along with the other children. “They didn’t force those kinds of tasks on her.” Participant 8’s child had some difficulty understanding that the daycare toys were not his own and had difficulty understanding the concept of sharing. Participant 8 explained how the daycare assigned some toys just for him to use when he started to have difficulties with the other children to help calm him. Participant 8 shared that they:

would keep separate toys that were just for him because he had a hard time getting the concept of these belonging to the daycare. Therefore, they belong to everybody. So, she (the educator) did have some things that were just for him. And then when he had difficulties with the kids, she would be like, okay, well, you can redirect to the things that are just for you. So then that made him feel a little more secure.

Additionally, parents discussed how the daycare easily provided accommodation for their children. Participant 6 explained how the daycare bought a special chair for her child so he did not fall off it due to his motor issues. They modified many activities, such as adapted scissors, to suit his needs. “They always have to make sure that they modify the activity for (Child 7), but they made sure that he's still included,” Participant 6 shared. Three of the participants’ daycares

reduced the number of kids in a class by one to better accommodate their children, so they had more time to focus on their children's needs. Participant 10 explains, "They only accept seven kids because they considered (Child 11) as two kids. They reduced the ratio just to be able to accommodate her."

Parents also saw an improvement in their child's behaviour and abilities at the daycare. Participant 3 explained how his daughter was potty-trained at daycare, and her behaviour improved as she could follow routines and had fewer crises. "Because we don't have a routine, we work whenever we need it. So, it's hard for us to follow her and make her follow a routine. But with the school, this thing improved," shared Participant 3. Child 2 was non-verbal, but he was able to make more verbal commands with the help of his educator. "He was learning basic things like making requests, like one word, because he is nonverbal. But pointing one-word, two-word requests, he was almost in the three-word request," said Participant 2. Participant 1 shared how her daughter also learned to follow a routine and how to be with other children. "They worked a lot getting her used to the routine outside of the house as well as really just how to integrate and play with other kids," said Participant 1.

Overall, all parents were pleased with their child's daycare as they provided much support and were very interested in accommodating the children to the best of their abilities. They always provided the best care and were keen on understanding the children's needs and what was best for them. "So, he really could not have had a better daycare experience," said Participant 8. Participants also exclaimed that their children were thrilled to be at daycare. "Both of them were very happy, especially with the (Child 4), was very happy," shared Participant 4. "(Child 7) loves going to the daycare," said Participant 6.

Children and families' experiences in kindergarten. Four out of 11 of the children were in a specialized class for those with special needs such as ASD, and the other seven children were placed in an inclusive class where a special educator was available for them and for other special needs children in that class. Children experienced more academic work in kindergarten, such as learning the alphabet, math and science. Those in English schools were introduced to learning French, which was a bit of a challenge for some children. Participants were asked how their child was doing at their new school this year and if they could describe their child's behaviour at school.

Some of the participants expressed that they and their children had an adequate kindergarten experience. Parents felt that the school did its best and supported their children's needs. Participant 1 shared that the school provided her child with all her accommodations, such as staying inside during the last recess because it's too much for her to get dressed to go outside three times a day. She expressed how her child's aide was always with her, supporting her. When describing the school, Participant 1 states, "They're really a nice small school, and it's really a community." She also shared what she enjoyed about the school: "I really like that they just took in all the information we gave them and observed her and were able to adapt to what they thought would work best in the situation." Both Participant 1 and Participant 3 expressed how their children seemed happy in kindergarten and enjoyed being there as Participant 3 stated, "She's happy there." Similarly to Participant 1, Participant 3 also felt that the school met his child's needs. He expressed how the special educator helped improve his child's behaviour, such as her "tantrums reduced a lot...[she] stopped throwing tantrums every day." Participant 4 explains that one of her children, who was in the specialized class (Child 4), had all her needs met, and she received everything she needed to succeed in kindergarten. She shared that her

child had “a wonderful class.” Participant 4 also explained how in kindergarten, the school and the teachers were “very patient with her” as Child 4 had a lot of emotional issues as she “would cry, she would spit on them.” She shared:

She would hit them, things like that, and unpleasant moments. But still, they were very patient. They were loving and caring people, and she did well. I'm still very happy with how she did.”

Overall, all the participants' children had a special educator in the classroom to help with their behaviours and support their children and their teachers. As Participants 1, 3, and 4 expressed that their child's kindergarten experience was relatively positive and their children's needs were always met, it wasn't the case for the rest of the participants. Interestingly, as most of the participants had a very positive transition to start kindergarten, many challenges arose when they were in kindergarten, and certain needs were not always met.

Q. 2 How do children with ASD experience their transition to kindergarten?

This question was answered through themes: children and families' transition to school experience (c) and variables that led to a successful transition (d).

Children and families transition to school experience. Seven out of ten parents felt that their child had a positive transition to kindergarten, while three participants thought the transition was very negative. When asked about the positive and negative experiences of their child's transition to kindergarten, parents exclaimed that the transition went quite well and their child could adapt to the new environment. Participant 4 shared, “Yeah, I think school mostly everything was positive.” She further explained, “(Child 4) finds it fun because she had more toys, more new things to see, new things to touch, to play with. And it was more fun for her. It was more fun for her, and it was not as far to go to as daycare.” Her child was able to integrate

into the new school well. Due to all the support she received, Participant 1 believed that her child's experience was great. She shared, "Well, for her transition into school last year, I mean, we had so much support. I would honestly think it was an excellent experience. I think all things considered." Participant 3's child also had a successful transition to school; she was excited to go every day. She seems to have adapted well to kindergarten since she enjoys going to school and is always trying new things. Participant 5 said, "his transitions to kindergarten were super" because he was able to make friends and advance his social skills. Her child struggled socially, so making new friends and talking to other children was a big step for him. A lot of the children seemed to be able to adapt to their new environments, such as child 6. Participant 5 exclaimed:

He's super adaptable, so it was fine. He liked it. I think that there were some things that he didn't love. It was much louder, obviously. But other than that, it went really well. I think he was really happy to be in an English-speaking environment. So, he did that adaptation really well.

When asked how the transition to kindergarten was overall, Participant 10 said, "I think it went excellent." Her child is non-verbal, but she is able to know that her child enjoys school since "she's waiting happily with her school bus" and that "she doesn't cry that she's going to wake up." Child 11's actions and emotions indicated that she was quite comfortable going to school and seemed happy there, similar to Participants 5 and 6's child. Participant 7 shared that she believes that the transition "went well." However, she explained how she believed that knowing the staff working at the school gave her and her child a more positive transition. She shared:

But I feel it went well not because of the school board but more or less because I have a personal relationship with the staff that works in his class. For a parent who doesn't have

that going in with their kid, I can see how it would be hard. But luckily, I already know the staff that's working with my child outside of school, so that for sure helped.

Although most participants felt that their children had a positive transition and adapted well, three of them shared that their children's transition did not go as smoothly. Participants 2, Participant 8, and Participant 9 expressed how their children did not seem happy starting kindergarten and had a difficult time adapting to their new school. When asked how they found their child's transition experience, Participant 2 said, "He didn't seem very happy at the beginning. I faced a few meltdowns at arriving at school." She expressed that his reaction to school was not the same as going to camp and that "it took some time to adapt to the change in the environment." She also expressed how there were no positive experiences during the transition to kindergarten. Participant 8 also expressed that the transition has "been a little challenging." She shared how her child did not understand the concept of kindergarten being a whole year as he would tell her, "Mom, I'm done with kindergarten." Participant 9 expressed how her child really struggled with the transition. When asked how her daughter reacted to the new changes in the environment, she shared, "She became depressed, anxious, very depressed."

One reason why these children had a negative experience was that their new school did not support their needs or help them through the transition. Participant 9 shared that even though the school tried to help her daughter with her academic skills, she felt like they were not listening to her worries. She stated, "We didn't really feel like our concerns were addressed." Participant 2 also felt that the school did not help her child during his transition, which is why her son had a hard time adapting to his class since he usually is able to adapt well to new environments such as camp and respite care. Participant 2 shared:

But I think it's mostly due to the lack of support from the adults than from him. Because here, he adapts. They care for their children. Here, we do, but they don't have, I think, the necessary support. The school just doesn't have it.

Participant 8 felt that the school could have done more to aid her son and make his transition smoother and easier. She shared, “There could have been more effort made to make him comfortable rather than just worrying about how the school was going to organize themselves.” She explained how there was a meeting in the spring before school started to see what the school could do to help her son in his new school. However, she felt it was more about how much support the school needed to hire or provide rather than understanding her son’s needs and getting to know him.

Overall, most of the participants expressed that their children had a fairly positive transition to kindergarten. Their children adapted well to the changes and environment and were excited to start school. The children had good support and were able to make new friends, which influenced their positive transition. However, three out of 10 participants expressed how it was challenging for their children to adapt to their new environment and felt very unhappy going to kindergarten. Parents shared that their voices were not heard when expressing their concerns to the school, leading to their children having a negative transition.

Variables that led to a successful transition. In the interviews, participants were asked what were the most and least helpful things the school did to facilitate the transition and if the school or daycare provided them support with the transition. Parents shared the different variables that allowed their child to have a positive transition. Some variables included the collaboration between the daycare and the school, support and resources provided, and preparing for kindergarten ahead of time. Participant 1 and Participant 4 had their children’s daycares, and

schools collaborated with each other to ensure the transition went well. Participant 4 explained that their daycare provided a lot of information on her children to send to the school so they would have a better idea of what type of person her children are and what type of support they need. She shared:

And they wrote everything, especially for (Child 4), they wrote a lot, a lot, a lot. She likes this, she doesn't like this to work with her, use this, this, this a lot. They wrote. They gave me also the other few even pile of documents, of paper that I had to fill up and I filled them up. It was also confirmed what they wrote and put additional information about each child and just to bring it to their attention, how it's better to work with them, what to focus on, things like that. That's one thing that we filled up many papers there and at home also. And, they made a nice kind of album with photos, what they did during the year, how they went out, what they did, just laughing, crying, whatever they had. They did a nice book for them with a little bit of story of each photo. That was nice on them.

This idea was to help the school really understand Child 4 and 5 and what was the best way to help them. Participant 4 also expressed how there was a lot of communication between herself, the daycare, the school, and her interventionist. She believed a lot of communication between these four points allowed her transition to go easily, and the school was more open to her children since they already knew what to expect and understood their needs. Participant 1 had a few meetings in the summer with the daycare, the school and her child's therapist. Like Participant 4, Participant 1 also believed that it was very important to communicate with the school and everyone involved in her child's transition. The meetings discussed what Child 1 needed and what "could [they] do to get things set up for her when she started school." There

were multiple meetings on this, which provided the school with a lot of insight into how to better support Child 1 during her transition to kindergarten. Participant 1 also shared:

The daycare told the school what was working for them. Then, the specialized educator was able to offer insights to the school. And so, I helped them with certain behaviours or if they saw things at the school. So, she was well set up by the time she got to school. That's good.

Due to this communication and collaboration between the school and daycare, the school gained extensive knowledge of the children and the best way to help and understand their needs. This led to them having a positive transition.

Having the proper support and resources is one variable that can lead to a successful transition. Participant 6 had support from her social worker, who gave her “all the possible resources that they could find to [Child 7]. She said, “They give it to him and everything that they could be given to us.” Having this extra support helped her child have an “excellent” transition. Participant 6 had a good support team from her social worker, which allowed Child 7 to have a good transition since he was given proper resources to help him succeed. Participant 7 also received extra support for her child to help with his transition to school. Participant 7 shared that she had an ABA therapist for her son who “created social stories and scenarios and a lot of talk about going to school.” This was beneficial to him because he would be very scared about going to school; however, over the summer, the ABA therapist continued to provide social stories and worked on him getting used to the idea of going to school that when it came to the first day of school, his transition went relatively well.

Many of the participants shared that the daycare their children attended helped prepare them for kindergarten, which led to a successful transition. Participant 6 explained that the

daycare provided social stories to Child 7 so he could know what to expect going to school. She exclaimed, “It helped every day like, oh, you're going to be at a big school.” Participant 8 shared that her son's daycare also prepared him for kindergarten. She explained how the educator taught him to be more independent in his dressing and “doing things on his own.” Similarly to Participant 6, Participant 8’s daycare educator spoke to her son about school a lot and what it would be like.

Participants 6 and 10 had tours of the school and their classrooms before school started to help them know what to expect and to see their new environment. Participant 6 shared:

They show us where (Child 7) is going to sit, where his cubby is. And then it's like a classroom tour. That's the teacher, and this is your bathroom and everything. At least he already knows where a little bit, Oh, this is going to be my cubby, and everything. And then they have this huge bulletin board that have a caricature face of [Child 7], so he knows that all my arts and practice is going to be shown here. So, it also helped.

Participant 10 also explained how her daughter was shown her classroom and who her teacher would be. Both participants felt that having the children explore and familiarize themselves with their new environment and meet their teachers and classmates helped them have a great transition.

Q. 3 How do families with children with ASD experience and navigate their child’s transition to kindergarten, and how are they impacted by this process?

This question was answered through themes: the relationship between parent and teacher (e) and challenges that children and their families experience during the transition to kindergarten (f).

The relationship between parent and teacher. All participants indicated that they had a positive relationship with their child's daycare educator, and all their children were also very fond of their educator. Participants were asked about their relationship with their children's teacher. They were also asked how often they communicated with the teachers and if they felt comfortable asking them questions. According to the findings of this study, most participants seemed to have more communication and collaboration with their children's daycare and preschool educators compared to their kindergarten teachers. They also seem to develop a more personal relationship with their child's daycare educator. All participants shared that they spoke to their child's daycare educator daily and were very comfortable talking to them. Participant 8 shared that her son's educator was "fantastic.... I still talk to her once a week." Participant 8 developed a very close relationship with her child's educator, where she felt that if they needed extra help, the educator would always be there. Participant 9 also had a good relationship with her child's daycare educator, who was "really understanding and listened to [her] needs." Like Participant 8, Participant 9 explained that the educator was "super supportive," and she "provided a really warm, supportive environment."

Similarly to Participant 9, Participant 8 felt that her daughter's educator shared how she "could go to them for anything." She also expressed that his daycare educator accommodated his needs as he did not nap during nap time, so she "developed a whole other program for him to be able to do during that period." Her daycare educator bought supplies for him, such as a noise motor to help regulate the class's noise so her son would not be uncomfortable. Both participants felt that the daycare educators understood their children's needs and took the time to figure out what was best for them as they collaborated.

Having this positive relationship with the daycare educator contributed to their children's improvements in their behaviours and their abilities to improve on specific skills needed in kindergarten. When asked about the relationship with the daycare teacher, Participant 2 said, "It was very good." Participant 2 expressed how invested her child's educator had been in his therapies and interventions and that he could progress in his demand-making, verbal speech, and potty training. Participant 3 also shared how his daughter's behaviour and ability to be more independent improved with their preschool educator. He shared that "she followed instructions more and more" and "she learned to be independent slowly. Both participants expressed their children loved their preschool educator and had a good relationship with them.

In terms of communication among kindergarten teachers, some participants felt they had maintained a good relationship with their child's kindergarten teacher. However, the level of communication and collaboration had decreased. When asked if they had a positive relationship with their child's kindergarten teacher, Participant 5 shared:

Yeah. I mean, I think it was a positive relationship, as you can have with a school teacher. I never had any negative experiences with her, but obviously, they're just very busy. It's not like a daycare teacher. They're just super busy. They don't have time to reassure you or to walk you through everything, which is understandable. But we did have a good relationship.

Participant 6 also expressed how she did not have as good a relationship with her child's kindergarten teacher as with their daycare educator. Participant 2 shared how she and her son's kindergarten teacher only communicated in IEP meetings; she felt it was because "they're not open to many communications." She tried to keep a positive relationship but felt that his teacher did not communicate enough with her.

Some parents felt that their child's teacher did not address their child's needs and was not receptive to listening to parents' suggestions and concerns. Participant 9 shared she had an okay relationship with her daughter's teacher. However, she shared, "I would go over my concerns, and she would ignore them." She felt the teacher did not properly support or address her child's needs, and she felt her concerns about her daughter were dismissed. Participant 4 expressed that, at times, her daughter's kindergarten teacher did not always listen to her and wouldn't accept her advice. Participant 5 expressed that her son's teacher did not support his needs as it is an "ongoing issue." She said:

The reason is that because he doesn't have any negative behaviors, he doesn't have any of, like I said, the very stereotypical negative behaviors, the downside to that is that they assume that he has no needs because he's not very vocal about them, and he's not very explicit about what his needs are. His needs are consistently not met with the school. Like I said, it's an ongoing issue. It's just that he's always being treated like a typical child. Then they'll be like, Well, how come he's doing X? Or, How come this? I'm always like, Yeah, that's actually your fault because you're not being careful because you assume that he has no needs. He does have needs. He just doesn't have negative behavior associated with those needs. So yeah, I would say that no, they don't meet his needs really at all.

The increase in students causes teachers to have less time to focus on all their children's needs, which leads to less collaboration between parents. These participants have expressed that having their child's kindergarten teacher tend to their child's needs has become incredibly difficult due to this.

On the other hand, the other participants expressed that they had a great communication system with their child's kindergarten teacher. Participant 10 explains how regularly the teacher

contacts her throughout the week to keep her updated on her child's behaviours and what is happening in the class. Participant 10 states, "Every day [the teacher] always emails me what happened with (Child 11)." "They always send pictures". She also explains how she communicates with the teacher thrice daily through a communication platform. Like Participant 10, Participant 1 also expressed how she regularly communicated with her child's kindergarten teacher. Participant 1 expressed how the teacher was "always helpful" and would give helpful advice to improve Child 1's language skills at home. She states:

She suggested that we have a lot of friends come over so that she could work one-on-one on communication. Because if there is stuff that still... Certainly, last year, her communication wasn't where other kids' language skills were. So, she suggested that we do that to help out with her language skills the one-on-one play. So that helped. And that's what she suggested, really. And that's what we did. So, it went very well.

Participant 1 explains how the teacher gave her child a lot of support and provided insight into how to help her progress in skills she has trouble with. Participant 3 also had good communication with his child's kindergarten teacher. Participant 3 frequently communicated with his child's teacher regarding her behaviour, and the teacher provided valuable advice to assist the child in establishing boundaries. With the teacher's support, parents were able to obtain resources to help improve their child's behaviour. Participant 3 reported having a positive relationship with her when asked about their relationship with the teacher, similar to Participants 1 and 10.

Challenges that children and their families experience during the transition to kindergarten. The participants have indicated that they experienced various challenges during their transition to kindergarten. The participants were asked about some challenges they faced

during the transition, and one challenge that most participants mentioned was the lack of support and resources they and their children received in kindergarten. Participant 2 shared how her son did not receive adequate support from his teacher or from the school. She expresses that she found “the school system [is] very disappointing in [her] opinion.” She also explained how her child “started to lose skills” and did not seem to learn any new ones when he was in kindergarten. She expressed that his teacher should have looked at previous reports to see what skills he has or has already learned. Not looking at his reports resulted in the teacher not providing him with the proper support to enhance his skills. Her child was put in a specialized class. However, she expresses how the school doesn’t have the necessary support for her child or the other kids in his class. When asked what would have made the transition more comfortable, Participant 2 indicated:

I think they would need more staff to start because there's not enough support. They need more individual time for new learning [of the children] because the support, the aids, and the educators can help the children follow the routines from the activity autonomy. The things that they did are like maintenance, like skills that they already learned.

Participant 9 also expressed how there was no support at school for her daughter, and she was “disappointed [in] the lack of services they offered.” Her daughter struggled a lot in kindergarten emotionally and behaviourally, and she shared how there was no aide in the class to help her child or any of the other kids who also had behavioural problems. When she brought up her concerns to the principal, she felt her needs were never met. Participant 9 “felt as if nobody was truly listening” to her concerns about helping her daughter. She felt that her child was a low priority, lacking support and resources to succeed in kindergarten. Participant 4 also experienced a lack of support and resources from the school for her daughter. She explained how Child 5

struggled emotionally and academically with her transition to kindergarten. She explained how she wanted her daughter to see the school's remedial teacher for help with her academics, but the school would say that the teacher didn't have enough time to see all the children. She further explains how Child 5's teacher "was not interested in [Child 5's] case to really help her." She explained that the teacher did not request the remedial teacher to see her daughter even though the remedial teacher was available. She felt the teacher did not provide her daughter the extra help. The school only had one speech therapist, so the therapist did not always have time to see her daughter, leading to her not receiving an important part of the therapy needed to enhance her skills. Participant 5 has also faced similar issues with her child's school as well. Participant 5 expressed her dissatisfaction with her child's elementary school by indicating that they have the same ongoing issues throughout the school year. She expressed that "his needs are consistently not met by the school" and that "he's always treated like a typical child." Since her son does not have stereotypical behaviour or behaviour issues, the school did not provide the support he needs since he does not behave like the other children in his class on the autism spectrum. Participant 5 indicated that her son has a speech disorder, but the school does not effectively accommodate or provide him with help. She also expressed how the school does not work with private therapists; only teachers can work with them. She stated:

So, if a teacher was really willing to work with [the private speech therapist], then that would be good. We would contact them to work on strategies to help him with his communication. And in some cases, they just weren't.

She believed that if the teacher worked with her speech therapist, this would have helped improve her son's speech skills, as the teacher did not know how to help him with his communication skills. Similar to Participant 5, Participant 6 explains how since her son does not

have behavioural problems either, she felt that “he fell through the cracks” at his school.

Participant 6 expressed how the school did not support his needs. An example of this was that Child 7 was “supposed to have at least 6 hours a week of help”; however, these hours were given to other children in the class, and the school told her that other children needed more help than her son. The school also lacked occupational therapy resources for the children as well. Child 7 has a motor and coordination disorder, but the occupational therapist at the school would only be able to see him once every two months, which does not give Child 7 enough support to help with his motor skills. She also explained how the teacher did not seem to “understand his diagnosis” and was always putting pressure on him to finish a task even though he has accommodations for this. Participants 7 and 8 also expressed how the school had very limited resources but seemed to be “trying their best” as they have many kids in the school. Both participants expressed how their children’s needs are not being supported to the fullest due to the limited resources their children’s elementary school has and provides.

Another challenge that participants experienced was that their child’s individualized education plan (IEP) was not done correctly, and they often included goals that were irrelevant or did not match their capabilities. Participants 2, 4, 5, and 6 all expressed how they were not allowed to be involved in creating their child’s IEP and were just asked to sign once it was made. Participant 2 shared that the school added goals and skills that her child had already acquired. Participant 2 expressed that her child’s IEP does not reflect his abilities, and she asked them to change the goals outlined in his IEP. However, they did not listen to her. When asked if she could suggest things to add to the IEP, she stated:

The parents are never involved. When we go to the meeting, the IEP is already ready, and they just show you what they're doing, and then you have to sign, and that's it. When I

saw the goal and made demands, which could be eye contact, pointing or pulling somebody or something, I expressed that that was not enough for him because he was way beyond that. Then I asked them to please do not accept just pointing. Just make him ask verbally because he could do it. But I had to insist a lot. And they said, oh, maybe he can do that at home, but maybe he won't do it here.

Participant 2 expressed her frustration with not being listened to regarding her son's IEP. She felt this challenge affected his ability to have a successful transition since the school was not focusing on the proper skills needed to be taught.

Participant 4's oldest child (Child 4), who is in a specialized class, had a very detailed IEP, and there was a lot of discussion on her goals. Participant 4 said, "It's like a real plan, a real paper to work with," where they would add and take out certain objectives depending on her needs. However, similar to Participant 2, Participant 4's younger child (Child 5), who is in an integrated classroom, did not have objectives that were being followed. Participant 4 described Child 5's IEP, saying, "It looks more like just paper that nobody opens during the year." No one really attended to the IEP or bothered to make improvements. Participant 5 also shared her frustration with the inadequate IEP her son received. When asked if she knew the objectives of her child's IEP, she said:

Yeah, I do. I know them, and they're pretty stupid. I know that it's different from other school boards. At [school board's name], it's like a drop-down, like a computer program where you drop it down and you select an option. Then they'll be like, What is your strategy for it? It's really dumb. As an example, it was like to get him to communicate more clearly. They were like, We will just ask him to repeat himself when we don't understand what he's saying... They have an IEP, and it's not very well done. It's very

short. It's a page and a half or two pages. They'll really just go through what his communications are like: good, moderate, needs work, very poor, or something like that. Participant 5 expressed that her son's IEP objectives also did not provide the proper interventions to help him with his needs, which in turn led him to not being able to improve his communication skills and other skills that needed support. Similar to Participant 2, both attempted to advise on what the right goals and objectives should be, but they ended up being ignored. Participant 6 was also not content about her child's IEP as it was "more of a generalized IEP." She had concerns that the IEP did not reflect her son's needs in supporting his motor issues. She further explained how she refused to sign it until it was revised, but it was only revised months later.

Another challenge participants experienced was that they often had to advocate for their child's needs to the school. Participant 7 had to advocate for her child to receive an aide in his classroom. Participant 7 further explained how the school was unsupportive during the transition as her child initially "wasn't going to get an integration aide because of funding." The school wanted to give support to another child as they believed he did not need it as much as others, even though his report says he needs one. She said, "So I actually had to argue with the school board quite a bit to get him to get the integration aid in his class." She had to constantly advocate for her son to receive the proper support he needs as "he's one of the kids that can fall through the cracks." Participant 5 also indicated that she was constantly advocating for her son throughout the year to the school. Her child had problems with the uniform pants and needed to get accommodated by wearing joggers due to his sensory and motor issues. She explained that she had to advocate multiple times before they granted him that accommodation. Participant 5 also expressed how tiring it was to always have to advocate for her kid when she said:

I think that is probably going to be a very common theme among parents of just how exhausting it is to have to constantly advocate for your kid. Everyone will tell you that you have to advocate for your kids. You have to do it. You have to do it. You're their number one advocate. The truth is that the teachers and everyone start to define you as incredibly annoying at some point. Then you just get this reputation of being a very difficult parent to work with. It doesn't go well. But I'm comfortable in a sense of, like, I don't really see how I could not do it.

Both participants often had to advocate for their children's needs since their schools did not want to provide the right support. Similar to this, Participant 6 also had to advocate a lot for her child as the teacher did not seem to understand his motor issues. She advocated that he needed accommodations for modifying certain classroom things, such as scissors. She "always make sure that they modify all the activities for him and all the tools that they're doing is appropriate for him." As we previously discussed, Participants 2 and 9 encountered difficulties in receiving proper support for their child during kindergarten. They had to frequently communicate with the kindergarten teachers as they felt that their children were not receiving the right support and were not showing improvement in their skills. They had to constantly advocate for their child as their needs continued not to be met, and they expressed their frustration about this.

Some of the participants talked about how their children experienced a positive transition and were happy to attend kindergarten. However, some participants have encountered the challenge of their children struggling to adapt to their new school. Participant 9 expressed how her daughter "struggled a lot" in kindergarten as she felt the school did not prepare much for the transition beforehand. When asked what her routine was like going to school and how it was, Participant 9 said, "Oh, she hated it. She absolutely hated it. Every day was a battle to get her

there. So, she's often late because she was talking.” When later asked what her progress was in kindergarten compared to daycare, she said:

When she went to kindergarten, she hated letters and numbers and was sworn off. It became really a punishment to her, and it triggered a lot of anxiety. When she used to go to daycare, although she had those days where she didn't want to go. I knew when I was picking up, she'd be happy and playing, and I had to pull her away. With [school] she was like, running to me at the door, get me out of this prison.

Participant 9's child struggled to adapt to her new school, as she did not enjoy going and was anxious. Participant 9 expressed how her daughter "was miserable" and "it was a horrible year" for her. She also said, "Every day she was depressed, which made me, and my ex-husband depressed because we couldn't help her." The family and Child 10 struggled emotionally through this transition as Child 10 did not adjust well to kindergarten and had a hard time socially, emotionally and academically. Participant 9 felt this was a big challenge for her and her daughter as she felt no one was trying to help her daughter, and the school did not provide any support to help with this. Participant 8 explained how her son was excited to start kindergarten and was happy about it but had a little trouble adapting to his new routine initially, as their "biggest challenge was getting him out of the building." She indicated that her child had difficulty leaving the house in the morning, and getting him ready was difficult. When asked how the transition to kindergarten has been for her child overall, she said:

It's been a little challenging. It's definitely had its ups and downs. I don't think he understood at first that kindergarten is like a whole year because he did a few days at kindergarten. And then the next morning, when I tried to get him up to go back to school, he was like, Mom, I'm done with kindergarten. I'm done. I went. I did it. I'm done. And

I'm like, It's a whole year, buddy. So, I don't think he fully grasped that this is your life now. You have to go there all the time. I think he thought it would be fun for a few days, and then when he was tired of it, he could go back to Tata's. So that's been a little bit tricky. And then this morning, all the way to school was like, Mom, don't leave me there. You have to come with me. Don't leave me. You're going to make me sad. So, he definitely has a hard time being away, I would say, from people he's secure with.

She explained how her son struggled with his new environment as he did not feel like school was a safe space yet, which made him upset to leave home and go to school. He didn't understand that he had to stay in school for a whole year as he believed he could go back to daycare once he was done. Participant 8 explained how he was well-behaved at school, but as soon as he was at home, he would let everything out and act out due to him keeping in his behaviours all day. Participants 5 and 6 also expressed how their children were very excited to start kindergarten and had a great transition. However, they were both bullied by their peers in kindergarten and had a difficult time making friends. They had difficulty fitting in, making them not want to attend school. Participant 6 said that Child 7 had told her, "I don't want to go to school." Which made it difficult for him to enjoy kindergarten and adapt to the class. The bullying was also a struggle for Participants 5 and 6's children as the teacher didn't seem to do much about the bullying, and their children were very distraught about attending kindergarten. The school did not help them much with the bullying, which did not help the participants and their children. Participants 2 and 7 also expressed it was difficult for their children to adapt to their new classes and schools. Participant 2 explained that her son usually adapts well to new places but had difficulty adapting to kindergarten. When asked how she found the experience of transition to kindergarten was for her child, she said:

He didn't seem much happy at the beginning. I would have faced a few meltdowns at arriving at school. He would throw himself on the ground and didn't want to go in, so I don't think he was that happy there. But then, after a while, it was better.

Like Participant 8, getting Child 2 to school was very difficult as he did not want to go.

Participant 2 also mentioned that the school's lack of support was why it took some time for her child to adapt to his new environment. Participant 7 expressed that her child had difficulty adapting to kindergarten as well. She explains that “it’s a battle in the morning because he doesn’t want to go to school right now” and “he’s having a hard time accepting and adjusting to French class.” Similar to the other children, Child 8 did not want to go to school in the mornings, and it was difficult to bring him. When asked how he reacted to the changes in the environment, Participant 7 said:

Well, he's still adjusting to it. He's always been a child that holds it together in public.

But when he comes home, he falls apart or when he gets in the car, somewhere more familiar. So right now, when he gets home from school, he's very angry. You can't talk to him. He's just angry at the world.

Like Participant 8’s child, Participant 7’s child also holds in his anger at school and lets it out at home when he feels like he’s in a safe space. Child 8 struggled with his new school, and since he doesn’t want to go to school, he is struggling with his anger at home, which is challenging for Participant 7.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of families with children with ASD during the children’s transition to kindergarten from daycare. Specifically, the study aimed to understand the qualitative differences between how the families

of children with ASD experienced daycare and kindergarten and how children with ASD and their families experienced the transition to kindergarten. The study also looked at the challenges they experienced in the transition to school and what variables make a transition to kindergarten successful.

The comparison of experiences in daycare and kindergarten with the families with children with ASD.

When comparing the transition between daycare and kindergarten, it is clear from these findings that the majority of the participant's children had a more positive experience during daycare. This finding is very similar to what is seen in Fontil et al., (2020) and Yamauchi, (2020) studies regarding a positive daycare experience for children with ASD. Similar to the research, common themes that surrounded this finding were that the children were happy to attend daycare, the daycare focused more on play-learning, and educators worked on social and emotional skills as opposed to academics (Yamauchi, 2020). Daycare educators have a bit more flexibility to choose what they would like to teach and what skills they should focus on in their classes, and the participants explained how their children worked a lot on arts and crafts and the daycare worked on helping the children with specific skills they needed to improve. What is taught in daycare is a contrast to what is being taught in kindergarten, where the teachers have to focus on academics as they have a curriculum to follow. Yamauchi's (2020) study suggested that due to the difference in the curriculum between daycare and kindergarten, there can be a heightened chance of difficulty during this transition. In aligning with this research, several of the participants expressed two curriculum difficulties. The first was learning French as a second language when their main instruction was in English previously. The second was keeping up with schoolwork, as Participants 6 and 9 expressed. In Quebec, children must learn both English

and French, as French is the common language in Quebec (Gouvernement du Québec, n.d). Most of the participants' children were anglophone, which may be the reason why learning French was difficult for them if they did not speak French at home or were exposed to French in their daycare. However, the majority of the participants reported that their children were doing well and were able to keep up with their academics.

One notable difference that affected the participants' children's experiences during this transition was the variance in communication and cooperation between the daycare educator and their child's kindergarten teacher. Rimm-Kuafman & Pianta (1999) and Yamauchi (2020) researched how a parent's experience with different educators at different educational levels can affect a child's transition. Generally, it is more common to have a positive and more collaborative relationship with a daycare educator than with a kindergarten teacher because communication is less frequent with kindergarten teachers (Fontil and Petrakos, 2015; Starr et al., 2016). In this study, all participants spoke highly and expressed appreciation of their child's daycare educator. The reasons behind these positive mentions were that the participants felt they could approach the educator daily about their child's progress, that they felt heard when expressing concerns, and that the educator and daycare did their best to accommodate the child's needs, including but not limited to extra items for therapy interventions. All participants felt lucky and grateful for all their child's daycare has done. However, most of the participants expressed how they felt there was a lack of ability to communicate regularly with their child's kindergarten teacher, and they felt that the amount of collaboration between teachers had decreased. One reason for this could be the difference in class size in kindergarten and daycare. In Quebec, the maximum number of children a daycare educator can have is 10, so they tend to be smaller classes (Ministère de la Famille, 2020). In elementary school, teachers can have over

25 students in one class, which may result in some teachers having less time to communicate with parents daily and/or regularly. This relates to the literature, as a study by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999) found that when children and families transition from preschool to kindergarten, there is a decrease in parent-teacher communication. This decrease may help explain the decline in the quality of the teacher relationships and communication found in the participants.

Additionally, two common disappointments with their child's kindergarten teacher that the participants brought up were that they felt their concerns were not acknowledged and that teachers did not implement any intervention. Participants 2 and 6 mentioned that the only times they had a chance to communicate with their child's kindergarten teacher was during IEP meetings, which supports the disappointment mentioned previously. Two reasonings from the literature that support these disappointments experienced by the participants are that many teachers also do not receive the proper support from their school for their children with special needs and therefore cannot provide the proper support, and some teachers may not have the knowledge to fully understand their student's diagnoses and how to properly support them (Fontil et al., 2020; Jellinek et al., 2022). However, it is important to note that not all participants in this study experienced a lack of support from their children's kindergarten teachers. Participants 1, 3, and 10 shared how their child's kindergarten teacher communicated with them regularly and supported their child's needs to the best of their ability by improving their skills and behaviours. The literature suggests that teacher support during the transition is crucial for students' success as it makes it easier for students to adjust to their new environment and have better academic and emotional success in school (Star et al., 2016; McIntyre et al., 2010). It seems that when the teacher communicated often with parents, this created a better

trusting relationship, where parents felt better about their child's transition. It seemed that when the parents had a stronger relationship with their child's teacher, the transition was more successful. Based on previous findings, participants 1, 3, and 10 had successful transitions to kindergarten because their teachers supported them, supported their needs, and collaborated with the parents.

Families with children with ASD experiences and impacts from the transition to kindergarten.

The findings of this study found that most of the participants indicated that their children had a positive transition experience to kindergarten because their children were receptive to meeting new friends and a change in their academic environment. Though the transition itself was positive, this quickly changed when challenges arose. One challenge was the lack of support the school and kindergarten teachers provided the participants' children. Many of the participants were disappointed because they felt they were left to fend for themselves during their child's academic journey, further advancing academic struggles. This lack of support is not a new phenomenon as research has indicated this is a common challenge that many families with children with ASD experience as schools tend to lack the resources in order to provide proper support to children with special needs (Fontil et al., 2020; Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). Without the proper resources, children with ASD cannot have a successful transition and will have a difficult time in kindergarten (McIntyre et al., 2010). Due to limited or missing resources, parents expressed how their children were not able to see the school professionals, such as remedial teachers, occupational therapists or behavioural technicians, enough as they claimed there were other children in the school that needed those services, too, and these professionals were busy. They felt the school did not make their children's needs a priority. This refers to the literature, as

previous research has indicated that parents find it challenging to communicate their concerns about their children's unmet needs in kindergarten, while schools appear to be unresponsive (Stoner et al., 2007; Fontil et al., 2020). This may reveal that schools and teachers lack an understanding of the children's needs and specific challenges and are not aware of how important it is to give children with ASD specified individual support. In turn, this hinders a child's ability to have a successful transition. Limited resources at the school, in terms of extra support and school professionals, may suggest that schools are not given the proper funding for special education, which makes it difficult to provide proper services to all children with ASD equally (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011).

Parents have brought up the issue of their child's IEP, as it did not reflect the needs of the child. Quintero and McIntyre's (2011) study found that if there is a plan for transition for other support, the plan does not always fit the needs of the child. This was seen through the children of Participants 2, 4, 5, and 6 who encountered issues. The objectives and goals in the IEPs were not related to their children's needs and included goals that did not reflect their children's skills and abilities. Participants did not see any improvements in their child's skills or abilities mentioned in the IEP, and Participant 2's child started regressing in his skills. Children of the participants who did receive an IEP, it seemed that the IEP was generalized, and school staff and teachers did not take the time to review with the parents beforehand. Thus, this may be why the IEPs were not adequately done to fit the child's needs. This may suggest that is why many of the participants' children did not all have skill improvements throughout their kindergarten year. By not having an IEP with goals and objectives that reflect the child's needs, children are unable to improve in specific skills they need.

Additionally, two participants expressed that their child's disabilities, excluding ASD, were not being adequately accommodated because the teacher lacked the knowledge and understanding of these diagnoses. Besides some teachers having the knowledge to accommodate such students, there are teachers who lack the knowledge and understanding of ASD and other disabilities, therefore leading to misconceptions about these diagnoses. This lack of understanding may be the reason why these children are not receiving adequate support (Jellinek et al., 2022). Participants 5 and 6 expressed how their children were treated as typical children because they had no behavioural issues or stereotypical behaviours. In turn, they did not receive support for their kids because the school believed that other kids needed more help. The school and teachers did not understand that they still had needs and disabilities with their motor skills and speech, which resulted in their advancement and growth being stunted. It has been found that when some children with ASD display less stereotypical behaviours, they may receive less help than those who display stereotypical autism behaviours (MacDonald, 2010). This may reveal how children with ASD with little to no behavioural issues may be seen as children who do not need extra support in the classroom and may be looked to providing certain resources over those children who have behavioural issues and are seen as more difficult. This may suggest that children with ASD who do not exhibit difficult behaviour may often go unnoticed, leading to them falling through the cracks and not receiving the necessary support they need.

Due to this lack of support experienced in kindergarten, the participants felt a need to speak up and advocate for their children's needs. Several of the participants had to constantly advocate for their children to receive the proper support from the school and teachers. Participant 9 expressed how she thought she was annoying for always contacting the school and teachers about her child's emotional issues but said that she later regrets not advocating more. This need

to constantly advocate for your child's ASD needs during their transition to kindergarten is a common challenge (Stoner et al., 2007; Starr et al., 2016). Though advocating for your child's needs could be empowering, due to the fact that outreach was much more frequent, the parents explained how they felt burdened and exhausted that they always had to advocate for their children to get the support and accommodations they needed in their transition (Stoner et al.'s, 2007; Starr et al.'s, 2016). Due to this constant need to reach out and feeling that they were battling for this support, many parents described they felt the need to be cautious about what they said to the school out of concern that negative remarks could have a detrimental impact on their child (Starr et al., 2016). The findings suggest there are similarities between what is said in the literature to what the participants felt during their transition, such as a constant battle or exhaustion. However, contrary to the literature, some of the participants in the study were not scared to get in contact with the school and fight for their child's needs. Participants constantly advocated for their children to be accommodated or get modifications to their work, their uniforms, or extra time with the behavioural technicians and other therapists. Participants were not afraid of being a difficult parent; they had accepted that this was something they must do, and they felt like they had no other choice but to keep advocating everything they knew their kid deserved.

Successful Transition

The transition to kindergarten posed various challenges for some participants and their children. However, 4 out of 11 children had a very positive experience. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 10 successfully transitioned to kindergarten due to the effective support and collaboration between parents and teachers. To note, Participant 3's child was in a preschool class in the same elementary school as her kindergarten class, so although the child did make a transition to

kindergarten, she did not change school environments. She changed classes and teachers; however, her classroom aide was the same. This may have played a role in Child 3's positive transition experience. While other participants explained that they had a good transition and that their child was excited to start school, but later faced many challenges throughout kindergarten. This suggests that even though the participants said their child transitioned well to kindergarten, the overall experience was not positive as compared to participants 1,3, 4, and 10, who had a positive transition experience from start to finish.

Previous research has found that when daycare educators, parents and kindergarten teachers collaborate together, it increases the chance of having a successful transition (Purtell et al., 2020; Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2020; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011). These people should meet beforehand to discuss the child and any possible challenges the child might face. They should also plan what type of support or accommodations the child needs so they can be better prepared when the child arrives at kindergarten. In Stoner et al.'s (2007) and Purtell et al., (2020) studies, parents emphasized that having a detailed transition plan is important before the child goes to school. Some strategies that these plans should include are meetings with the school to discuss the child before they start kindergarten, introducing the new environment gradually before the school year starts, and allowing the children to meet their classmates and teacher prior to the transition so they can be better prepared and understand their new environment. The findings of this study align with the research as Participants 1 and 4's daycare and elementary school collaborated together to help Child 1 and 4 transition smoothly. Participants 1 and 4 both explained how they had meetings in the summer with the daycare, school, and their interventionist to discuss what could be set up at the school to have them easily transition. The daycare also provided plenty of additional information to the school about the children so they

know how to best support their needs. This constant and frequent communication between the parents and the three subjects involved aided the school and teacher in being well-prepared and learning how to help the children, therefore leading to a successful transition. When examining Participants 6 and 10's experiences, their elementary school had them do a tour of the school before they went to kindergarten. The children got to meet their future teacher and other students as well. The children were shown around their classroom to indicate where certain things would be and where the bathroom was, which allowed them to become more familiarized and comfortable with going to their new school. The children were more prepared for the new environment and transition by seeing the school and teachers before starting kindergarten.

In order for a daycare to kindergarten transition to be successful and positive, there needs to be adequate support (Stoner et al., 2007; Starr et al., 2016; Fontil et al., 2020; Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). The participants who received the proper support during their child's transition were very happy with their children's school as their teachers were very supportive and were very involved in helping them develop new skills and working on skills they needed. There were also specialized educators in the class to provide them with the extra support they needed. The schools made accommodations for their children and respected and followed the parents' requests. They had developed great relationships with their children's teachers and felt very comfortable communicating with them. They spoke to the teachers quite often and were always being updated on how their children were doing at school. Parents felt they were very supported by their children's teachers as they were very helpful in helping their children accomplish their objectives. This may reveal that the factors that Participants 1,3, 4, and 10 experienced are important factors in what it takes to have a successful transition, and these variables lead to successful transitions.

In this study, not all participants had the same transition experiences; this may be because all the participants' children attended different daycares and schools. The schools the children attended were also within different school boards in Montreal. The school boards in Montreal have their own regulations on how they operate, which may have led to varying participant experiences.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has contributed to our knowledge of the experiences of children with ASD transitioning to kindergarten and their families. However, this study has some limitations that need to be discussed. One limitation of this study is the small sample size. As there were only 10 participants who discussed 11 children, the results cannot be generalized. However, this sample size allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the participants and their children's transition experience to school. Even though the sample size was small, the participants were recruited from various schools and daycares, representing diverse backgrounds. This diversity can improve the generalizability of the results to gain the perspective of their child's transition to kindergarten through various people.

Another limitation is the time gap between the interviews and the children's transition to kindergarten. Participants were recruited if their child with ASD had transitioned from daycare to kindergarten within the past five years, which resulted in most of the participants describing their transition in the past years. Since some participants were recounting experiences from a few years ago, there might be information they forgot to share. Participants also might not recall certain details of their child's transition that may have been relevant in answering the study's research questions. Regardless of this time gap, participants were still able to provide detailed narratives of their experiences. By having some children who had already completed

kindergarten this provided full narratives and understandings of their entire kindergarten experiences, which gave the study more information to understand how the entire transition was from start to finish.

This study gathered participants voluntarily through Facebook and a centre for those with ASD, and anyone who fit the criteria was able to participate. One limitation of this was that perhaps many of those who participated were motivated to share their experiences if they experienced a difficult transition. This may have resulted in why most participants experienced a difficult transition and had many challenges. However, gathering participants through social media and through an ASD centre allowed the participants to have variability as they all come from different socioeconomic classes and backgrounds. The diversity in participants' schools and backgrounds contributed to the variability in the results.

One of the study's objectives was to understand the experiences of children with ASD as they transition to kindergarten. However, this study lacks the perspective of the children. Parents are not with their children in the classroom, so there may be some social interactions and behaviours that they are unaware of, as teachers were not included in this study to tell their perspective of the child in their classrooms. The child's perspectives would also be beneficial in understanding their thoughts and feelings about the transition. However, this was not the focus of the study.

In the future, researchers could compare the experiences of families as they transition to kindergarten with their transition to grade one. This comparison could help determine if a successful transition to kindergarten also influences a successful transition to grade one. Understanding any correlation between the two transitional periods could provide insights into how to increase the likelihood of continuous successful transitions in other periods of life.

Future studies can examine teachers, daycare educators and parents' experiences with children with ASD during their transition to kindergarten. Studies can better understand the perspectives of all three parties involved with a child's transition to kindergarten, compare the differences between each experience, and better understand how children transition to kindergarten. By following teachers and parents, future researchers can follow the child through the different stages of the transition; this can provide more in-depth information on how the child navigates this transition through the different stages and see what methods work or don't work to have a successful transition.

Future research could also explore the children's perspective on their transition to kindergarten, along with their parents' experiences. This can provide insight into how children perceive kindergarten and allow them to voice their experiences. Future researchers can also conduct observations in the classroom to see if what is observed aligns with the parent's perspectives and gain a better understanding of their perceptions.

Implications and Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the study has contributed to the research on the transition to kindergarten for children with ASD since there are limited studies that look at this transition among children with ASD and their families (e.g., Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010; Stoner et al., 2007; Fontil et al., 2020). This study sheds light on how children with ASD transition to kindergarten, what makes a successful transition and how it impacts their families.

This study has emphasized the importance of collaboration among kindergarten teachers, parents, and daycare educators in ensuring the successful transition of children with ASD. The literature has indicated that when these three parties collaborate before the start of school, it

increases the chances of the child having a positive transition to school (Stoner et al., 2007; Fontil & Petrakos, 2015). The findings of this study reinforced the findings in the literature as the participants who had a positive, successful transition had the school and daycare collaborate with each other before the start of the school year, while those who did not have this collaboration had children experiencing a more difficult time transitioning to kindergarten. Additional therapies and interventions may also assist children with ASD in transitioning to school more easily. Visiting the school and meeting their teachers before the start of school helps make the transition smoother. It is a common challenge that schools do not provide proper support for children with ASD when they transition to kindergarten, and parents often feel overwhelmed and have to advocate for their child's educational rights persistently (Fontil et al., 2020; Stoner et al., 2007). This study highlights the challenges that families and their children experience during this transition, as they have to deal with the schools with little support. Due to the lack of support, families experienced their children having a difficult time adapting to their new environment, and their IEPs were frequently not done adequately and did not reflect their child's needs.

The study also highlighted the difference in experiences between daycare and kindergarten as parents had productive and positive relationships with their child's daycare educator and how accommodating they were to their children. They felt like the daycare listened to their concerns and felt very lucky to have this much support from them as opposed to some of the participant's experience in kindergarten, where they did not feel as supported. This emphasizes the importance of collaboration between teachers and daycare educators so that schools can learn from daycare educators' knowledge about the child and how to best support them. The findings of this study also imply the need to have teacher training on ASD and how to

support children with ASD in the classroom best, as teachers are a crucial part in the succession of the transition.

In conclusion, the study supports previous work that shows that with the proper support and understanding, children with ASD can have a successful transition. This study demonstrates the differences between children's experiences regarding what certain interventions and support can accomplish and what elements can make a transition more difficult. The findings can be applied to schools and inform school administrators so that they can better understand how to help children with ASD join their schools and how they can best help with their transition. These findings can also be applied to elementary school policies to help change what is not being done and to strengthen their knowledge of how families and their children with ASD experience the transition to kindergarten.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). *Data and statistics on autism spectrum disorder*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>
- Chen, Y. (2020). Pre-service teachers' perspectives on transition to kindergarten practices for autistic children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(5), 597-607.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00991-8>
- D'Amico, L. K., Fan, X., Garrett, S., Zhang, X., Kilburn, J., Jones, A., & Richard, C. (2021). Supporting children and families with opportunity gaps: Educators' perspectives of a summer kindergarten transition program. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49(3), 365-375. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01079-9>
- Denkyirah, A. M., & Agbeke, W. K. (2010). Strategies for transitioning preschoolers with autism spectrum disorders to kindergarten. *Early childhood education journal*, 38(4), 265-270.
- Fontil, L. (2011). *Parents' and teachers' perceptions of the transition to school experiences of children with autism spectrum disorders* (MA thesis). Concordia University.
- Fontil, L., & Petrakos, H. (2015). Transition to school: The experiences of Canadian and immigrant families of children with autism spectrum disorders. *Psychology in the Schools*, 52, 773-788. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21859>
- Fontil, L., Gittens, J., Baudoin, E. & Sladeczek, I.E. (2020). Barriers to and facilitators of successful early school transitions for children with autism spectrum disorders and

- other developmental disabilities: A systematic review. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(6), 1866-1881.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03938-w>
- Forest, E. J., Horner, R. H., Lewis-Palmer, T., & Todd, A. W. (2004). Transitions for young children with autism from preschool to kindergarten. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 6(2), 103–112. <https://doi-org/10.1177/10983007040060020501>
- Glesne, C. (2011). Ch 6. But is it ethical? In *Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction*, 4th ed. (pp. 162-182). Pearson.
- Gouvernement du Québec. (n.d.). *Modernization of the Charter of the French Language*.
<https://www.quebec.ca/en/government/policies-orientations/french-language/modernization-charter-french-language>
- Hays, D.G. & Singh, A.A. (2012). Ch. 5. Understanding the researcher's role. In *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings* (pp. 137-158). The Guilford Press.
- Jellinek, E., Keller-Margulis, M., Mire, S. S., & Fan, W. (2023). Pre-service teachers' perspectives on transition to kindergarten practices for autistic children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 51(7), 1205–1214. <https://doi-org./10.1007/s10643-022-01367-6>
- Kim, S. A. (2022). Transition to kindergarten for children on the autism spectrum: Perspectives of Korean American parents. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 1-16.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-022-05665-1>
- Kurth, J. A., & Mastergeorge, A. M. (2010). Individual education plan goals and services for adolescents with autism: Impact of age and educational setting. *The Journal of Special Education*, 44(3), 146-160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466908329825>

MacDonald, M. A. (2010). Invisible disorder, visible effect. *Principal Leadership*, 10, 42-45.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). Ch 6. Validity: How might you be wrong? In *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach, 3rd ed.* (pp. 121-138). SAGE.

McIntyre, L. L., Eckert, T. L., Wildenger, L. K., Fiese, B. H., & DiGennaro, R. F. D. (2010).

Family concerns surrounding kindergarten transition: a comparison of students in special and general education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38(4), 259–263.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-010-0416-y>

Ministère de la Famille. (2020). *A sufficient number of qualified staff*. Gouvernement du Québec.

<https://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/en/services-de-garde/legal-illegal-reconnu/services-garde-reconnus/Pages/personnel-en-nombre-suffisant-et-qualifie.aspx>

Pianta, R. C., Kraft-Sayre, M., Rimm-Kaufman, S., Gercke, N., & Higgins, T. (2001).

Collaboration in building partnerships between families and schools: The National Center for Early Development and Learning's Kindergarten Transition Intervention. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16, 117-132.

Purtell, K. M., Valauri, A., Rhoad-Drogalis, A., Jiang, H., Justice, L. M., Lin, T.-J., & Logan, J.

A. R. (2020). Understanding policies and practices that support successful transitions to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 52, 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.09.003>

[org./10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.09.003)

Quintero, N., & McIntyre, L. (2011). Kindergarten transition preparation: A comparison of

teacher and parent practices for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38(6), 411–420.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-010-0427-8>

Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., & Pianta, R.C. (1999). Patterns of family school

- contact in preschool and kindergarten. *School Psychological Review* 28(3), 426—438.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.1999.12085975>
- Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(2), 147-166.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0885-2006\(00\)00049-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0885-2006(00)00049-1)
- Ruble, L. A., McGrew, J. H., Dalrymple, N. J., & Jung, L. A. (2010). Examining the quality of IEPs for young children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 40(12), 1459-1470. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-010-1003-1>
- Starr, E.M., Martini, T.S. & Kuo, B.C.H. (2016) Transition to kindergarten for children with autism spectrum disorder: A focus group study with ethnically diverse parents, teachers, and early intervention service providers. *Focus on Autism Other Developmental Disabilities*, 31(2), 115-128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357614532497>
- Stoner, J.B., Angell, M. E., House, J.J., Bock, S. J (2007). Transitions: Perspectives from parents of young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 19, 23-39.
- Wildenger, L.K., & McIntyre, L.L. (2012). Investigating the relation between kindergarten preparation and child socio-behavioral school outcomes. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 40,169—176. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-012-0509-x>
- Wong, M. (2016). A longitudinal study of children's voices in regard to stress and coping during the transition to school. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(6), 927—946.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1068769>

Yamauchi, L. A. (2020). Early childhood educators' perspectives on early childhood settings and collaborations to promote kindergarten transition. *Professional Educator*, 43(1), 100–113.

Appendix A

Parental Consent Form



INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: The Experiences of Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten

Researcher: Alyssa Raposo

Researcher's Contact Information: Phone: 514-975-6022 Email: a_rap@live@concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Miranda D'Amico

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: Phone: 514-848-2424 ext. 2040 Email: miranda.damico@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study: N/A

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to understand the experiences and perspectives of families with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in their transition to kindergarten from preschool. The aim is to gain insight into families' experiences, thoughts, and feelings about their child's transition.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to complete one semi-structured interview. You will also be asked to answer a small demographic questionnaire before the interview.

The interview will be between one hour to 90 minutes and will be conducted through Zoom.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include potentially discussing experiences that you may find upsetting or uncomfortable. You do not need to answer a question if you are uncomfortable answering it.

This research is not intended to benefit you personally.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Interview transcripts: The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Your answers to the questions will be used as information for this study.
- Demographic form: The information you provide on the form will be used in this study.

We will not allow anyone to access the information except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form. The information gathered will be confidential. This means it will not be possible to link you and the information you provide.

We will protect the information by storing the data on a password-protected computer that I can only access. Once the data is analyzed and the results are finalized, all data will be destroyed. We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that your audio-taped interview, interview transcript and, the demographic form you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher within one week after the interview has been conducted. There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions, and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME

(Please print)

SIGNATURE

DATE

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix B

Demographic Form

Demographic form

Please answer the following questions. If you wish not to answer certain questions, you can leave it blank.

1. Parent/Guardian Information

- Name:
- Relationship to the child that transitioned to kindergarten:
- What is your highest level of education?
- What is your current employment status?
- How many people live in your household?
- Email:

2. Child who transitioned to kindergarten information:

- Name:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Diagnosis/diagnoses:
- Age at Diagnosis:
- Preschool/daycare:
- Current school:

3. Support services

- Does your child receive any support services (e.g., therapy, counselling) (Yes/No)?
- If yes, briefly describe the services received:
- Have you received support services or resources for yourself, or your family related to your child's transition to kindergarten (Psychologist, therapy, transition specialists, school providing interventions)? (Yes/No)
- If yes, briefly describe the services or resources received:

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Interview questions:

Adapted and extended from Fontil, L. (2011). *Parents' and teachers' perceptions of the transition to school experiences of children with autism spectrum disorders* (MA thesis in Child Studies). Concordia University.

Experience at preschool

1. Where did your child go to preschool?
2. What type of things did your child learn in preschool?
 - What kind of activities did they do?
3. Tell me about your child's behaviours at preschool.
 - What were their positive behaviours?
 - Did they have any negative behaviours?
 - How did they get along with their teacher?
 - How did they get along with the other children?
4. How did your child's preschool support your child's needs, or how did they not?
 - What were some ways the preschool helped you and your child be successful at preschool?
5. What challenges did you and your child face with the preschool/daycare?
 - How did you overcome these challenges?
6. Describe your child's preschool teacher.
 - Did they help support your child's needs? If so, how?
 - How often were you in contact with your child's preschool teacher?

- How comfortable were you contacting your child's preschool teacher? Why or why not?
 - What was your relationship like with your child's preschool teacher?
 - How was the relationship between your child and their preschool teacher?
7. Were you involved with the preschool?
 8. Did the preschool prepare your child for their transition to kindergarten? If so, how?

Experiences at Current School

1. What is your child's routine before going to school?
 - What is it like when they first wake up in the morning?
 - What does your child talk about on the way to school?
 - What does your child do when they are picked up from school? What do they talk about? What do they do first once they get home?
2. Please tell me how your child is doing at their new school this year.
 - What type of things are they learning?
 - What types of activities do they like to do?
 - What activities do they not like?
 - Tell me about your child's progress this year compared to preschool.
3. Describe your child's behaviour at their current school.
 - What is their positive behaviour?
 - What are some of their negative behaviours?
 - How does your child get along with their teacher?
 - How do they get along with their peers?
 - Does your child like their current school?

4. Do you have a positive relationship with your child's current teacher?
 - Does your child have a good relationship with their teacher?
 - Does the teacher support the child's needs? If so, how?
 - How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?
 - How comfortable are you communicating with your child's teacher?
5. When you do talk with your child's teacher, what do you talk about?
 - Does the teacher discuss their behaviour or academics-related topics?
 - How often do you communicate with your child's teacher?
6. Does your child have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?
 - When was your child given an IEP?
 - What are the goals and objectives outlined in your child's IEP?
 - Have you seen any progress toward meeting the goals outlined in your child's IEP?
 - Are you involved in your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP)? If so, to what degree?
7. How is your relationship with the school personnel?
8. Who are your child's friends at school?
 - What do they like to do?
 - Do they see or play with each other outside of school? If so, what type of activities do they like to do together?

Transition to Kindergarten

1. Before your child transitioned to kindergarten, did you and your child have any meetings with a case worker or ASD transition specialist? If so, what did they do to help with the transition?

2. Is your child using services or programs outside of the school? (Such as psychologists)
3. What did you do to prepare your child for the transition to kindergarten?
4. How did the transition experience of going to kindergarten has been for your child?
 - Overall, was it excellent, good, okay, or not very well?
5. How did your child respond to the transition to kindergarten?
 - How did they react to the changes in the environment?
6. Please explain to me your experience with your child's transition to kindergarten.
 - Was there a transition process between the school and you?
 - What were the most and least helpful things the school did to facilitate the transition?
 - What were the worries and concerns that you had before your child transitioned?
7. Did the school provide any help with your child's transition?
8. How have you worked with the school to ensure your child's success?
9. Do you believe your child's needs are met at their current school?
10. What modifications have you requested or implemented to help your child adjust to the new environment?
11. What were the positive experiences of the transition?
12. What were some of the challenges your child faced during the transition?
13. What has gone well for you? (parent)
14. What has been difficult for you during the transition?
15. What were some challenges you faced during the transition?
16. What support systems have you found to be helpful during the transition? Were support systems provided?

17. What strategies have you found to be successful when dealing with the challenges of the transition?
18. What aspects would you have liked the school to do differently for your child's transition?
19. What are some things you believe the school can do to make you more comfortable?

Appendix D

Sample of Participant 1's Interview Transcript

[00:07:15.230] - Alyssa

Did you face any challenges at the daycare or with the staff, or just in general?

[00:07:26.220] – Participant 1

I think the biggest challenge was just getting her in and finding a place that would accept her. And then, like I say, once we were in and once... I mean, because I think they have limited resources as well, so they don't have the resources, both the manpower or the... They don't have specific training for kids with special needs, so they don't feel equipped to take care of a child. That is very problematic.

[00:07:57.990] - Alyssa

Okay.

[00:07:58.920] – Participant 1

But (Child 1) is really high functioning. So, although she had the diagnosis, they were able to integrate her into the group, and she made friends. So it worked out well.

[00:08:16.980] - Alyssa

Okay, good. So, how did she get along with her friends? Like she was easy to like and was able to get along with the other children.

[00:08:24.030] -Participant 1

Yeah, she has a bunch of little buddies, and she's in kindergarten now. And yeah, some of them, there's one little girl who she was in daycare with that's in the same kindergarten class as her, so they're friends. Yeah, no, she has a couple of good friends, a couple of boyfriends, a couple. She's got lots of... She seems to be popular. When I pick her up from school, people are always giving her hugs.

[00:09:01.010] - Alyssa

Oh, okay.

[00:09:01.910] – Participant 1

They're very affectionate towards one another. It's like a little six-year-old group hug. So it's very cute.

[00:09:10.510] - Alyssa

So, how often were you in contact with her preschool teacher at the time?

[00:09:18.820] -Participant 1

Oh, every day. Because we always did condensed days. I wasn't working. It was really just for child 1's therapy part of her. We thought of it more as therapy as opposed to an opportunity for me to work.

[00:09:40.620] - Alyssa

Okay, to help her integrate.

[00:09:42.360] – Participant 1

Yeah, it was all about her. I called myself (Child 1's) CEO because on Friday, I mean, there would be one day a week that we'd be taking her to one therapist, and the other day we'd be taking her to another therapist. So it's really a full-time job.

[00:10:00.140] - Participant 1

Okay. The way we did it, it was a full-time job.

[00:10:04.610] - Alyssa

Okay. Were you very comfortable with her, with her preschool teacher? Like, and why? Were you able to easily contact her?

[00:10:18.000] - Participant 1

I was comfortable with her, both of them, I think, just because whenever I saw them, they were smiling and they talked to me, and we'd have good communication. I think they knew that if they had a problem with her, that my husband and I were really open to help out as well. So instead of... I know a lot of parents are in denial or have a really hard time with it, and we were lucky because we had the finances to be able to pay for therapists to go into the CPE, which is just not what everybody has. So I think because the daycare felt supported and respected, whenever I went there, I felt supported and respected.

[00:11:05.450] - Alyssa

Okay, that's really good. I'm happy you had that experience. And did (child 1) and her teacher also got along, I assume they did have a good relationship?

[00:11:19.140] - Participant 1

Yeah.

[00:11:19.270] - Alyssa

Okay. And the last question about the preschool part: Did they help her transition to kindergarten? Did they prepare her?

[00:11:31.210] – Participant 1

Definitely, she really was not ready for kindergarten when she was three. So it really helped her that year of daycare. She matured a lot. She wasn't potty trained when she was three, so we were able to do that with the daycare. And that's something that would be much harder at school than it would be with the daycare. At the daycare, they're all set up for it. They're like, what's another diaper at this point in my life? I have to change thousands of diapers, so they don't. And so we were able to potty train her over the six months before she started school. So when she was freshly potty trained, she was still at the daycare and they were helpful and supportive of that. So it was good.

Appendix E

Sample of First Cycle Coding

[00:24:35.190] – Alyssa
Yeah, okay. What did you do to prepare her for her transition to kindergarten?
[00:24:45.520] - Participant 10
During the whole summertime, we starting her to use uniform, like (another child's name)? You know that wearing uniform going to daycare. Then we're starting also to let her bring backpack. At least she gets used to something in her bag because she doesn't like it that something stuck in her bag. Then few summers, few days in the summertime, we drive around to her school. At least she knows that's her school. Then we let her go down in that front yard just to familiarize.
"During the summertime starting her to use uniform" 66 "starting also let her bring back pack" 67 "we drive around to her school, at least she knows that's her school" 68 "go down in that front yard to just to familiarize " 69
[00:25:22.300] – Alyssa
How did her transition experience according to kindergarten? How has it been for her? Overall, was it excellent, good? Okay, or not so well?
[00:25:36.740] - Participant 10
I think it was an excellent because we don't have a problem. Since she doesn't talk, the only signs that we know that she's enjoying is when I wake her up in the morning, she doesn't cry that she's going to wake up. Then when I help her put her clothes, no resisting, she doesn't resist. Then she's waiting happily with her school bus. Then the teachers also mentioned that she's always happy at school. Like a happy disposition, always. We know that she's enjoying at school.
"I think it was excellent " 70 "we know that she's enjoying is when I wake her up in the morning, so don't cry" 71 "always happy at school" 72
[00:26:14.600] – Alyssa
Okay, that's good. How did she react to her changes in environment?
[00:26:25.370] - Participant 10
I think when she first starts kindergarten, the first few weeks they are only four kids because it was COVID, right? It's only four kids. Then on the second week, (Child 11) didn't go to school and the other four kids starts again, the second batch. When they were only four, she's very happy. She's so excited. But when everybody was there, the eight kids already at school, the teacher mentioned that (Child 11) is starting to be so quiet. It's like she was shocked at why there's a lot of kids before her four. Then I think it's hard for her that she's participating with a lot of kids. Compared to when they were four.

explaining how child11 was happy in the beginning but then got quiet when she saw more kids 73
[00:27:18.300] – Alyssa
What were the most... What was some of the helpful things or at least helpful that the school did to help with the transition?
[00:27:32.060] - Participant 10
The most helpful one was inviting her to attend the one day that they go first. Then the first and then the first one week that is only like a four child to get used to the environment. That's the most helpful one. But there's also a drawback with that because when all the kids came back, (Child 11) was shocked why there's a lot of kids.
"Most helpful one was inviting her to attend the one day that they go first" 74 having only 4 children at a time to get used to the new environment 75
[00:28:02.060] – Alyssa
What were some of your worries and concerns that you had before the (Child 11) before she transitioned?
[00:28:12.310] - Participant 10
My worries were she's not going to eat because I already know it. In the day in the kindergarten, it's going to be longer because she has to take the bus more than one hour from our house and to his school is already one hour and the same thing in the afternoon. My worry is always like, oh, is going to be hungry the whole day because I know she's not going to eat at school. Which is true.
worrying about child not eating 76
[00:28:46.400] – Alyssa
And did the school provide any help with her transition? Besides that, before we talked about when they invited her for one day?
[00:28:56.560] - Participant 10
Yeah, I think they also asked pictures of us and then they put it in the wall, in the classroom. So when (Child 11) was sometimes crying, there are incidents that they told us that sometimes (Child 11), like being sad and we always just show your picture or (son's name) or the dad's like, Oh, it's okay, Mommy. I'm going to see Mommy after a few hours, something like that. Then she comes down. They also give (Child 11) always opportunity to go to the sensory room to the quiet room. It also helpful.
explaining when child 11 gets upset school has pictures of family to show her and she calms down 77 "always opportunity to go to the sensory room" 78
[00:29:36.410] – Alyssa
Okay. So do you believe that her needs are met at the time of kindergarten?

[00:29:43.690] - Participant 10
Yes.
needs being met at kindergarten 79