



Pictured above: the ACoRNS logo

Websites

acorns-soton.org.uk

autismtransitions.org

Twitter

[@ACoRNSoton](https://twitter.com/ACoRNSoton)

Contact us

S.J.Parsons@soton.sc.uk

H.Kovshoff@soton.ac.uk

26TH APRIL 2021

About us

The Autism Community Research Network @ Southampton [ACoRNS] is an education-focused initiative which seeks to improve the lives of autistic children and young people. It is a unique collaboration between Education and Psychology at the University of Southampton and local nurseries, schools and colleges who are interested in developing, researching, understanding, and sharing good practice in educational provision for autistic children and their families. The network is co-directed by [Professor Sarah Parsons](#), from the University's [Education School](#), and [Dr Hanna Kovshoff](#) from the [School of Psychology](#) in partnership with our Steering Group who you can read about on our [website](#).

ACoRNS News



We are delighted to welcome Dr Asha Ward to the ACoRNS team. Asha is the new Research Fellow on our ESRC-funded ['Our Stories' project](#) which is extending our Digital Stories

methodology to new settings to support the transitions and understanding of autistic children, young people and their families. Asha recently completed her EngD at Bournemouth University with a thesis entitled: MAMI Tech Toolkit: Utilising Action Research to Develop a Technological Toolkit to Facilitate Access to Music-Making. Her work focuses on using participatory design methods to create bespoke technology-based systems through combinations of hardware, software, and tangible objects. She is passionate about finding new and interesting ways to interact with the computer and how these can be used to benefit humans.

Please feel free to contact Asha:
A.L.Ward@soton.ac.uk

ACoRNS webinars

On 15th April 2021 Dr Jacqui Shepherd from ACoRN@Sussex reported on her large survey of parents of SEND children, about their experiences of schooling, and home-schooling, over the past year.

The recording of the talk is now available here:

<https://sussex.box.com/s/3lr4jattxiujgqs7hj487xh5q5203f56>

Our next open webinar is on 11th June 2021 from 10-11am.

Dr Henry Wood-Downie will be discussing his research on sex / gender differences in camouflaging in autistic children and adolescents.

All welcome via Zoom:

[Join Zoom Meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 839 9670 0154

Passcode: 102570

ACoRNS research summaries

Here we will share links to new open access (free to view) papers by members of ACoRNS and / or summaries of our other recent research.

Please get in touch if you would like the full paper and the links do not work!:

s.j.parsons@soton.ac.uk

Amber Warren, Kate Buckingham & Sarah Parsons (2020) Everyday experiences of inclusion in Primary resourced provision: the voices of autistic pupils and their teachers, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2020.1823166

Resourced provision is an important model for inclusive education, one that could be argued to provide the 'best of both worlds' of special and mainstream provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs. Typically, resourced provision means that pupils split their time between specialist and mainstream classes, gaining balanced support that is highly valued by parents. However, there is little research about resourced provision from the perspectives of the pupils.

The paper reports on a small-scale study that explored how children and teachers experience resourced provision and manage the daily transitions between activities and classes. A qualitative visual storyboard methodology was co-created between the researchers and school staff. This was used to explore what five 9 to 11-year-old pupils on the autism spectrum thought about their everyday experiences, including transitions between special and mainstream classes. Six staff members from the resource base were also interviewed. The storyboard method was found to be a simple and adaptable approach that can enable children to share their views in research and practice.

The findings showed the importance of friendship and peers; where and how support was provided; tensions between structured and unstructured periods; and student/school identity.

Encouragingly, the school has implemented changes to how daily transitions are supported in response to pupils' views, with positive impacts on practice.

Sarah Parsons, Hanna Kovshoff & Kathryn Ivil (2020) Digital stories for transition: co-constructing an evidence base in the early years with autistic children, families and practitioners, *Educational Review*, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2020.1816909

Concerns have been raised about the quality of practice-focused research in education generally and in early years education specifically. Chris Pascal and Tony Bertram argue that a shift in worldview is needed to improve the robustness and overall quality of participatory research in the early years and proposed a "praxeological framework" for research comprising praxis, power, values, and methodology. This paper provides an example of how this praxeological framework was applied within an existing research-practice partnership focusing on autism education in the early years. We used a "non-orthodox" Digital Storytelling methodology to co-construct knowledge between researchers, practitioners, children and families about educational transitions. Our co-construction of knowledge involved the embodied knowledge of children and the exemplary (practical) knowledge of families and practitioners, leading to new insights into educational practices. In adopting a knowledge co-creation approach from the start, we established a powerful pathway to impact through which our research is already making a difference to practice. We propose that pathway to impact is an important element that could be made more explicit within a praxeological framing of research.

Sarah Parsons, Hanna Kovshoff, Efstathia Karakosta and Kathryn Ivil (2021) Understanding holistic and unique childhoods: knowledge generation in the early years with autistic children, families and practitioners. *Early Years*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2021.1889992>

The knowledge of children with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families, is essential for informing educational transition planning and decision-making. However, often their views are marginalised through formalised processes and assessments which underestimate children's capabilities and prioritise professional knowledge. We draw upon a project in an early years setting that involved 5 young autistic children, their families, and practitioners in the creation of Digital Stories as the children prepared for transition to school. Parents and practitioners contributed exemplary (practical) knowledge and children contributed embodied knowledge about the things that mattered to them. We analysed the Stories to find out what we learned about the children through taking these different perspectives.

Children's embodied knowledge revealed their voices, interests and capabilities, with a focus on the spaces where they liked to be and who they chose to spend time with (including themselves). Parents and practitioners shared knowledge about the objects and interests of the child, the choices they make, and where support is needed. Taken together, the Stories provide a holistic view of the child that moves beyond difficulties and challenges. The Stories could be an important tool for professionals and families for supporting children's transitions.

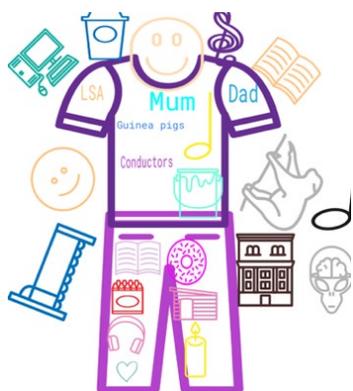
Introducing... Chloe & Steph



Hello. My name is Chloe East and I'm in the second year of my PhD in psychology at The University of Southampton.

Having taught drama and media studies in secondary schools for many years, I became interested in the educational experiences of the growing number of children in my classes with an autism diagnosis. Having recognised the gaps in my knowledge and understanding of autism I am seeking to find ways to support autistic young people to share their lived experiences in a way that will be of benefit to them and others. Focusing on the challenging transition between primary and secondary school, my research uses a method called body mapping. This method supports young people to share their thoughts and feelings about their transition experiences.

The work will build into a larger project which will involve working collaboratively with a group of autistic young people to develop resources that will support the transition experience.



Body map – the task has moved online

The focus of my research is very much on promoting the voices of autistic young people using creative and participatory methods.

Hello, I am Steph Lewis and I am a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton.



For my thesis project I have collaborated with Hill House School to adapt and extend the 'I am..' Digital Story framework, for older young people transitioning to post 19 settings. In partnership with Hill House, I have been supporting the co-creation of Digital Stories with the young person, care staff and other professionals working within the school.

I have also carried out interviews with key stakeholders to understand the perspectives, experiences and views on the Digital Story methodology, and its impact within the young person's transition. The Digital Stories have been especially relevant during these recent challenging times where COVID restrictions have limited the opportunities for transition visits. I am very passionate about the Digital Story methodology; it is a novel, creative and strengths-based approach, which captures the views and voices of young people with complex needs, so they are heard and understood.



Pictured: image from Emily's Digital Story

Voices Through Art Project

Voices Through Art is a collaborative project between ACoRNS, Samantha Davies, illustrator, and Tracie Raufi at New Forest School. It is an impact project funded by the University's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, in which we will be designing four short comics targeted at autistic children transitioning from primary to secondary school. The transition between primary and secondary school can be a daunting process, even more so for young autistic children, where the move from smaller environments to larger ones can have potentially long-term impacts. Critically, the COVID-19 lockdown has resulted in extra challenges in supporting transitions and so there is an even greater need for resources to help with the process.

The project aims to support the wellbeing and resilience of children, family and schools through transitions by drawing on autistic children's transition experiences, working closely with a gain feedback with staff and pupils at New Forest School throughout the design process and ensure the resulting comics reflect the priorities and views of autistic children and young people. We aim to provide a set of engaging resources to support schools and young people with ideas and strategies to enable positive strategies and transitions.

Upon completing the comics, we intend to gather feedback from young people, parents and teachers, and evaluate their impact before and during the transition to secondary school during Summer/Autumn 2021. **If you would like to be a part of this pilot please get in touch with Hanna Kovshoff who is leading the project:**

H.Kovshoff@soton.ac.uk

You can follow our exciting progress on Instagram at [@acornsvoces](https://www.instagram.com/acornsvoces) or on our blog: <https://acornsvoces.soton.org.uk/category/acorns-art/>

Dropping in on The Aviary Nursery

By Kathryn Ivil, Nursery Manager

The Aviary Nursery is one of the Special Education Needs (SEN) Hubs for Hampshire County Council. Located in central Eastleigh, it offers both childcare and term time sessions for the children of the borough, this includes places for twenty children with SEN. These places are allocated via the SEN department of Hampshire County Council at termly panel meetings attended by their representative as well as other educational and health professionals. These twenty child spaces are offered as term time morning or afternoon sessions with ten children attending at each.

Over the last five years it has become evident that many of the children attending these spaces have a diagnosis or an area of need around social communication and autism. Of the current cohort of children, fifteen have a diagnosis of autism and three have social communication difficulties. The Aviary Nursery has been part of ACoRNS since it began in November 2016. We were keen to bring practice and research closer together and be part of current theories and conjectures so that we may provide a suitable environment for children with autism to learn and develop. One of the projects we were initially part of during 2018 was listening to the voices and experiences of children with autism and their families, during their transition from nursery to Primary school (<https://autismtransitions.org/>). The

making of our first Digital Stories was enlightening and powerful, as it not only made us stop, watch, and listen, it also showed so many details of the child's play that we had not previously noticed. It also illustrated the children's choice of outside play for most of their day, whatever the weather.

Our building, previously an infant school, has a mixture of large, high ceilinged rooms, smaller rooms, previously cupboards or toilets and a large, outside area. The outside area is outstanding and provides space for children to explore, run, climb, build, and experience a Forest School learning environment. This unique facility is popular with all children and offers a distinctive learning opportunity for the children to explore. The Digital Stories highlighted these areas as being important for children with autism to access and their engagement in this area was high.

Since the project finished, we have strived to continue to use Digital Stories as part of a transition meeting for a child with autism or SEN and their family. We have had positive comments from receiving schools, professionals in the meetings and the parents, who enjoying seeing what the child is doing when they are not around.

This year has given us a different challenge and one in which Digital Stories have become centre stage. The new parents and children visited the nursery in the summer but only our outside areas which, although important, did not give them the whole view or the nursery. Our twenty spaces

are occupied, and the children need Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP) to support their transition to their next educational setting. These are now in process and we have Educational Psychologists (EP) wanting to see the children and write their reports for their individual EHCP.

Covid-19 has stopped this happening with EP's working from home. So, out came the video camera, a bit earlier than usual, and the recording began. Again, stopping, watching, and listening to the noises the children were making gave us a new perspective of their characters. It has helped us write some 'next steps' for their learning plans, and most importantly at this time, produced an 'I am... Digital story for an EP to watch and gain a similar insight of the child they need to write about. An additional 'bonus feature' for this year is trailing a memory stick which we have given to parents with their child's Digital Story on. This can then be added to, as we film more about their child and build a bigger picture ready for transition to school and beyond.

As I write this report the nursery is closed due to a Covid-19 outbreak, so although not feeling 100% it has given me time to pause and take time to do this important bit of recording. To make the time to produce these stories about each of our twenty children is our aim for these next couple of months and to make it intrinsic a child's time at the nursery. Please feel free to follow-up with Kathryn directly:

Kathryn.Ivil@hants.gov.uk