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# **”Now he’s a secondary school student” : successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with autism spectrum disorder**

Mechthild Richter

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**ÉCOLE DOCTORALE** *Sciences humaines et sociales - Perspectives européennes (519)*

**THÈSE** présentée par :

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**« Maintenant c'est un collégien » - Réussir la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme**

**"Now he's a secondary school student" - Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Volume 1

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## Liste of Abbreviations/Glossary

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ADI-R	Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised
ADOS	Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule
AESH	<i>Accompagnant des élèves en situation de handicap</i> ; teaching assistant
APA	American Psychiatric Association
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASSQ	Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire
AVS	<i>Auxiliaire de Vie Scolaire</i> ; teaching assistant
Carte scolaire	Regular attribution to a neighborhood school
CFTMEA-R	<i>Classification française des troubles mentaux de l'enfant et de l'adolescent</i> ; French classification of mental disorders in children and adolescents
Collège	Lower secondary school (6th-9th grade)
Conseil école-collège	Primary school-secondary school council
CRA	<i>Centres Ressources Autisme</i> ; autism resource centers
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
Cycle	Here: learning stages; Cycle 1: first learning, Cycle 2: fundamental learning, Cycle 3: consolidation, Cycle 4: deepening
DAMP	Deficits in Attention, Motor control and Perception
Diplôme national du brevet	School-leaving certificate at the end of lower secondary school
Diplôme du baccalauréat	School-leaving certificate at the end of upper secondary school
Devoirs faits	Program for doing homework under supervision at secondary school
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
Ecole maternelle	Pre-school
Ecole élémentaire	Primary school
ESS	<i>Equipe de suivi de la scolarisation</i> ; schooling monitoring team
EU	European Union
HAS	<i>Haute Autorité de Santé</i> ; National Authority for Health
ICD	International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems
IEP	Individualized Education Program
Livret scolaire unique	Unique school booklet

LPC	<i>Livret Personnel de Compétences</i> ; personal competency booklet
Lycée	Upper secondary school (10th-12th grade)
M-CHAT	Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers
MDPH	<i>Maisons départementales des personnes handicapées</i> ; local offices for individuals with special needs
MEN	<i>Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale</i> ; Ministry of National Education
MENJ	<i>Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse</i> ; Ministry of National Education and Youth
MENESR	<i>Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche</i> ; Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research
MESRI	<i>Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation</i> ; Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation
Plan Autisme	Autism Plans; Government programs for the support of individuals with ASD
PPRE (Passerelle)	<i>Programme personnalisé de réussite éducative</i> ; personalized educational success program (transition edition)
PPS	<i>Projet Personnalisée de Scolarisation</i> ; personalized schooling project
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
SESSAD	<i>Service d'éducation spéciale et de soins à domicile</i> ; Service for special education and home care
Sixième	Sixth grade; first year of lower secondary school
Socle commun de connaissances	Common knowledge base
Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées	State secretary to the prime minister for persons with disabilities
TEACCH	Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children
ULIS	<i>Unités localisées pour l'inclusion scolaire</i> ; local units for inclusive education
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organisation

# Introduction

During my studies in special needs education in Germany I had a part-time position in a family support service and worked regularly with B., a teenager with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), walking disability, hypersensitivity to noises and light, hyposensitivity to physical contact, who was non-verbal and had a non-German family background. In the mornings at university, I studied texts on inclusive schools as part of inclusive societies. In the afternoon, people left the metro when B. did not bear the lights and expressed it by screaming. We were thrown out of a fast-food restaurant. A broken elevator meant long detours with the wheelchair. A mainstream school has never been considered for B. The specialized school he attended aimed to prepare him for the work in a workshop for people with disabilities, although the school staff was convinced that he would never be capable to work there.

This gap between theory and practice, claim and reality, got hold of me and led to an increased interest in applied research in the field of inclusive education. The examples above show that inclusion touches more areas than just the education system. However, almost every child in Western societies goes through the formal education system which makes it a valid point of departure.

It leads to the question of how an education system can be inclusive and therefore ensure for every child to learn, to discover, to develop personally and to be supported along its way. In Germany students are selected for the multi-track secondary school system after the 4<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school and studies show that this selection reproduces societal inequalities (Klemm, 2016; Schütz & Wößmann, 2005). In France, the separation takes place much later or outside of school. Nevertheless, up to one third of French students with special needs in mainstream primary schools do not enter or finish secondary school (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale [MEN] & Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation [MESRI], 2018b). The education systems of both countries are quite different in regard to this transition. However, in both cases, it seems to have a remarkable influence on the educational and professional career of a student. This is why the transition from primary to secondary school is in the center of this research project.

As other European countries have done, France passed a law on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of persons with disabilities in 2005 (Legifrance, 2005). This law demands an inclusive education for all students without any exceptions (MEN, 2018a). This law has led to a serious increase of students with special needs attending mainstream schools and classes, among them students with ASD. However, the gap between primary and secondary school attendance remains.

At the same time ASD-diagnoses increase, thus it can be assumed that the number of students with ASD will further rise and soon pose more challenges to the transition from primary to secondary school.

The autism spectrum is large and challenges the education system in many possible ways. Social communication and interaction difficulties, as well as restrictive behavior, may influence the everyday school life to a major extent. A resistance to change can be a major obstacle for the transition to secondary school that consists of various changes. This complexity allows the identification of a wide range of potential challenges, which may affect any student in the transition period. The comorbidities that frequently occur in addition to ASD like ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or high sensitivity to light or noise may be shared with classmates without ASD diagnoses. Furthermore, students on the autism spectrum can have an intellectual disability or be highly gifted. Finding a way to improve the situation of students with ASD may lead to a benefit for all students.

To approach this research task, some concepts need to be clarified. The first part of this thesis gives an overview of the theoretical elements of the study. First, the term *Autism Spectrum Disorder* is defined based on international classifications; recent developments in the research are presented and put into the context of schooling. Second, the primary-secondary transition is conceptualized based on former research. It is put into connection with the French school system and its measures for students with special needs during the transition. A presentation of the national and international developments regarding inclusive education, provide a further context the research project is embedded in. Finally, current research on the inclusive education of students with ASD is presented.

These theoretical elements were the foundation for the construction of a research project that seeks to find out how a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD can be established. To do so, the literature was reviewed to determine what a successful transition means in the context of ASD, but the literature did not provide a sufficient definition. This was the starting point for the development of a research methodology that is presented in the second part. It clarifies the research questions and the choice of research methods applied in order to answer these questions. Furthermore, it describes the sampling processes for the different studies. The last section gives further information on how the data was collected and analyzed. This chapter complements the three studies, which constitute the research project and which are presented in part 3 in the form of scientific articles.

The first study is a literature review that revisits the definition of the successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD. Therefore, sixteen international studies on this topic have been systematically analyzed. Criteria for the primary-secondary transition for students with ASD were developed based on this review. This article has been published in 2019 by the Journal of Research in Childhood Education.

The second study applies a free association method based on the theory of social representations. It approaches the question, what a successful transition from primary to secondary school means for lay people in contrast to the few scientific definitions that exist. Furthermore, this study seeks to find out if the social representations differ in regard to the transition of a student with or without ASD. It, therefore, targets the same question as the first study but applies an empirical method, which is widely used in social psychology, to obtain an additional perspective, that of lay people. The results show that there is a large congruence between scientific ideas and lay beliefs and also between the perspectives on the transition of students with and without ASD. Some minor differences seem to remain and offer departure points for further research. This article is prepared for submission to an international journal.

The third study aimed to put the light on the experiences and perspectives of those people who are directly involved with the primary-secondary transition of a student with ASD. As key stakeholders students with ASD, their parents and teachers were identified. Each participant was interrogated three times during one school year using semi-structured interviews. This enabled the collection of rich data about the transition experiences and perceptions of individuals directly affected by it. Part of this study, the interview data of students and parents from the first cohort of participants (school year 2017/2018), is presented in article 3, which has been published by the European Journal of Special Needs Education in 2019.

In the fourth part of this thesis, the results of all presented studies are combined and discussed in light of the existing literature and official texts. The different perspectives form a solid foundation for the development of recommendations for a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD. Due to the large autism spectrum and the individual character of each transition experience, all recommendations have to be individually adapted to the specific case, as the study results have shown. The implications of the recommendations for the social and political context in France are discussed specifically.

The methodology is revisited, reflected and discussed to identify strengths and limitations, which are discussed in terms of method choice and sampling. The limitations, as well as the obtained results, offer departure points for further research. This includes ideas for the

application of other methods as well as for topics that emerged in the different studies and demand deeper understanding. A summary of the contributions of this research project and an outlook on their implications conclude the thesis.

# 1 Part I: Theoretical Elements

## 1.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder

In this study the term *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (ASD) is used. This chapter explains how the different classification systems define the most important terms in this study.

Furthermore, this chapter draws attention to comorbidities that often occur in connection to ASD and may make the students' condition even more complex. The increasing prevalence rate is one reason why this study and also French education policies focus on students with ASD. A short overview on recent developments and research in regard to autism is given. The last section concerns the diagnosis of ASD, which is difficult and often takes long time due to the complexity of the phenomenon. The process is often difficult to bear for the participants and can have a long-term impact on the family.

### 1.1.1 Classification Systems

The term *Autism Spectrum Disorder* is a widely used term in order to describe a spectrum rather than different subtypes of autism that have been used separately from each other before. It was shaped by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). The fifth and most recent edition (DSM-5) published in 2013 describes the diagnostic criteria for ASD as a neurodevelopmental disorder. It is characterized by “[p]ersistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts” and “[r]estricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities” (APA, 2013).

For each of these major characteristics there are main symptoms assigned. Social communication and interaction deficits are linked to problems with social initiation and response (abnormal social approach, failure of normal dialogue, reduced sharing of interests, reduced sharing of emotions and affect, lack of initiation, poor social imitation), with non-verbal communication (impairments in use of eye contact and body language, abnormal speech, abnormalities in use and understanding of affect, lack of coordinated verbal and nonverbal communication) and difficulties to understand the concept of relationship (deficits in developing and maintaining relationships, difficulties adjusting behavior, difficulties in sharing imaginative play, difficulties in making friends, absence of interest in others). For each of the three diagnostic criteria there is a list of items representing behavior examples. All three criteria must be present in order to determine an ASD (Carpenter, 2013).

Restricted and repetitive behavior or interests is described by atypical speech, movements and play (stereotyped or repetitive speech, stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, stereotyped or repetitive use of objects), resistance to change (adherence to routine, ritualized patterns of verbal and nonverbal behavior, excessive resistance to change, rigid thinking), preoccupations with objects or topics (obsessions, preoccupations, narrow range of interests, interests that are abnormal in intensity and focus, excessive focus on non-relevant/non-functional parts of objects, unusual fears) and atypical sensory behaviors (high tolerance for pain, poking eyes, unusual visual exploration/activity, odd responses or atypical focus on sensory stimuli, unusual sensory exploration with objects). Of these four symptoms at least two must be present (Carpenter, 2013).

The major symptoms must be present in early childhood and cause impairment in important areas of life such as social or work life. The symptoms cannot be explained by an intellectual disability (Carpenter, 2013). Three levels of severity for each of the major characteristics allow a positioning on the spectrum: requiring support (level 1), requiring substantial support (level 2) and requiring very substantial support (level 3).

In the former version DSM-IV, autism was classified as pervasive development disorder and divided in different subtypes such as Asperger's syndrome or autistic disorder. These subtypes sometimes overlapped. Thus, it was difficult to assign a specific subtype in certain cases (Grzadzinski, Huerta, & Lord, 2013). That is why the DSM-5 replaces the subtypes by the term "spectrum". Whereas the main criteria for autism in the DSM-IV were the diagnostic triad: social impairments, communication disorder and restrictive, repetitive interests and behavior, the DSM-5 combines the first two to social communication deficits and deficits in social interaction (Varley, 2013).

These new criteria have provoked some critique since parents and professionals were concerned, whether all persons previously diagnosed with a form of autism would receive the same diagnosis again using the new criteria (Kent et al., 2013; Grzadzinski et al., 2013; Lai, Lombardo, Chakrabarti, & Baron-Cohen, 2013). This is a relevant question, since the provision of specific support or care may depend on the diagnosis. The APA estimates that more than 90% of people diagnosed with autism through the DSM-IV keep an ASD diagnosis under the DSM-5 (APA, 2013).

Another classification system is the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The eleventh edition from 2018 also uses the term *Autism Spectrum Disorder* under the category

“neurodevelopmental disorder” (World Health Organization, 2018). Similar to the DSM-5, the ICD-11 characterizes ASD by “*persistent deficits in the ability to initiate and to sustain reciprocal social interaction and social communication; and by a range of restricted, repetitive, and inflexible patterns of behaviour and interests*”. These should emerge in early childhood but can also manifest later and impact all spheres of life. The ICD puts a focus on intellectual functioning and language abilities in link to ASD. Therefore, it distinguishes between ASD with or without disorder of intellectual development and/or with different degrees of language abilities (mild or no impairment, impaired functional language, absence of functional language).

As a matter of completeness and due to the claim that French psychiatrists show a reluctant attitude towards international criteria (Chamak, Bonniau, Oudaya, & Ehrenberg, 2010), it is relevant to mention the existence of a French classification system: the *Classification française des troubles mentaux de l'enfant et de l'adolescent* ([CFTMEA-R]; French classification of mental disorders in children and adolescents) from 2012 (Misès, 2012). The CFTMEA-R only concerns children and adolescents, thus the criteria are not applicable for adults. It resembles the former versions of the DSM and the ICD (DSM-IV and ICD-10) to some extent; however, it is based on “*psychopathological reflections inspired by psychoanalysis*”<sup>1</sup> (Bursztejn, 2006, p. 431), which has strong roots in France. The CFTMEA-R links ASD to psychoses and is therefore viewed as outdated by many, but also finds supporters who see gaps in the international classifications that the CFTMEA-R perhaps could close (Bursztejn, 2006; Bursztejn, Raynaud, & Misès, 2011). The association *Vaincre l'Autisme* (2013) critiques this classification to demonstrate a significant delay in regard to ASD in France.

The *Haute Autorité de Santé* ([HAS]; French National Authority for Health) (Haute Autorité de Santé, 2010) refers to the ICD in its reports. Also, in this study, the term *Autism Spectrum Disorder* is used, based on the recent and internationally well-established classifications DSM-5 and ICD-11.

### 1.1.2 Comorbidities

Comorbidities often occur in combination with ASD. It is important to consider them, since they also impact a student’s life at school and outside.

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<sup>1</sup> Direct citations from original French or German texts have been translated to English by the author.

ASD and intellectual disability are seen as covarying disorders, which affect 50 to 75% of individuals with ASD (Mannion, Leader, & Healy, 2013; Matson & Shoemaker, 2009). In this case, it can be difficult to clearly link certain comorbidities to either the ASD or the intellectual disability. In general, studies present extremely different numbers on the prevalence of comorbidities due to changing diagnostic criteria and a lack of diagnostic instruments (Gabis, Pomeroy, & Andriola, 2005; Mannion & Leader, 2013; Simonoff et al., 2008). Furthermore, the presence of comorbidities may depend on several factors such as the severity level, a potential intellectual disability or gender (Amiet et al., 2008; Matson & Shoemaker, 2009). Mannion et al. (2013) state a prevalence of comorbidities of 46% among persons with ASD, but only when an intellectual disability is excluded, otherwise it is almost 80%.

Simonoff et al. (2008) draw the attention to psychiatric disorders among individuals with ASD, that are very common but difficult to diagnose. They come to the conclusion that in their sample of children with ASD more than 70% have at least one psychiatric disorder, often they receive multiple diagnoses. The most common are social anxiety disorder, ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder. ADHD is estimated for 28% of the children with ASD under examination in their study, in Mannion et al. (2013) it is only 18%.

Epilepsy affects 10-30% of individuals with autism (Gabis et al., 2005; Mannion et al., 2013). The HAS (Haute Autorité de Santé, 2010) states that up to 25% of children with ASD have epilepsy, which is a much higher prevalence than in the average population (0,5-1%). Also, Gabis et al. (2005, p. 655) confirm “*that epilepsy and autism are comorbid phenomena*” that affect girls more than boys, probably due to a correlation between epilepsy in girls with ASD and a lower cognitive ability of girls with ASD. Amiet et al. (2008) also link the prevalence of epilepsy among individuals with ASD to intellectual disability and gender.

Sleep problems are very common affecting 40-80% according to different studies of Réseau Morphée (2018), this means insomnia, problems to fall asleep and to keep sleeping and a shorter sleep time in general. A similar prevalence is given for gastrointestinal symptoms (Mannion et al., 2013). Gillberg and Billstedt (2000) mention a wide range of other potential comorbidities such deficits in attention, motor control and perception (DAMP), depression, eating disorders and selective mutism.

It is important to consider these comorbidities in the context of school, since it is not only the ASD that can have a severe impact on behavior, well-being and achievement (Ashburner, Ziviani, & Rodger, 2010; Zablotsky, Bradshaw, Anderson, & Law, 2013). Students with ASD

are potentially more easily tired or have other problems, which may affect their learning and behavior more than the actual ASD. In the transition context, comorbidities may play an important role and need to be considered.

### 1.1.3 Prevalence

As mentioned before, the prevalence rate for ASD is rising globally (Blumberg et al., 2013; King & Bearman, 2009; Lord & Bishop, 2010); however, the numbers differ remarkably among different countries. Since different classifications are used, which are also revised every few years, leading to a change of numbers of diagnosed persons, it is not possible to get an exact overview (Posserud, Lundervold, Lie, & Gillberg, 2010).

In 2010, the HAS compared different French studies on the prevalence rate of autism and development disorders. Since the numbers in these studies differed from each other, it is not possible to state a number of diagnosed children. However, they assume that 1 out of 150 children in France has a development disorder (Haute Autorité de Santé, 2010). A few years later the state secretary to the prime minister for persons with disabilities presented an estimated 1 out of 100 children (Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2017), one percent is also the number US-American scholars work with. Lord and Bishop (2010) differentiate further an estimated 1 out of 70 boys and 1 out of 315 girls on the autism spectrum. This difference in prevalence in regard to sex is similar in most studies. The HAS (2010) in France, but also Blumberg et al. (2013) in the US, estimate a four times higher prevalence for ASD for boys than for girls.

Recent studies (Kreiser & White, 2014; Rynkiewicz & Łucka, 2018; Wilson et al., 2016; Zwaigenbaum et al., 2012) examine this gender difference and indicate that an underidentification of ASD in females may exist. Apparently girls and women are more likely to not receive an ASD-diagnosis due to sociocultural and familial factors as well as intrapersonal processes which influence the manifestation of ASD symptoms (Kreiser & White, 2014). Wilson et al. (2016), as an example, found out, that girls show similar scores in the socio-communicative domain like boys, but less symptoms in regard to behavior issues. Rynkiewicz & Łucka (2018) see greater efforts to camouflage in girls with ASD, which makes it more difficult to detect the ASD-symptoms. This is why Kreiser & White (2014) claim the important role of the education system. Girls are often diagnosed later and therefore observation of educational staff is crucial for the diagnostic process.

The general increased prevalence cannot be explained by a survey measurement error (Blumberg et al., 2013). As one reason for this increase, the diagnosis of older children, who

have not been diagnosed before, is stated. Furthermore, changes and improvements in diagnostics allow an earlier and clearer diagnosis. This is also supported by other studies (Hansen, Schendel, & Parner, 2015; King & Bearman, 2009; Rødgaard, Jensen, Vergnes, Soulières, & Mottron, 2019), which see an increase in those time periods, where diagnostic criteria were changed.

A further difficulty in this context is that the etiology of ASD remains unknown. Research on the origins of ASD has been going on for many years, but until now it only seems to be proved, that autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that evolves from a complex set of different factors which could be genetic predispositions, health issues such as a low immune system and environmental factors (Currenti, 2010; Engel & Daniels, 2011; Shaw, Sheth, Li, & Tomljenovic, 2014). This knowledge gap is another obstacle to find an explanation for the increase of prevalence rates (Lord & Bishop, 2010).

#### 1.1.4 Diagnostics

Diagnosing ASD is based on complex and time-consuming behavioral evaluations (Blumberg et al., 2013). As described above the spectrum is large and comorbidities aggravate the clear distinction between ASD and other difficulties. Since most children are diagnosed at a young age the cooperation with their caregivers is of utmost importance, which demands time and energy from the parents or caregivers (Vaincre l'Autisme, 2013).

There are several tools in order to diagnose the complex and various forms within the autism spectrum. The Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) and the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) are widely used instruments and can diagnose both small children, but also adults (Lord & Rutter, 2000; Rutter & LeCouteur, 2003). The ADI-R is often used in combination with other tools such as the ADOS. Both tests complement each other and are available in French.

The ADI-R is a standardized, semi-structured interview guide focusing on the behavior of the individual with ASD. Quality of social interaction, communication and restricted or repetitive behaviors and interests are the main areas covered by the ADI-R. The examiner scores the behavior described by the interview participant, usually the parents (Autism Speaks, 2017b).

The ADOS is a test that takes 30 to 60 minutes and is based on behavior observation. It contains structured activities and less structured interactions, which enable the examiner to observe social, communicative and other behaviors (Autism Speaks, 2017a).

Other tools often aim at a specific age group such as toddlers (Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers [M-CHAT]) or focus on a specific form within the autism spectrum such as the

Asperger-syndrome (Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire [ASSQ]) (Ehlers, Gillberg, & Wing, 1999; Robins, Fein, & Barton, 1999).

Studies (Chamak et al., 2010; Crane, Chester, Goddard, Henry, & Hill, 2016; Osborne & Reed, 2008) report that a high proportion of parents is not satisfied by the way their child with ASD has been diagnosed. This is also true for France, where discontent among parents remains high. Usually it is the parents noticing the first symptoms, often before the second birthday of the child (Baghdadli, Picot, Pascal, Pry, & Aussilloux, 2003; Chamak & Bonniau, 2013; Vaincre l'Autisme, 2013). In most cases they consequently seek help from pediatrics, psychiatrics or general practitioners. However, among those parents who obtained the child's diagnosis before the 1990s in France, 96% were dissatisfied, because of delays, lack of explanations and insensitive language used by professionals (Chamak et al., 2010). In the 1990s the procedures improved, the diagnosis still took several years, but parents felt more respected and the number of dissatisfied parents decreased to 63%. Whereas the average age of diagnosis was ten years before 1990, it is now three years. However, 45% of all concerned children still only obtain a diagnosis at the age of 6 to 16 years (Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018a) and some psychiatrists remain reluctant to give an ASD diagnosis (Chamak et al., 2010).

Chamak et al. (2010) still underline that the diagnosis in France has improved remarkably. They name the *Centres Ressources Autisme* ([CRA]; resource centers for autism) as very useful for an early diagnosis and other services to people with ASD. At the moment 24 CRA exist in France and welcome children and adults with ASD and their families and provide them with diagnostic procedures, training, research and support.

Since frustration and shock in context of the diagnostic process cannot be ruled out completely (Braiden, Bothwell, & Duffy, 2010; Hedderly, Baird, & McConachie, 2003), it is important to consider in empirical studies that the long and often difficult process may affect family life through factors such as parental stress, depression or disruptions (Chamak & Bonniau, 2013; Crane et al., 2016; Hedderly et al., 2003; Osborne & Reed, 2008; Vaincre l'Autisme, 2013).

## 1.2 Primary-Secondary Transition

Hanke (2011) describes transitions as “*complex, overlapping and blending changes, when there is a massive restructuring of life contexts*” (p. 13). Zittoun and Perret-Clermont (2001) characterize transition as a “*rupture*” from a previous life and a need to adapt to changes. In this research project we refer to a definition by Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) that describe transitions as “*temporal processes which cross social, academic, and procedural issues.*” (p. 2). This definition contains the notion of various changes and applies them in a structured way to educational transitions. However, the notion of restructured life contexts and the need of adaptations are important to consider, provided by the other definitions, in order to depict this complex life situation.

The question of temporality of the transition from primary to secondary school is part of the definition and viewed differently in the studies regarding this period of time. Hargreaves, Earl, Oldfield, Ontario, & Ministry of Education (1990) summarize that most scholars acknowledge the transition as an extended period starting the last year of primary school and ending with the first weeks or months at secondary school. They argue that this time period is too short and risks missing out changes that occur during the first school year at secondary school.

Several studies acknowledge that the transition from primary to secondary school is a major event in a child’s life, despite any special need. Children link the transition to ambiguous feelings: “*a mix of optimism and anxiety*” (Topping, 2011, p. 269). It means to change from a school, where they are the oldest to a school, to a school where they are the youngest again. Secondary schools are usually bigger, students are taught by more teachers, classroom changes are frequent, new subjects are added etc. This means an increased demand in independence and self-organization (Akos, 2004; G. Bailey, Giles, & Rogers, 2015; Coelho & Romão, 2017; Coffey, 2013; Pratt & George, 2005; Symonds & Galton, 2014; van Rens, Haelermans, Groot, & Maassen van den Brink, 2017). Above all, the transition takes place parallel to the onset of puberty (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007).

As part of a bigger project Evangelou et al. (2008) studied the primary-secondary transition and developed five criteria for a successful transition: 1) developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence, 2) having settled so well in school life that they caused no concerns to their parents, 3) showing an increasing interest in school and school

work, 4) getting used to their new routines and school organization with great ease and 5) experiencing curriculum continuity.

These criteria show the different dimensions that are challenged when a student transfers to secondary school and the involvement of different stakeholders. Social relations are a major concern for the students themselves as several studies show (Coffey, 2013; Pratt & George, 2005; Topping, 2011). Coffey (2013) mentions the importance of extracurricular activities in order to create opportunities for new students getting to know their classmates and older students at secondary school. Furthermore, tutoring programs are seen as useful to establish a connection between new and older students, who can also serve as protection in regard to bullying. Pratt and George (2005) state, that school staff needs to take into account the importance of social relationships in this sensitive phase, however, a unique focus on interpersonal relationships is not sufficient either (Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Symonds and Galton (2014) describe that students at secondary level are more likely to form better and more supportive friendships despite the potential rupture of old friendships from primary school.

The authors also state that most students present a stable self-esteem throughout the transition. Positive factors in order to enhance a high self-esteem are the feeling of security and personal confidence (Symonds & Galton, 2014). Usually these factors lead to a quick adaptation to the new environment within a couple of weeks (Lipps, 2005; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Symonds & Galton, 2014; West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010). In contrary, Coelho and Romão (2017) observe a decline in both academic and social self-concept and also self-esteem.

Academic aspects are another concern during the transition. Hopwood, Hay and Dymont (2017) analyzed in different studies how the transition to secondary school influences academic achievement. They found out that reading skills decreased during the transition phase, probably due to the challenge to cope with various changes in terms of daily routines and places, but also changes in teaching style and the developments puberty brings (Hopwood et al., 2017). Goos & Decelle (2016) underline that the didactics used by primary school teachers differ to those of secondary school teachers, which makes learning continuity less likely. Their study regarded Flemish teachers, but the phenomenon can be found in other contexts, too (Hopwood, Hay, & Dymont, 2016; Makin, Hill, & Pellicano, 2017).

A general decline in academic achievement after the transition has been detected by different studies (Galton, Gray, & Ruddick, 1999; Hanewald, 2013; Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr, & Smith, 2006; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

Andrews and Bishop (2012) analyzed different transition programs for the primary-secondary transition. They identified the inclusiveness of a long-term transition planning and a minimal disruption of learning processes as crucial elements. The importance that all stakeholders including the students participate in the transition process has also been stressed in other studies (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Goos & Decelle, 2016; Griebel & Berwanger, 2006; Woods, Sylvester, & Martin, 2010). Despite the fact that teachers and also parents play a central role in the transition process there are only few studies on these stakeholders in regard to the transition. Hopwood, Hay, and Dymont (2016) even found out that many teachers are not at all involved in the transition activities of their students. Their focus is on curriculum continuity, but at the same time there is a lack of communication between the school types, which makes continuity less probable (Goos & Decelle, 2016; Hopwood et al., 2016).

### 1.2.1 Impact of ASD on the Primary-Secondary Transition

Studies acknowledge that students with special needs have more difficulties to cope with the transition than their typically developing peers (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Evangelou et al., 2008; Foley, Foley, & Curtin, 2016; Galton et al., 1999; Hughes, Banks, & Terras, 2013). Students with ASD in particular struggle more with the transition and are more likely to encounter long-term difficulties (Batten, 2005; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantam, & Williams, 2008).

Since children affected by ASD often have major problems to change their daily routines, the transition to secondary school can become very difficult. At the same time, most students are positive towards the transition as it means to grow up. Furthermore, a new school can mean a fresh start, especially when the experiences at primary school were not good in terms of peer relationships or teaching methods (Dann, 2011; C. Graham & Hill, 2003; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Hebron, 2017; Neal & Frederickson, 2016).

Looking at studies on the transition from primary to secondary school shows that several stakeholders are involved in the transition process (Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Makin et al., 2017). Students, parents and teachers appear in all studies and can be identified as key stakeholders. This is also important, since several studies show, that different stakeholders link very different concerns, perspectives and perceptions to the transition from primary to secondary school (Makin et al., 2017; van Rens et al., 2017). Studies on students with ASD facing the transition to secondary school (Foulder-Hughes & Prior, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008) show that they are worried about making friends, fitting in and moving independently

in a bigger school. This focus on social issues rather than academic is also common among peers without ASD (C. Graham & Hill, 2003; Hanewald, 2013).

Topping (2011) compared the different perceptions of teachers and students in regard to the transition. According to this study, teachers focus on attainment and institutional matters such as the curriculum, whereas students are more concerned about social issues. Parents' worries touch several dimensions: their main focus is their child's socio-emotional well-being as well as its achievements in school in regard to a long-term life and career perspective (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; McNerney, Hill, & Pellicano, 2015; Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007). These different perspectives have to be reflected in a study about the primary and secondary transition of students with ASD, which means that the different stakeholders have to be included.

Studies underline the importance of transition planning, but describe that often it is not institutionalized (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; Deacy, Jennings, & O'Halloran, 2015; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Mandy et al., 2015; Tobin et al., 2012). This means that there are no fixed procedures or tools the schools can make use of. In some cases families do not receive any support from the school during the transition period (Dillon & Underwood, 2012). In other cases, it seems to be very common to make visits to the new school before the transition. This is seen helpful by students and parents, since it gives an opportunity to see what change they will encounter and to increase the feeling of being prepared (Deacy et al., 2015; Hannah & Topping, 2013; Hebron, 2017).

Parents are often reported to be concerned, that the school staff is not sufficiently prepared for a student with ASD and its specific needs (McNerney et al., 2015; Stoner et al., 2007; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). Studies show that teachers in fact often do not feel prepared to teach a mainstream classroom including children with different special needs (Jindal-Snape et al., 2006). An understanding of what ASD means seems to be necessary in order to find a way to deal with a student with ASD in a mainstream class, not only academically, but also socially (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Cappe, Smock, & Boujut, 2016; Flavier & Clément, 2014; Mavropoulou & Padeliađu, 2000; Young, Mannix McNamara, & Coughlan, 2017). Apart from that communication between home and school is seen as crucial and constructive in order to build mutual trust (C. Graham & Hill, 2003; Tso & Strnadová, 2017).

In the study of Jindal-Snape et al. (2006) in four out of five cases the transition process was delayed due to different factors, but with sometimes severe consequences. Being excluded

from school for a certain period of time, is a negative experience for the student and makes the integration process into the new school and the classroom very difficult, in some cases impossible. This might be one reason for the long-term difficulties many students with ASD face during their time at secondary school.

Several barriers and enablers to a successful transition from primary to secondary school have been detected in different international studies. However, it has to be taken into account that none of the reviewed studies have been conducted in France. This is a research gap that is supposed to be closed with this thesis project conducted in France. It may deliver results that can enrich the research in other countries and contribute to comparative studies.

### 1.2.2 The French Education System and the Primary-Secondary Transition

In order to better contextualize the research project it is important to present the French education system, its approach to students with special needs and to the transition from primary to secondary school. D'Alessio and Watkins (2009) remind that the provision of inclusive education differs greatly from country to country. Therefore, it is necessary to have detailed information about the social and legal developments in French education policies, in regard to students with special needs and students with ASD in particular, in order to discuss the outcomes of the different empirical studies that were conducted within the French education system.

#### The French Education System

Since September 2019 compulsory education<sup>2</sup> in France starts at the age of three and ends at the age of sixteen for all children. During this time students are supposed to master the first of four *cycles* (learning stages) of the *socle commun de connaissances* (common knowledge base) (MEN, 2018c).

Even before instruction at the age of three became obligatory, almost all children (97%) attended the *école maternelle* (pre-school) (Blanquer, 2018). The objective of the pre-school is to motivate children for school and to develop their personality. Learning is centered around five areas: language, physical activity, artistic activity, structuring thoughts and exploring the world (*cycle 1*). The students learn 24 hours per week, usually during four full days and one half day (MEN, 2017c).

*Ecole maternelle* and *école élémentaire* (elementary school) constitute together the primary school, that lasts until the age of eleven. Children learn in gender-mixed classes and for free in public schools. The first three years of *école élémentaire* are dedicated to *cycle 2* (fundamental learning stage). The main objectives are to build a fundament in French and mathematics. Furthermore, students discover a foreign language, question and explore the world around them, have lessons in arts and physical education as well as moral and civic education. In *cycle 3* (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, consolidation stage) the natural sciences and technology are introduced as well as history, geography and history of arts. Children still learn 24 hours per week, either four full days or four days and one half day (MEN, 2017b).

The *collège* (lower secondary school<sup>3</sup>) starts at the age of eleven and comprises four school years. The first grade at secondary school, the *sixième* (6<sup>th</sup> grade) is considered as the last year of *cycle 3* and is supposed to consolidate the knowledge and skills acquired during primary school. Furthermore, it allows students to get used to the organization of secondary school. *Cycle 4* serves the development of competencies in different disciplines and transversal issues and, therefore, prepares the students for their future personal and professional life. Lower secondary school is completed with the *diplôme national du brevet* (lower secondary school diploma) (MEN, 2018b).

The next level is the *lycée*, the upper secondary school. There are different types of *lycées*: The *lycée d'enseignement général et technologique* is necessary in order to access higher education at the university level. The *lycées professionnels* offer vocational training (MEN, 2017a). Upper secondary school is completed with the *diplôme du baccalauréat* (upper secondary school diploma).

### Students with Special Needs

In general, there are three educational pathways for students with special needs in the French school system: the instruction in a mainstream setting, the instruction in a collective scheme for integration or instruction in a medico-social institution (Blanquer, 2019; MEN, 2018a). Home-schooling, education at the hospital or distance-learning are less executed options for educational instruction in France. A blend of different instruction modes can also be found, such as part-time instruction at school and part-time instruction at home.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “compulsory education” or “instruction” is used, since in France instruction is obligatory, whereas schooling is not. Parents can decide whether their child receives instruction in a school or at home (Code de l'éducation, Article L131-2).

<sup>3</sup> In the following the term *secondary school* refers only to the *collège* (lower secondary school) for better readability.

Individual instruction in a mainstream setting means that the student attends a mainstream class in a mainstream school. The provision of a teaching assistant<sup>4</sup> or other arrangements may facilitate the student's participation (MEN, 2016).

For every school level so called *Unités localisées pour l'inclusion scolaire* ([ULIS]; local units for inclusive education) exist for the instruction in a collective scheme for integration. It is supposed to offer the students “*the opportunity to pursue inclusive learning adapted to their potential and needs and to acquire social and academic skills, even when their achievements are very limited.*” (Robine, 2015b). The ULIS are resources provided for students whose disability hinders them to fully participate in a mainstream class. They are enrolled in an ordinary class, their reference class, but are supervised additionally by a special needs teacher, the ULIS-coordinator, in the local unit (Lesain-Delabarre, 2016; Robine, 2015a). How much time a student spends in the reference class depends on different factors and is usually decided in joint decision between several stakeholders such as the special needs teacher, the teacher who teaches the subject in question and the parents (Robine, 2015a). This means that a student may participate in regular music, mathematics and history classes, but would have French and natural sciences courses with a special needs teacher in the ULIS-classroom. According to these specific decisions, the amount of time a student spends in the ULIS can differ notably between students benefitting from the same ULIS.

There are different types of ULIS depending on the categorization of special needs: intellectual disabilities, language and speech disorders, pervasive developmental disorders (including ASD), physical disabilities, hearing or visual impairment and multiple associated disorders. In regard to this research project on students with ASD, it is important to note that not every school has an ULIS and even if a school has an ULIS it might not be specialized on ASD. The number of ULIS increased during the last decade from 39 830 in 2005 to 50 652 in 2017 at the primary level, and from 7062 in 2005 to 34 762 in 2017 at the lower secondary level (MEN & MESRI, 2018b). Further increase is planned, mainly for the pre-school and the secondary level (Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b).

In medico-social or medico-educational institutions students can be taught by specialized teachers in so called teaching units. These can be either located in the institutions themselves, but are supposed to become more and more externalized in schools (Secrétariat d'Etat auprès

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<sup>4</sup> The term *teaching assistant* refers to *Auxiliaire de Vie Scolaire* ([AVS]; Assistant for school life) or *Accompagnant des élèves en situation de handicap* ([AESH]; Assistant for students with special needs) whose

du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b). Since they are often separated from the mainstream school system, students attending such institutions full-time are not considered in this study, while students who were part-time instructed at school (with or without an ULIS) and part-time at a day care center were still considered.

The *Projet Personnalisé de Scolarisation* ([PPS]; Personalized Schooling Project) plays an important role. The PPS is a document that “*defines and coordinates the educational, psychological, educational, social, medical and paramedical actions that meet the special needs of students with disabilities.*” (MEN, 2016). This document is developed by the *Maisons départementales des personnes handicapées* ([MDPH]; local offices for individuals with special needs), local offices consisting of multidisciplinary teams, which accompany individuals with special needs in all life phases (MDPH.fr, 2011). They assist the parents of children with special needs in all questions around school: the choice of instruction, potential arrangements in order to facilitate schooling (e.g. a teaching assistant, part-time schooling) etc.

A reference teacher, who no longer teaches in class, but is exclusively responsible for the schooling situation of students with special needs, is nominated by the school inspection. This person forms the *Equipe de suivi de la scolarisation* ([ESS]; schooling monitoring team) together with the student and his or her parents. The reference teacher is responsible for the implementation and realization of measures that were agreed on in the PPS, whereas the school principal monitors the process (Ministère de l’Education Nationale et de la Jeunesse [MENJ] & MESRI, 2014, 2017, 2019).

The PPS is revised once a year or at least during the transition to a new learning stage, when parents wish a revision or when the child’s situation makes a revision necessary. The transition to secondary school is a moment where a revision is recommended. The yearly evaluation is sent to the MDPH and the very school management. The PPS is supposed to follow any student with special needs through the entire school career (MENJ & MESRI, 2014, 2017).

It is important to know these details about the French education system in regard to students with special needs, since “*special needs education is a social construct that depends on the way in which countries organize their legislative, administrative and financial systems to respond to diversity in education*” (D’Alessio, 2013, p. 107).

## Measures to Facilitate the Transition for Students with Special Needs

Therefore, the established measures for the primary-secondary transition for students with and without special needs are presented in the following. French students change to lower secondary school at the age of 11. For the transition from primary to secondary school the Ministry of Education (MENJ, 2011, 2017) focuses on two main aspects: the continuity of learning and the joint work of teachers. The following table (Table 1-1) summarizes transition tools and measures that are supposed to be in place in order to facilitate the transition for all students. Although students with special needs were not in focus, some measures concern them specifically and are listed as well (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche [MENESR], 2014; MENJ, 2011, 2017; Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2018; MENJ, 2019c; MENJ & MESRI, 2014, 2017; MESRI & MENJ, 2018; Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b).

**Table 1-1: Transition tools in the French education system**

<i>Continuity of learning during transition preparations</i>	
Unique school booklet ( <i>livret scolaire unique</i> )	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• documenting which competences a student has acquired</li> <li>• supporting the communication between school, student and the family</li> </ul>
National assessments	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identifying weak students in order to prepare a support system</li> </ul>
Primary school-secondary school council ( <i>conseil école-collège</i> )	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring pedagogical and educational continuity</li> </ul> Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• secondary school principal, an education inspector, staff appointed by the secondary school principal, members of the teachers council for primary schools</li> </ul> Realization: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meetings twice a year</li> <li>• revision of the PPS</li> </ul>
Personalized Educational Success Program ( <i>PPRE Passerelle</i> )	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identifying actions to tackle the difficulties students with low academic achievements may encounter</li> </ul> Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• student, parents, educational team<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>
Refresher courses	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• giving opportunity to catch up on lacking knowledge or</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> The educational team (*équipe éducative*) consist of all persons taking care of students with special needs in the schools. This includes the school's principal, the teachers, the reference teacher, teaching assistants and others (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2017).

competencies	
<b><i>Continuity of learning after school transfer</i></b>	
Homework support ( <i>Devoirs faits</i> )	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing time to do homework under supervision at school</li> <li>• reducing inequalities in regard to homework support at home</li> </ul> Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offer for all students</li> <li>• special focus on students with special needs</li> </ul>
Pedagogical support	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• considering needs and abilities of all students</li> <li>• diversification and differentiation</li> </ul>
Individualized support	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3h/week of additional teaching in certain subjects</li> </ul>
Educational support	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time of supervised studying</li> <li>• participation in cultural, artistic or sport activities</li> <li>• strengthening the use of modern languages</li> </ul>
<b><i>Collaboration among teachers</i></b>	
Exchange of information	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• knowledge of the reality of the objectives and requirements of each level by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ information on pedagogy and program of the other school type</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Joint projects	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coherence between school types by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ working together on CM2 assessments</li> <li>○ developing common objectives or methods for learning and assessment</li> <li>○ monitoring exceptional students</li> <li>○ participating in joint first and second level placements</li> <li>○ meeting at the pre-entry stage</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Training for teachers, school principals	Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitating individualized support through training on transition-related issues</li> <li>• understanding the differences and similarities of pedagogical activities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ half day-exchanges at the other school type</li> <li>○ exchange on practices</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The table (Table 1-1) shows the focus on transition planning. By providing support measures specifically for the 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students it seems to be acknowledged that the transition can last as long as one school year to be completed. The planning is characterized by collecting and exchanging information about the students. The school booklet and the national assessments are supposed to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the academic performance of the student. For students with ASD the PPS could be added as document that follows the student

through its school career. Since students with ASD already have the PPS, they do not receive a PPRE Passerelle.

All information about the student are supposed to be taken into account, exchanged and discussed in the primary school-secondary school council and between teachers from primary and secondary school. Once at secondary school, the focus is on consolidation, which is in line with the objective for *cycle 4*. Several offers for support are supposed to allow weak students to catch up (homework, pedagogical, educational and individualized support).

Students with special needs and ASD, in particular, may benefit from all these measures during their transition to secondary school.

### Secondary School Attendance of Students with ASD

Despite these measures there remain major differences between primary and secondary school attendance among students with special needs. In 2017 ca. 180 000 students with special needs attended a mainstream primary school, whereas only 140 000 attended a secondary school. Students with ASD are not explicitly depicted in the national statistics but are part of the group of students with intellectual disabilities. This group has been 77 000 students at ordinary primary schools in the school year 2017/2018. At the same time only 51 000 students attended the secondary school level (MEN & MESRI, 2018b). According to the national strategy on autism 32 000 students with ASD receive instruction at school and 12 000 in medico-social institutions (Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b). A decrease of 13% of students' with ASD attendance between primary and secondary school has been identified (Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018a). In a country report on France by the EU it is stated that the primary-secondary transition for students with intellectual disabilities is particularly problematic due to rigid curricula that hinder adaptations and flexibility. Furthermore, a "*widespread belief that children with disabilities do not have the capacities to go to secondary school*" remains according to the authors (Gouritin, 2013, p. 11).

Around 10 000 of the students with an intellectual disability benefit from a teaching assistant who supports them either in full- or part-time. 2,3% are taught by a special needs teacher, 3,4% receive financial help for adapted materials and 22,2% for specific transports (MEN & MESRI, 2018b).

This is the context the empirical research project is embedded in. It shows that the primary-secondary school transition is a critical period that demands careful preparation and adequate measures. This is even more the case for students with special needs, and ASD in particular,

in an education system that is supposed to become inclusive by 2022 (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale & Secrétariat d'État auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018).

### 1.3 Inclusive Education

In the 1960s and 1970s movements that promoted the instruction of students with special needs in regular classes could be observed in several Western societies (D'Alessio, 2013; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012; Vienneau, 2006). These national developments became an international educational debate during the World Conference on Special Needs Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (World Conference on Special Needs Education, 1994). Article 7 of the Framework for Action of the Salamanca Declaration says about inclusive schools:

The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school. (p. 11f.)

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This declaration started a global debate on inclusive education systems (Ainscow, 2005; D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009). Several countries worldwide have introduced changes in their education policies in order to make their education systems more inclusive (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Plaisance, 2010).

In 2006 the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted by the United Nations (UN) (United Nations, 2006). Ten years later 164 member states have ratified the CRPD, among them France in 2010 (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2018). Article 24 (Education) of the convention targets inclusive education: “*States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning*” (United Nations, 2006, p. 17f.). Member states have to ensure that students with disabilities are not excluded from ordinary schools and are provided with individualized support in order to pursue their educational career (United Nations, 2006).

However, the strategies to provide this inclusive school system differed remarkably between the different countries and education systems depending on context factors such as historical developments and the existing system of instruction for students with special needs.

In 2005, France passed a law on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of persons with disabilities, which claims an inclusive education system (Legifrance, 2005). A similar law has been introduced in Finland in 1998 and has led to a decreasing number of special schools (L. J. Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). Nevertheless, Finland maintains a so called “*part-time special education*” (L. J. Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011, p. 9), which means the provision of special education groups in mainstream schools, similar to the ULIS (chapter 1.2.2) in France. These “*micro-exclusions*” are also discussed in Italy, where students with special needs are generally taught in mainstream classes since 1971 (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2014, p. 127).

The CRPD’s direct impact has been observed in several countries. In the report on the realization of the CRPD Germany states that all students have the right to free and suitable schooling. Nevertheless, it is mentioned that special schools play an important role in the German education system (United Nations, 2011).

At a lower level, Harpur and Bales (2010), observe impacts of the CRPD on education policy in the South Pacific, though rather on paper than in reality. New South Wales in Australia serves as counter-example: L. J. Graham & Jahnukainen (2011) report that even though 80% students with special needs in New South Wales attend a mainstream school, schools tend to refuse students with learning disabilities. The authors even see a recursive trend to integration rather than to inclusion (L. J. Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011).

This leads to the question of terminology. D’Alessio and Watkins (2009) draw the attention to the fact, that inclusion became a “*buzzword*” (p. 235) in education debates but can be understood very differently by various actors in the manifold national education systems.

Inclusion is to differentiate from integration. Integration was a counter movement to segregated schooling, that was practiced in most countries. Although students with special needs had the right to education, their schooling mainly took place in specialized institutions outside of the mainstream education system (L. J. Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Hänsel, 2003; Plaisance, 2010).

In the 60s and 70s integrative schooling was promoted, which means the presence of a student with special needs in a mainstream school and to find a way to support him or her in an unchanging environment. This means the student needs to be prepared for the mainstream setting, whereas the school does not need to change remarkably (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; D’Alessio & Watkins, 2009; Thomazet, 2006). This approach is criticized for its “*assimilatory logic*” (L. J. Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011, p. 1) that is based on understanding

disability as individual deficit (D'Alessio & Cowan, 2013). Inclusive education, therefore, means a paradigm shift

from a special needs education paradigm, which generally constructs disability as an individual deficit that must be compensated for with the provision of individualized support and additional services and personnel, to an inclusive education paradigm that requires schools to make radical changes. (D'Alessio, 2013, p. 98)

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It means that any student is an ordinary part of the heterogeneous learning group. It is the school's task to adapt to potential special needs in order to cater to them adequately (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009; Vienneau, 2006). However, in the media but also in the research these terms are sometimes understood and debated interchangeably (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; D'Alessio, 2013; D'Alessio & Cowan, 2013).

In this research project a definition from the UNESCO policy guidelines on inclusion in education is used. Inclusive education is thus seen as:

a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009, p. 8f.)

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This definition puts the focus on inclusive education as a process and not "*an end in itself*", as Armstrong, Armstrong, and Barton (2000, p. 1) state. Furthermore, the focus is not on disabilities, but any barriers individuals may encounter (D'Alessio, 2013). The French education system started this process and the paradigm-shift is still ongoing, as the following chapter will explain. Therefore, it is useful to work with a definition that acknowledges this process (Thomazet, 2006).

### 1.3.1 French Policies on Inclusive Education

*"[I]nclusive education is strongly embedded in cultural, political, social, and economic conditions"* (D'Alessio & Cowan, 2013, p. 240) and needs to *"be engaged in dialogue with local contexts as these always reflect the outcomes of historical and cultural situations."* (D'Alessio & Cowan, 2013, p. 241). Accordingly, this section provides background information on French education policies concerning students with ASD by presenting historical, legal and societal developments.

## French Education Policies concerning Students with ASD

In order to understand the historical and political context this study is placed in, this chapter aims to give a short overview on French education policies in regard to students with special needs, and in particular to students with ASD. It starts in 1882, when primary education became obligatory for all students in France.

The following table (Table 1-2) provides an overview on laws, policies and government plans in regard to inclusive education (Legifrance, 2000, 2005, 2013, 2018, 2019). It shows well how France made the pathway from segregation to integration and trying to reach inclusion. Major steps can be observed starting in 2005 with the law on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of persons with disabilities that led to a doubling of the number of students with special needs in mainstream French schools (MEN & MESRI, 2018b). At the secondary school level there are almost four times more students with special needs registered at mainstream schools. On average their number has increased by 7,3% each year since 2013. Different *Plans Autisme* (Autism Plans), government-financed programs for improving the situation of persons with ASD and their families, were developed and introduced (Ministère de la Santé, de la Jeunesse, des Sports et de la Vie Associative; Ministère du Travail, des Relations, 2008; Ministère de la Santé et de la Protection Sociale, 2004; République Française, 2013; Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b). They concern all areas of life thus education is only one dimension of many. It is still relevant to have a closer look, since they illustrate well the general approach of French policies in regard to autism.

**Table 1-2: Historical developments in regard to education for students with special needs in France**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
1882	Law on the organisation of primary education ( <i>Loi du 28 mars 1882</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• primary education is compulsory for children of both sexes, French and foreign, aged 6-14 years</li><li>• means to provide primary education for deaf-mute and blind children</li></ul>	Assemblée nationale
1975	Orientation law for people with disabilities ( <i>Loi n° 75-534 du 30 juin 1975</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• obligatory instruction for students with special needs</li><li>• instruction for students with special needs in mainstream or specialized settings</li></ul>	Assemblée nationale
1996	Law on social and medico-social institutions and on ensuring appropriate care for autism ( <i>Loi no° 75-535 du 30 juin 1975</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ASD considered as disability</li><li>• educational, pedagogical, therapeutic and social care for individuals with ASD</li></ul>	Assemblée nationale

2005	<p>Law on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of persons with disabilities (<i>Loi n° 2005-102 du 11 février 2005</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public education service provides academic, vocational or higher education to children, adolescents and adults with disabilities or disabling health disorders</li> <li>• enrolment in the school or in an establishment the closest to student's home</li> <li>• provision of appropriate education program</li> <li>• assessment of skills, needs and the measures implemented as part of this program</li> <li>• educational pathway which is the subject of an individualized school project with the necessary adjustments, promoting, wherever possible, education in the mainstream school environment</li> </ul>	Assemblée nationale
2005-2006	<p>First Autism Plan (<i>Autisme 2005-2006</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of places in medico-educational institutions for children who are not able to be integrated in the mainstream education settings</li> </ul>	Ministère de la santé et de la protection sociale
2008-2010	<p>Second Autism Plan (<i>Plan Autisme 2008-2010</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving the instruction of children with autism</li> <li>• interdisciplinary training for teachers who will welcome a student with ASD in their class</li> <li>• information brochure Asperger-syndrome and high-functioning autism for teachers</li> <li>• promotion of integration into mainstream schools through the development of <i>Service d'éducation spéciale et de soins à domicile</i> ([SESSAD]; Service for special education and home care)</li> </ul>	Ministère de la santé, de la jeunesse, des sports et de la vie associative; Ministère du travail, des relations sociales, de la famille et de la solidarité; Secrétariat d'état chargé de la solidarité
2013	<p>Law on orientation and programming for the rebuilding of the Republican school (<i>Loi n° 2013-595 du 8 juillet 2013</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acknowledgement that every child has the ability to learn and to progress</li> <li>• inclusion of all children in school, without distinction</li> <li>• participation of parents, regardless of their social background</li> <li>• dialogue and cooperation between all the actors in the educational community</li> </ul>	Assemblée nationale, Sénat
2013-2017	<p>Third Autism Plan (<i>Troisième Plan Autisme</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a range of structures adapted to the schooling of students with autism</li> <li>• increasing the places provided by the SESSAD</li> <li>• promoting and developing, wherever possible, the education in a mainstream environment, starting in pre-school</li> <li>• adapting instruction and care to the needs of students with autism</li> </ul>	Ministère délégué en charge des personnes handicapées et de lutte contre l'exclusion
2018-2022	<p>National Autism Strategy (<i>Stratégie nationale pour l'autisme</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integrating training on ASD into all initial/continuing trainings for professionals</li> <li>• more permanent and professional support through teaching assistants</li> <li>• increasing the number of students with ASD enrolled in</li> </ul>	Secrétariat d'état chargé des personnes handicapées

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ULIS in primary, secondary and vocational schools</li> <li>• provision of special education within the school and creation of elementary teaching units dedicated to the instruction of young students with ASD requiring medical and social support</li> </ul> |  |
|--|--|--|

Apart from these steps on the legal and political level, it is important to understand the societal developments in regard to ASD that took place in parallel. They complement and reflect the measures presented in Table 1-2 and therefore give a more comprehensive picture, especially since “[t]he gap between the official texts on the schooling of children with disabilities and the situation on the ground is therefore striking” (Beauguitte, 2006, p. 11).

As has been mentioned before, France has strong roots in psychoanalysis, which is why ASD was seen as psychosis and consequently mainly treated in hospitals or psychiatric institutions until the 1980s (Bursztein, 2006; Chamak et al., 2010; Philip, 2012). Education was thus not seen as a priority for children with ASD. Only in the 1980s under the pressure of parent associations schooling in a mainstream setting, though in specialized classes, became an issue. During the 1990s the Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) program, a training program for children with ASD, was introduced in France, leading to a mobilization of parents of children with ASD in order to promote this US-American program in France (Philip, 2012).

In the 2000s the understanding of ASD shifted from mental illness to a disability and later to communication deficit or a different form of intelligence, also due to the influence from international classifications such as the DSM and ICD (Philip, 2012). Even though the learning ability of students with ASD is not questioned anymore, scholars (Beauguitte, 2006; Philip, 2012) observe a lack of adequate teacher training and other resources. Beauguitte (2006) assumes in 2006 that only 1,2% of students with ASD benefit from educational integration, despite the law from 2005. One reason could be that many students attend medico-social institutions, where they can have access to education, even though this is not always ensured (Beauguitte, 2006). According to the national strategy for autism (Secrétariat d’Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b) this has changed to 71% of students with ASD attending a mainstream school, 25% of them benefiting from an ULIS.

Studies (Beauguitte, 2006; Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Philip, 2013) underline that outdated statements in regard to ASD are still present in France unsettling parents. On the other hand, they underline the enormous changes that have been accomplished during the last 30 years. In

this context it is important to emphasize the important role of parents, who have encouraged these changes to a large extent (Beauguitte, 2006).

Nevertheless, France has become object of international critique several times. In 2014, the Commissioner for Human Rights visited France and stated in his report that even though there is a certain focus on children with ASD, it remains a lack of inclusive education and professional support (Muiznieks, 2014). He underlines and encourages the efforts that have been made in regard to the inclusion of people with autism, but also criticizes clearly:

despite three "autism plans" anticipating support measures and the means to implement them, associations, as well as national and international bodies, have regularly expressed concern about the lack of adequate support for people with autism. (Muiznieks, 2014, p. 78)

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France's own report on the implementation of the CRPD is more positive (Nations Unies, 2017). It stresses the rising numbers of students with ASD attending ordinary schools and presents the ULIS as a measure to achieve inclusive education. For the future a closer link between education and the socio-medical sector is planned in this report, mainly for non-verbal children with ASD.

The focus on ULIS as measure for inclusive education remains strong. The Salamanca Declaration clearly states that segregation, even if it is inside a mainstream school, should be an exception (World Conference on Special Needs Education, 1994). In this study students attending an ULIS are still considered, even though they do not entirely match the understanding of inclusive schooling by the international organizations. Since the ULIS are part of a mainstream school and the students are also part of a mainstream class, their experiences are of value for this study and even give some opportunity for comparisons. In French education policy the ULIS are seen as appropriate provision of inclusive education, since many students spend the major part of their day in their reference class; however, this may differ from school to school and student to student.

The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities of the UN's Human Rights Council resumes that multiple barriers prevent students with special needs to receive inclusive education. These barriers are a lack of accessible infrastructure, lack of specialized training for teachers and carers and the inadequacy of curricula and classrooms. She expresses worries in regard to the estimation that up to 40 000 students with ASD do not receive instruction. She recommends the closing down of medico-social institutions in order to privilege mainstream education. Furthermore, she requests to place all financial and human resources devoted to the

education of students with disabilities under the sole responsibility of the Ministry of National Education (Conseil des droits de l'homme, 2019).

To sum up, inclusive education is the official objective of French education policy and has changed the regard on disability and ASD, in particular, to a large extent. More and more students with special needs attend mainstream schools, that did not deal with this new student population before. This challenge is reflected by the high aim of inclusive schools on the one hand and a reality, where students receive instruction in medico-social institutions or not at all on the other hand.

These developments concern the primary-secondary transition, as part of an inclusive educational pathway. Inclusive schools adapt to the special needs of all their students, that means that they also have to adapt the transition processes in order to achieve continuity for all students.

In this context, questions concerning ASD and inclusive education come up: Is inclusive education the best way to provide students with ASD with education? Do students with ASD benefit from inclusive education? How can students with ASD successfully be included in mainstream education settings? This research project does not aim to answer these questions, but is closely linked to them. That is why in the following chapter the literature concerning these questions is regarded in order to provide further information on the context in which the primary-secondary transition is embedded.

### 1.3.2 Inclusive Education for Students with ASD

The increasing number of students with ASD in mainstream settings shows that there is a demand for inclusive education, however, this means a considerable challenge as former research has shown. According to (Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr, & Smith, 2005) parents of children with ASD would favor inclusive education, if teachers were better trained concerning ASD. Barnard, Prior, Potter and National Autistic Society (2000) in contrast state that parents of students with ASD receiving ASD-specific support in special units or special schools are the most satisfied in regard to their child's schooling. They conclude that staff training and expertise is of utmost importance in order to meet the needs of children with ASD. Furthermore, they claim, that there needs to be the choice between specialized and mainstream education.

Humphrey and Lewis (2008) argue that the lack of research in this field leads to inadequately equipped schools and, consequently, to a lack of confidence from parents. Nevertheless, the authors see inclusive education as a source of opportunities for the various stakeholders.

Students with ASD can strengthen their social skills, while their peers learn to become more accepting (Humphrey & Symes, 2011). Inclusive education for children with ASD “*may be both social benefit and risk*” (Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011, p. 533).

Barriers are mentioned in several ways: The difficulties linked to ASD such as restricted interests or high sensitivity, but also lacking skills and experiences of teachers (e.g. Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Gavalda & Qinyi, 2012; Hart & Whalon, 2011; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Humphrey & Symes, 2011).

When looking at the literature on ASD and inclusive education certain topics emerge: the academic performance of students with ASD (e.g. Fleury et al., 2014; Keen, Webster, & Ridley, 2016; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010), the role of teachers in the context of inclusive education (e.g. Flavier & Clément, 2014; Gavalda & Qinyi, 2012; Hart & Whalon, 2011; Segall & Campbell, 2012) and the social life of the student at school (e.g. Begeer, Fink, van der Meijden, Goossens, & Olthof, 2016; Bradley, 2016; Hebron, Humphrey, & Oldfield, 2015; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Maïano, Normand, Salvas, Moullec, & Aimé, 2016; Rowley et al., 2012).

### Academic Performance

The autism spectrum is large, which makes it difficult to generalize findings on the academic performance of students with ASD in mainstream settings, but in general they are reported to be poor (Fleury et al., 2014; Keen et al., 2016). Keen et al. (2016) draw attention to the fact that students with ASD are often exempted from evaluations or assessments. Therefore, the academic achievement of students with ASD in mainstream classrooms remains widely unknown (Keen et al., 2016; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Poor academic outcome may also stem from a low active participation in class or school in general (Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Fleury et al., 2014). Estes, Rivera, Bryan, Cali, and Dawson (2011) report a discrepancy between academic ability and achievements in students with ASD, which may be linked to their social abilities and problem behaviors.

Although the social interaction and communication deficits of students with ASD may have a major impact on the everyday school work, many students seem to be capable of achieving as good as their classmates without ASD (Keen et al., 2016). In Kurth and Mastergeorge’s study (2010) students with ASD performed well in concrete tasks and showed difficulties in abstract tasks. However, those students who had mathematics and language classes in an ordinary class outperformed their peers who had learnt in specialized settings. Keen et al. (2016)

underline that achievement may vary across different academic skill areas and change overtime.

### Role of Teachers

In order to facilitate the learning of students with ASD, teachers play a crucial role (Flavier & Clément, 2014; Gavaldá & Qinyi, 2012; Hart & Whalon, 2011). Several studies show a lack of knowledge on and experience with ASD among teachers in France (Boujut, Popa-Roch, Palomares, Dean, & Cappe, 2017; Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Flavier & Clément, 2014), as elsewhere (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2000; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). This may lead to a more negative attitude towards inclusion and students with ASD, to burnout and become a frustrating experience for all stakeholders (Boujut et al., 2017; Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Segall & Campbell, 2012; Zorn & Puustinen, 2017).

Having identified these difficulties, research indicates that quality training for specialized and ordinary teachers has to be provided (Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Hayek, 2013; Jindal-Snape et al., 2005). This training needs to cover knowledge on ASD, since studies point out that many teachers have limited knowledge or wrong beliefs concerning ASD (Flavier & Clément, 2014; Rodríguez, Saldaña, & Moreno, 2012; Segall & Campbell, 2012). Moreover, it has to provide the teachers with strategies on how to deal with a student with ASD in the academic work, but also in the class (Flavier & Clément, 2014; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Zorn & Puustinen, 2017). One important factor is mentioned by Glashan, Mackay and Grieve (2004): it needs time for teachers to get used to the new situation. Studies show that most teachers are motivated and favorable in regard to inclusive education (Ashburner et al., 2010; Hayek, 2013; Rodríguez et al., 2012; Segall & Campbell, 2012), however, their attitude seem to depend on different factors such as feeling of self-efficacy, hours of training in special needs education or experiences with heterogeneous learning groups (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer & Pijl, 2016; Desombre, Lamotte, & Jury, 2019).

But even with a positive attitude, training and experience, the task to teach a heterogeneous class remains challenging. Continuous training is important and should not be limited to teachers, but be accessible to all school staff (Fleury et al., 2014; Gavaldá & Qinyi, 2012). Additional support by specialized teachers, a school psychologist or external support providers may be necessary (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Rodríguez et al., 2012). Furthermore, studies reveal that not only the teachers' attitude is important but also the openness of the

administration and the school in general (Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hebron et al., 2015).

However, on a daily basis it is the teachers who manage their classroom, especially if they are class teachers. In this case they can support children with ASD in establishing social contacts to peers and initiating communication situations (Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Hart & Whalon, 2011). The social sphere of inclusive education is very important for the child's well-being and moreover its progress at school (Coffey, 2013; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004).

### Social Relations

The study of Calder, Hill and Pellicano (2013) shows that friendship is often understood differently by children with ASD, leading into friendships that rely more on companionship than affection. Kasari et al. (2011) characterized the friendships of their study participants as rather unilateral, than reciprocal. However, it is clearly stated in several studies that children with ASD in general are able and willing to engage in friendships (Calder et al., 2013; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Leroux-Boudreault & Poirier, 2017; Rowley et al., 2012), even though it may be more difficult or even stressful. Friendships or good relationships to classmates are a working measure against bullying or social exclusion (Bradley, 2016; Hebron et al., 2015; Schroeder, Cappadocia, Bebko, Pepler, & Weiss, 2014).

Therefore, several studies mention peer interventions as useful measures in order to engage peer relationships between students with ASD and their ordinary classmates (Bradley, 2016; Crosland & Dunlap, 2012; de Boer & Pijl, 2016; Gardner et al., 2014; Gavaldá & Qinyi, 2012). However, peer programs often seem to work only in institutionalized formal settings and peer contacts consequently decrease as soon as this formal setting is not given (Gardner et al., 2014; Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2009). In general, students with ASD are reported to have less friends and to spend more time on solitary activities (Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Kasari et al., 2011; Wainscot et al., 2008). Like friendships solitary activities can also be seen as a protection from bullying (Wainscot et al., 2008). Kasari et al. (2011) state that relationships become poorer with age, which means increased difficulties for older children or adolescents with ASD trying to make friends. One reason may be that parents play a major role in establishing their young children's friendships (Gardner et al., 2014). At the secondary level students spend more time at school and the parental influence is decreasing.

Several studies show a higher likelihood for students with ASD to become victims of bullying (Begeer et al., 2016; Bradley, 2016; Hebron et al., 2015; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Maïano et al., 2016; Schroeder et al., 2014; Zablotzky et al., 2013). The reasons are manifold

according to different studies and based on the typical difficulties in communication and social interaction of individuals with ASD: social naivety, lack of resilience, lack of understanding that they actually are bullied, physical clumsiness (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Schroeder et al., 2014; Wainscot et al., 2008). The numbers differ, but they are clearly higher than in the general student population. In a meta-analysis Schroeder et al. (2014) report a prevalence of victimization of more than 90% and bullying of at least 40%. Humphrey and Lewis (2008) confirm that nearly all their participants had encountered verbal teasing.

This quite large body of research on the social life of students with ASD in inclusive settings presented above, shows that social aspects have to be considered and cannot be neglected in favor of academic aspects. Both are closely linked and are a condition in order to make inclusive education possible. The teacher's role has been proven as essential in this context. However, in this complex situation, the teacher is also dependent on other stakeholders such as the directorate, external support providers or the administration.

This complex situation has implications on the primary-secondary transition as one part of the inclusive education pathway. The empirical research project will therefore enlighten this topic using different research methods and including different stakeholders.

## 2 Part II: Methodological Elements

This chapter can be seen as complement to the articles presented in the third part of this thesis (chapter 3). An additional methodology chapter seemed useful in order to put the single studies into relation with each other and into the global context of the research project. Moreover, it may provide additional background information that could not be integrated in the articles. It allows describing the original methodology which was applied to address the different research questions in detail.

The methodology of a study depends on the objective of the research and the research questions that are targeted. Therefore this chapter presents both the research purpose of this research project and the research questions, which were asked in order to approach the purpose. The research approach has been chosen based on that. Furthermore the sampling and data collection as well as the data analysis are described. Ethical and quality issues are integrated for the various steps of the research project.

## 2.1 Research Purpose and Research Questions

This research project aims to explain what a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD means. Furthermore, it seeks to obtain information on how the transition is organized, realized and perceived and which factors enable or interfere with it. This information may be used to improve the situation of students with ASD transitioning to secondary school in France by developing recommendations for a successful transition that can be applied by families, schools and policy-makers.

This thesis deals with four main research questions with additional sub-questions.

1. What is a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD?
  - a. How is a successful primary-secondary transition defined in general?
  - b. Is there a difference between students with and without ASD in regard to the transition?

A first literature review (cf. chapter 1.2) revealed that in the international literature there are only few very vague definitions of what a successful transition to secondary school is, in particular for students with ASD. However, it seemed crucial to answer this question in order to approach the other research questions asked in this project. An original methodology has been applied to answer this question from different angles, which provides a firm fundament in order to address the following research questions.

2. How do students with ASD, their parents and teachers in France perceive the transition to secondary school?
  - a. How are transitions to secondary school prepared, planned and conducted?
  - b. How do the different stakeholders live and evaluate this transition?
  - c. Do these perceptions change over time?

There are only few studies on students with ASD in the French school system. The shift towards inclusive education is relatively new. Therefore, these questions can provide both factual information and personal insights. The transition process is an individual process for each student, his or her family and the school, therefore it is necessary to consider all these different perspectives and perceptions in order to understand the transition in its complexity.

3. What are the factors that hinder and enable a transition according to students, parents and teachers?
  - a. What do participants consider as useful strategies to facilitate the primary-secondary transition?
  - b. What obstacles do participants identify regarding the transition?

If the aim of the study is to develop recommendations for a successful transition, it is useful to know which strategies are already in place and considered helpful by the different stakeholders. These enablers give important hints which dimensions need to be considered in order to plan and conduct a primary-secondary transition for students with ASD. This is also true for obstacles that may occur. If these are known before, they can be addressed before a potential conflict escalates.

4. How to establish a successful transition for students with ASD?

The results of the previous three research questions are supposed to serve as fundament in order to answer this last research question, which responds directly to the study's objective.

## 2.2 Choice of Research Methods

Since the research questions for this project are broad and target different issues and stakeholders concerning the primary-secondary transition a study design that considers different perspectives was developed following the example of multi-informant studies such as Makin et al. (2017) or Jindal-Snape et al. (2006) in order to acknowledge the complexity of the transition situation. Based on former studies, the students with ASD, their parents and teachers were identified as key stakeholders. A triangulation of data sources (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004; Oppermann, 2000; Thurmond, 2001) could be achieved. The three different participant groups offer three different perspectives on the same phenomenon. During the analysis these different perspectives were compared and contrasted to each other, which enhances a better understanding of the transition for each participant group and how they are interlinked. In this research project triangulation, moreover, has the aim to make the data more robust in order to enhance validity by contrasting the results obtained from different data sources (Oppermann, 2000).

The existing studies on the primary-secondary transition show a wide variety of qualitative (Cremin, Healy, & Gordon, 2017; Dann, 2011; Fortuna, 2014; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2017) and quantitative approaches (Deacy et al., 2015; Mandy et al., 2015, 2016; Peters & Brooks, 2016) in order to examine certain phenomena in the context of transition. In this project a mixed methods approach (like e.g. Hannah & Topping, 2013; Makin et al., 2017), though with strong focus on qualitative aspects, has been used: *“Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches [...] for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.”* (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 123).

In the following the different research methods and their application are presented in detail as well as how they are interlinked to respond to the different research questions.

### Literature Review

The literature can provide information on what has already been researched and where gaps are remaining. In this research project we identified two gaps. The first was a lack of a definition for a successful transition from primary to secondary school of students with ASD. The second was the lack of studies on the primary-secondary transition for students with ASD in France. However, there are international studies that have covered this transition in other

education systems. A review of these studies provided an idea of the dimensions of this phenomenon and inspired the choice of methods. In this first study (cf. chapter 3.1) a concept matrix was applied in order to analyze 16 articles on the primary-secondary transition of students with ASD. The analysis resulted in criteria to evaluate a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD. This process is described in detail in the first article (chapter 3.1).

The literature analysis was the basis to answer research question 1 and enabled the development of the research instruments that were applied to target research questions 2 to 4.

### Free Association Method

To respond to the first research question “What is a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD?” the theory of social representations has been used as an additional approach to this question. Social representations are a model which describes how people understand their world (Abric, 2001). In the context of this research project the idea was to find out how people in general understand a successful transition and if there is a difference between people who have a reference to ASD (e.g. parents of children with ASD) or people who do not have this reference.

A free association method has been applied in order to research the social representation of a successful transition, which is a simple, but well known and broadly accepted method (Moliner & Monaco, 2017). This procedure has a mixed-methods character since quantitative and qualitative elements of the data are used. The results allow contrasting the criteria developed in the literature to the socially conveyed representations among lay people in France which is interesting since lay beliefs may influence actions (Dardennes et al., 2011). This means, if people regard the primary-secondary-transition of students with ASD different from the transition of typically developing students, they may also prepare and handle the transition differently. The analysis process and the results of this study are presented in chapter 3.2 and provide a complementary answer to the question, what a successful transition to secondary school means.

### Semi-structured Interviews

In order to respond to research questions 2 and 3, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research method. This is also due to the fact that the research addresses a relatively new field that needs to be explored: *“Long-term qualitative research will be an asset in this field as we begin to more adequately map out processes, experiences, narratives, and meanings of*

*transition over time. We need to understand which barriers and facilitators are shorter term, and which are longer term and why.*” (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007, p. 6).

Qualitative methods enhance a focus on the participants’ point of view which is crucial to understand a student’s transition from primary to secondary school in its complexity. Semi-structured interviews allow unexpected aspects to emerge and to become part of the data.

The interview guides (cf. Annex B) were based on the criteria developed in the literature review (cf. chapter 3.1). The background information asked for in the first interview served as opener for a conversation on the primary-secondary transition. It is also crucial since the diagnostic process or the experiences at primary school can influence family dynamics and the transition (Chamak & Bonniau, 2013; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Vaincre l’Autisme, 2013).

The second and third interviews can be seen as follow-up interviews. They aim to understand the student’s everyday life at secondary school as well as the developments in social and academic life. They also include a reflection of the transition. This enables to observe whether and how perceptions of the transition change over time, which strategies are constantly considered useful and which obstacles remain.

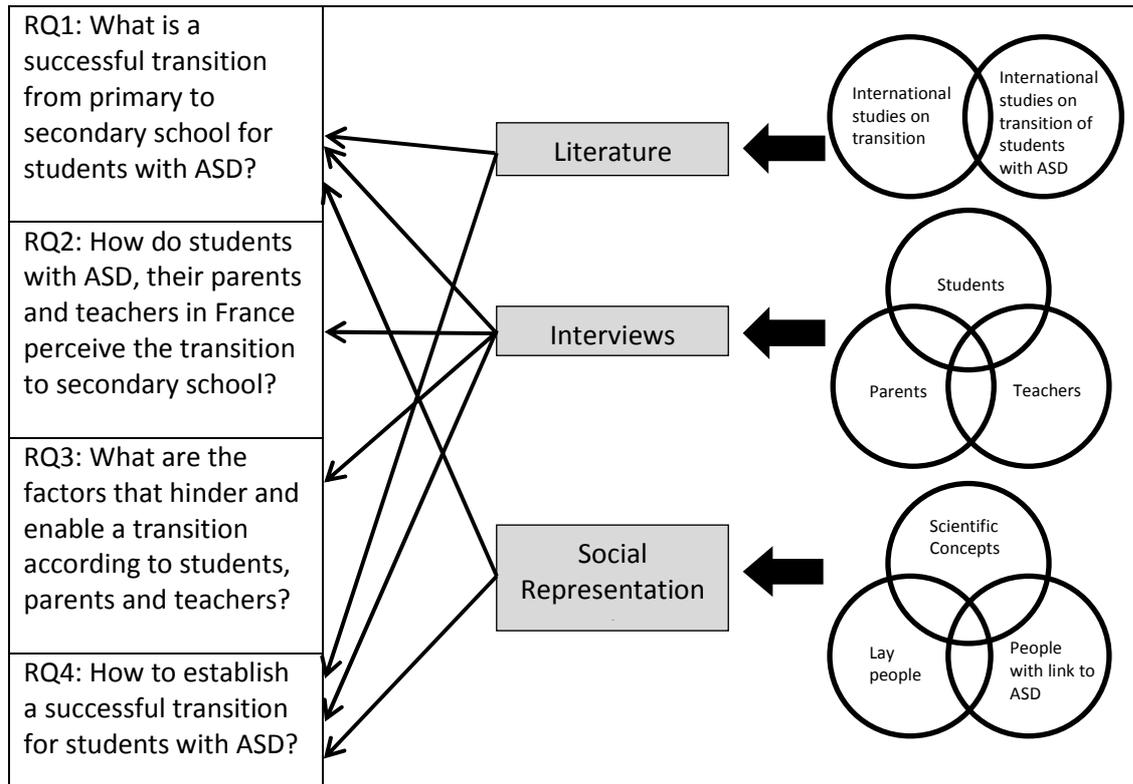
The interview guides were constructed separately for each participant group (parents, students, teachers) and for each data collection period (T1-T3), which means, that all in all nine different interview guides (cf. Annex B) were used.

The interview guides were flexible, that means that a number of questions was prepared and asked to every participant. Other questions were spontaneously added or reformulated. The flexibility is a strength of the interview method, but it also means that the interviews are not standardized in quantitative terms. They are nonetheless comparable, since most questions remained the same. Vogt and Werner (2014, p. 6) state that “[q]ualitative social research can discover completely new and unexpected interrelationships and is thus more open in its results than hypothesis-checking social research.”. This is crucial for this project, since the criteria, the interviews were based on, were retrieved from international studies which were not conducted in France.

### Construction of a Multi-Method Research Project

The described methods were used in three different studies which aim to answer the different research questions. The following figure (Figure 2-1) shows, how the research questions were approached using different methods and data source triangulation.

**Figure 2-1: Interlink of different methods and data sources and their application to respond to the research questions (RQ=research question)**



The interview study (study 3) is the largest among the three studies and covers a major part of the research questions. The second and third research question target the personal experiences with the transition and are, therefore, best answered by the interview study that involves the key stakeholders. This study additionally supports the more general research question on what a successful transition means for students with ASD by contributing the perspectives from the field.

The literature review focuses on the definition of a successful transition. Since all studies that were analyzed are international studies, the review cannot respond to the research questions 2 and 3 that concern the French situation. The second study on the social representations can be seen as link between the first and the third study. It responds to the wide research question 1, but it exploits data from France and, therefore, gives a first perspective on the understanding of the transition to secondary school among French lay people.

## 2.3 Sampling

This section refers to the sampling of participants for study 2 and 3. Sampling was done in several phases and based on various criteria. The transition from primary to secondary school

for students with ASD in the center of this research takes place in the French education system. Since the education system is national and differs remarkably from the education systems of neighboring countries (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009), France was chosen as single research site. The centralized system allows the data collection in the entire country since the administrative and structural differences are small. The population of students with ASD who do the transition to secondary school in a specific time period is limited, which is another reason to not limit the sampling to a certain region.

The sampling was subject to ethical guidelines, that did not allow direct access to the field. The research project has been entered in the processing register of the University of Strasbourg by the data protection officer under number 240 (accessible online: <https://cil.unistra.fr/registre.html#proc-240>). This registration attests that the research has been analyzed and approved for regulatory compliance.

Furthermore, the project was validated by the ethics committee of the University of Strasbourg. The validation process demanded a detailed research protocol including information on sampling strategies, research methods, data collection procedures, risk analysis, confidentiality issues and data storage (cf. Annex F).

### Participant Sampling for Study 2: Social Representations

For the study on social representations the sampling criteria were rather open, since the focus was to find a wide range of lay people. There was no age restriction, thus anybody who knew what the transition from primary to secondary school in France is, could participate.

The questionnaire was accessible online from July to October 2018 and the link was diffused *via* e-mail to contact parent and teacher associations, and *via* social media in parent, student, teacher, teacher assistant and school groups. Although it was not necessary to have any link to school topics, it was assumed that these groups are more likely to be interested to participate in a study on a school question. The authors also used their professional networks in order to recruit participants outside the direct school context. Furthermore, participants that have a link to ASD, autism-related groups on social media and associations were contacted as well.

### Participant Sampling for Study 3: Perception of the Transition

Based on former studies on the primary-secondary transition (chapter 1.2) and on the literature review (study 1, chapter 3.1) three key stakeholders involved in the transition from primary to secondary school of students with ASD were identified. These are the students themselves, their parents and their teachers.

The students are in the focus of this study. Sampling criteria for them was to have an ASD-diagnosis, to transition from a French primary to a French secondary school in summer 2017 or 2018 and to attend a mainstream class, perhaps with the support of an ULIS. This means, that two cohorts were followed: the first during the school year 2017/2018, the second in 2018/2019.

Due to the ethical guidelines, potential participants were contacted indirectly following the necessary administrative procedures. The academic authorities were contacted and informed about the project. They provided data of a certain amount of families meeting the sampling criteria. Therefore, the author had no influence on the choice, which can be seen as a limitation; on the other hand it was the only way to obtain official and institutionalized access to the field. These families were contacted directly *via* e-mail and invited to participate in the study (cf. Annex A).

At the same time the project was announced on Facebook using the social network of universities and ASD-related associations. Furthermore, 134 parent associations in France linked to ASD were invited to send out the information about the study to their members. This information contained a description of the project, a pilot survey and the request to take part in the study. Finally, seventeen families accepted to take part in the study. The student sample is presented in the following table (Table 2-1).

**Table 2-1: Presentation of the student sample (m=male, MC=mainstream class, PDD=pervasive developmental disorder)**

	No.	Age	Sex	Primary school	Secondary school	Public/private	Teaching assistant	Diagnostic <sup>6</sup>
2017-2018	1	11	m	MC	MC	public	part-time	High-functioning autism
	2	11	m	MC	MC	private	part-time	Asperger
	3	10	m	MC	MC	public	part-time	Asperger
	4	11	m	MC, ULIS	MC	private	part-time	Asperger
	5	12	m	MC	MC	public	part-time	Asperger
	6	11	m	MC	MC	public	part-time	High-functioning autism
	7	12	m	MC	MC	private	full-time	ASD
	8	11	m	MC, ULIS	MC, ULIS	public	full-time	ASD
2018-2019	9	11	m	MC, ULIS	MC, ULIS	public	part-time	PDD
	10	12	m	MC	MC	public	part-time	PDD
	11	11	m	MC	MC	public	full-time	ASD
	12	11	m	MC	MC	private	full-time	ASD
	13	12	m	MC	MC	public	part-time	Asperger
	14	11	m	MC	MC	private	part-time	Asperger
	15	11	m	MC	MC, ULIS	public	part-time	Asperger

<sup>6</sup> For the autism diagnostics we relied on information provided by the parents, therefore their wording (translated into English) is used in the table, although it might not be in line with new classifications.

16	12	m	MC	MC	public	part-time	Asperger
17	10	m	MC	MC	public	full-time	Asperger

The next step was to contact class teachers or ULIS coordinators of the students, who were willing to participate (cf. Annex A). Therefore, permission was obtained from the authorities and eventually, the school directorate.

### Saturation

This study did not have an *a priori* number of interviews, since sampling depends on the level of data saturation that is achieved during the research project (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Due to the low response rates, all participants willing to participate and meeting the sampling criteria, were included in the sample. Fusch and Ness (2015) name three criteria for data saturation: enough information to replicate the study, no additional information can be retrieved and further coding does not bring new results.

Study 3 had an exploratory character, which makes it more difficult to understand, whether data saturation is attained. However, the coding of the interviews with parents of the second cohort showed that it was not necessary to modify the category system for the data analysis: Even though new subtopics emerged, they were still easy to integrate in the existing system. One can assume that data saturation has been achieved.

This is not necessarily true for students and teachers. The interviews with the students were short (Table 2-2) and considering the huge variety of the autism spectrum, it is possible, that a bigger cohort would produce different results.

The six teachers that participated covered a wide range of profiles: the sample included teachers without any experience with students with ASD, but also ULIS coordinators who work exclusively with students with ASD. For both ULIS coordinators in the sample it was their first position as ULIS coordinator in their very schools, whereas the four regular teachers often had gained several years of teaching experience in the same school. One of the ULIS had only been established in 2017, when the study took place. Several teachers only started their participation with the second interview, since the contact could not be established earlier. These very particular profiles, with different educational backgrounds, different responsibilities etc. let assume, that the sample size (N=6) has been too small and would need to be extended in order to understand the situation of teachers in the transition process. Furthermore, new results have emerged during coding.

The first participant cohort only contained two teachers, this is the reason why the teachers' perspectives are not included in the published article on study 3 (chapter 3.3). In the second

cohort four teachers participated and increased the amount of data, which is why we include their perspectives, which are relevant for the question of a successful transition, in this thesis' discussion (chapter 4).

## 2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection procedure and the data analysis for the social representations are presented in detail in article 2 (chapter 3.2). Therefore, this section will focus on the data collection of study 3, which is only partially presented in article 3. With this procedure the controversial issue of quality criteria in qualitative research is taken into account. Qualitative studies are not standardized, usually cannot be measured and replicated. This is in contradiction with the classical principles validity, reliability and objectivity (Bryman, 2012; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014). Studies underline the importance of core criteria for qualitative research, but also state that quantitative quality criteria are not applicable to qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Kleven, 2008; Steinke, 2004). Steinke (2004) thus developed core criteria for qualitative research of which one is the indication of the research process, which implies to check whether a qualitative approach is suited for the research questions asked, a clear justification of the choice of methods, indication of transcription rules and sampling strategies, indication of methodological decisions in the context of the entire study and evaluation criteria.

In order to provide such a comprehensive research report for the interview study it seemed necessary to add this section to the thesis, although overlaps with article 3 (chapter 3.3) cannot be completely ruled out.

### Interview Procedure

The data collection for study 3 has been done in six time periods: beginning of the school year 2017/2018, in the middle and at the end; and the same in the school year 2018/2019, which means that each participant has been interrogated three times. All in all 101 interviews with 39 participants were conducted.

**Table 2-2: Participation (P=parent, S=student, T=teacher, \*=in written form) in the interviews and their length in minutes**

		T1			T2			T3		
		P	S	T	P	S	T	P	S	T
<b>School year 2017/2018</b>	Case 1	68			*					
	Case 2	39	29		32	35		36	12	
	Case 3	30	9		30	11		14	7	
	Case 4	28	7		41	15		27	10	
	Case 5	24	11		41	9		28	9	

	Case 6	33	11				32	25	6	16
	Case 7	122	4		99	4		88		
	Case 8	44		75	49	*	33	67		64
<b>School year 2018/2019</b>	Case 9	39	14		41	7	50	32		44
	Case 10	86	10		26	11	45	33	12	35
	Case 11	40	10		28	8				
	Case 12	49	12		40	9		58	13	
	Case 13	48	24		24	8		21	10	
	Case 14	56	17	60	43	18	48	32	24	47
	Case 15	64	18		47	15				
	Case 16	38	6					33	8	
	Case 17	76	13	45	60	10	38	45	29	49

The procedure for the interviews was largely decided by the participants. Interviews in the Alsace region often took place in the families' homes or in the school, for the teacher interviews. Interviews with participants outside of the Alsace region were done by telephone or video call. The interviews with the students usually took place before the interview with the parents. The participants decided whether the parents are present during the interview with the child and if the child is present during the interview with the parents. In most cases the parents stayed close to the child or at least in the same room, whereas children were usually not present during the interviews with the parents.

This issue influenced the interviews to some extent, especially those with the parents. It could be observed that some parents hesitated to talk about negative aspects in the presence of their child. In some cases the answers became clearly more differentiated as soon as the child had left the room. In order to rule out these major differences, it was useful to have the three interviews that could complement each other and left the possibility to clarify certain situations or expressions. For the children the presence of their parents often seemed rather reassuring. Since anxieties are common in individuals with ASD (Simonoff et al., 2008), the parents played an important role to handle potential stress. In some cases interesting dialogues between children and parents developed, which enriched the data. However, one can assume that the presence of the parents also influenced the answers of the children.

The interviews varied between four minutes with students and two hours length with parents (Table 2-2). Interruptions occurred both in the face-to-face-interviews through family members or phone calls and also in the video calls due to internet connection issues.

Each interview was introduced with a small presentation of the study and some hints for the procedure, such as that questions can be skipped, the interview can be stopped at any time etc. (cf. Annex B) Participants were asked if they agree that the interview is recorded with a

recording device and for general consent (cf. Annex C). Only in one case the interview was not recorded, notes were taken instead.

The limited French language skills of the researcher at the beginning of the study impacted the interviews to some extent. Spontaneous additional questions occurred less and details were overheard in some cases. In order to avoid misunderstandings and to guarantee a professional procedure, most interviews were accompanied by a native French speaking student, who could intervene to clarify questions or explain potential misunderstandings. This problem did not persist for the second cohort. Their results confirmed in large parts those of the previous group, which indicates, that the language issue did not have a major impact on the data.

### Interviewing Children

Interviewing children, especially children with ASD, was a challenge. The parents and the researchers prepared the students for the interview by explaining to them the aim of the study, their role within it and that there were no wrong answers. However, some children did not understand the situation, were afraid to give wrong answers or had the impression to not explain well enough. This is a common obstacle for researchers (Fuchs, 2008; Harrington, Foster, Rodger, & Ashburner, 2014; Nathanson & Crank, 2004) and according to Docherty & Sandelowski (1999) this may be due to the fact, that researchers tend to assume that the children understand the obvious, which is not always the case, and even less for children with ASD (Conn, 2015; Harrington et al., 2014).

Interviewing children with ASD holds particular obstacles. Conn (2015) states that individuals with ASD develop different ways to process information and their experiences are not automatically converted into expressions that are understood by others. Other methods used in research with children such as drawings are often not suitable for children with ASD that may have difficulties to express themselves in this way.

Some students did not want to talk about negative experiences, which is typical for interviews with children (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). In order to make it easier for the children to avoid questions, they do not want to answer, or to stop the interview a yellow card (“I want to skip this question.”) and a red card (“Stop!”) were offered as non-verbal communication tools, but rarely used.

Another problem was the time period. Several children did not remember in October what they did in order to prepare for secondary school before the summer. Despite efforts to do the interviews early in the beginning of the school year, this was often not possible, since the first weeks of the school year were the busiest ones for both the families and the teachers.

For students with selective mutism the researcher prepared a selection of questions and asked the student if he would be willing to answer those in written form. In order to obtain an answer directly from the student, he could choose between three answers (“Yes, I want to answer the questions now.”, “Yes, I want to answer the questions, but later.” And “No, I don’t want to participate.”), which were written on small pieces of paper, thus he could point out his answer. This shows the gap between the objective to include children in research concerning them and the reality, which may present serious obstacles.

The child’s credibility is another issue in regard to their interview participation. Children tend to give more socially desired answers, are more prone to suggestive questions and easier to manipulate (Fuchs, 2008; Kränzl-Nagl & Wilk, 2000; Lipski, 2000). To compensate this Fuchs (2008) and Lipski (2000) suggest obtaining detailed information from reference people such as the parents in addition. This has been done in this study.

### Analysis of Interview Data

In order to prepare the interviews for the analysis they were transcribed entirely using a rather simple transcription system (cf. Annex E). Expressions inclusive filling words, gestures, breaks etc. were transcribed in order to represent the interview situation as authentic as possible. Since a content analysis was planned and no linguistic or discourse analysis, it was decided to use punctuation for better readability.

For the first interview cohort any expression has been transcribed, which included various affirmative filling words from the interviewer. After the first coding rounds, it became clear that those rather hinder the analysis. Consequently, for the second interview cohort this was not done anymore. The researcher had collected enough experience and knowledge on the topic and the risk to oversee important topics was minimized. All background information on the child’s biography is useful in order to better understand the child’s situation in general, however, it does not need to be coded, since it is not directly linked to the primary-secondary transition. In order to keep participants’ data confidential, this information was noted down in keywords, but not transcribed.

The same was done, when participants went too far from the actual topic. This was mentioned in the transcriptions with [far from the subject], but not transcribed in order to make the transcription and analysis process more efficient. The transcriptions were done by different people. They all used the same transcription system; however, small differences cannot completely be ruled out.

The interviews were analyzed by qualitative content analysis (QCA) that can be seen as a mixed methods approach: “*assignment of categories to text as qualitative step, working through many text passages and analysis of frequencies of categories as quantitative step.*” Mayring (2014, p. 10). However, the focus in this study is on the qualitative aspects, frequencies were not used. The use of categories goes back to general psychology showing that knowledge building is based on putting experiences into “*classes of things*” (Mayring, 2014, p. 37). The difficulty is to clearly define the boundaries of a category, nevertheless, this is a necessary step for the categories used for the QCA. The category system (cf. Annex D) is at the core of the data analysis, since it makes the research transparent and comprehensible (Mayring, 2014).

The QCA follows a systematic procedure, that remains flexible and has to be adapted constantly to the research objectives (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Mayring, 2014). The category system (Table 2-3) makes the research transparent and comprehensible (Mayring, 2014). Mayring (2014) distinguishes between three different forms of content analysis. In this study “structuring” is used, which means “*to filter out particular aspects of the material, to give a cross-section through the material according to pre-determined ordering criteria, or to assess the material according to certain criteria*” (Mayring, 2014, p. 64). Since the interviews were based on specific criteria this form of interpretation is best suited. Although structuring is a deductive category assignment, it allows new criteria to emerge. “*In this way, aspects that do not fit the categorization frame can be used to create their own concepts, based on the principles of inductive content analysis.*” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 112). In this study deductive category assignment and inductive category formation were used complementing each other.

Due to their different roles, it was necessary to develop category systems for each participant group (students, parents, teachers; cf. Annex D). The first versions of the category systems used the criteria from the literature review as categories. All material was analyzed by assigning the text passages to categories. During the first coding process some parts of the text could not be assigned to the *a priori* categories and other categories proved to be too large, which led to the creation of subcategories. In a second coding process, new codes were generated from the material itself which led to another modification of the category system and a third coding process. The software MAXQDA helped to keep the overview and to modify the coding structure without losing data.

**Table 2-3: Extract of the category system used for the parent interviews**

<i>No.</i>	<i>Category name</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Anchor Sample</i>	<i>Coding Rule</i>
<i>MC 2</i>	<i>Membership in the class</i>			
SC 2.1	• Making Friends	All experiences, wishes, perceptions around the topic of friendship.	“No, honestly, friends as we understand them, he doesn't have any.” (study 3, parent 7, T1)	
SC 2.2	• Fitting in/ Being normal	All experiences and perceptions that concern the student’s personality in contrast to the other students. This concerns both the understanding of being a child with ASD, but also understanding oneself as secondary student.	“he does not know that he is different and does not know that he is autistic” (study 3, parent 1, T1)	Here it is not about friendship, but rather being a respected member of the class, feeling part of the class.
SC 2.3	• Social Difficulties	All experiences and perceptions parents express concerning the topics misunderstandings, isolation, being excluded, being bullied.	“he got beaten up, he got insulted not by one group, but by several groups” (study 3, parent 3, T1)	

Table 2-3 illustrates an extract of a finalized category system used to analyze the interviews with parents. It contains the category name, its definition, an anchor sample from the analyzed texts and coding rules, if any are applicable. The category systems enhance trustworthiness, since they document the coding process. The final category systems were used for the analysis of the entire corpus (cf. Annex D, E). The fact, that the addition or modification of categories was not necessary anymore during the analysis of the second cohort interviews with parents and students shows, that data saturation has been achieved but also proves the robustness of the developed category systems.

### 3 Part III: Contributions to Research

### 3.1 Article 1: Successful Transition From Primary to Secondary School for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Literature Review

Richter, M., Popa-Roch, M., & Clément, C. (2019). Successful Transition From Primary to Secondary School for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 33(3), 382–398.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2019.1630870>

#### Abstract

The transition from primary to secondary school is a sensitive phase in the life of a child, especially within vulnerable groups such as children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD-characteristics, such as the refusal to change or social interaction difficulties, present challenges to the transition not only for the students themselves, but also for their parents and the teachers involved in the transition process.

For the literature review, 16 studies focusing on the primary-secondary transition for children with ASD were selected. Based on criteria developed by Evangelou et al. (2008) for students without special needs, the selected articles were analyzed for identifying factors that enable a successful transition for children with ASD. The literature review confirms Evangelou et al.'s (2008) criteria to a major extent, but also modifies and adds new criteria, which involve all main stakeholders and the transition preparation. Both are of crucial importance for students with ASD.

These new criteria enable the evaluation of the primary-secondary transition of children with ASD and provide starting points for further research in order to better understand and improve the situation of students with ASD in mainstream education settings.

Keywords: transition, primary-secondary school, Autism Spectrum Disorder, stakeholders, inclusive education.

## Introduction

In several countries such as France (*Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*, translation: Ministry for national education, higher education and research, [MENESR] 2014), Germany (Klemm, 2013), Finland and Australia (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011), the number of students with special needs attending a mainstream school has been rising remarkably in the last few decades. However, statistics show that in 2015, up to one third of primary school students with special needs in French mainstream education either did not start a secondary mainstream education or did not finish it (MENESR, 2017).

Meanwhile, the prevalence rate for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has been rising, mainly due to changes and improvements in the diagnostics (Blumberg et al., 2013; King & Bearman, 2009; Lord & Bishop, 2010). These developments indicate that more and more students with ASD are attending mainstream education.

International research shows that the transition from primary to secondary school is often linked to excitement, but also stress and anxiety for both students and their parents (Bailey & Baines, 2012; Hanewald, 2013; Mackenzie, McMaugh & O'Sullivan, 2012). Students with ASD are particularly vulnerable in the transition phase since they often have problems accepting and dealing with changes in their daily routine (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr & Smith, 2006). Studies report that it is more likely for students with ASD to face social exclusion, to become victims of bullying and to have lower academic achievement than their classmates without ASD at the mainstream secondary level (e.g., Evangelou et al., 2008; Foulder-Hughes & Prior, 2014; Mandy et al., 2015; Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantam & Williams, 2008). That is why we assume that the transition from primary to secondary school plays a crucial role in the school career of a child with ASD. The literature does not define what a successful primary-secondary transition is, however, Deacy et al. (2015) underline that transition is a long process, suggesting a transition framework that starts two years before the school change and continues until one year after. In Dann's study (2011), parents report after the first term that the transition is not yet complete.

This leads to the question of how a transition from primary school to secondary school can be successfully conducted with short and long-term beneficial effects. This implies the need to clearly define what a successful transition actually means. Evangelou et al. (2008) is the only recent study that presents criteria for a successful transition from primary to secondary school. Students with special needs are mentioned in the study, but they are not the main focus. Five

aspects for a successful transition were revealed: 1) developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence, 2) having settled so well in school life that they caused no concerns to their parents, 3) showing an increasing interest in school and school work, 4) getting used to their new routines and school organization with great ease and 5) experiencing curriculum continuity (Evangelou et al., 2008, p. 16). These criteria served as a guideline for the literature review on students with ASD.

There is a substantive amount of studies concerning the transition from primary to secondary school in general. However, when considering the transition for children with ASD, the literature is scarce: the number of studies is low and quite limited in their regional scope. In this article, we seek to develop criteria that describe a successful transition for students with ASD and attempt to identify factors influencing the transition both positively and negatively, based on the existing literature.

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

The term *Autism Spectrum Disorder* was developed for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) by the American Psychiatric Association (2013). The fifth and newest edition of the DSM published in 2013 characterizes ASD as “[p]ersistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts” and “[r]estricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities” (p.1). These symptoms must be present in early childhood and cause impairment in significant areas of life.

Children with ASD usually prefer to keep to their daily routine. They have difficulties understanding social conventions such as how reciprocal friendships work or when it is adequate to talk about a certain topic. In Humphrey and Lewis’ (2008) study, students with ASD report that it is difficult for them to understand others’ points of view. Gardner et al. (2014) analyzed peer-interaction of students with ASD and observed behaviors such as talking over or interrupting conversation partners. Difficulties in social communication and interaction, as well as repetitive patterns of behavior or restricted interests, remarkably impact the everyday school life and the transition from primary to secondary school (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Wainscot et al., 2008).

Comorbidities linked to ASD, such as sleeping problems, epilepsy, psychological disorders and gastrointestinal symptoms, frequently occur (Doshi-Velez, Ge & Kohane, 2014; Mannion, Leader & Healy, 2013). Several studies (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Makin, Hill & Pellicano, 2017) also report a high sensitivity to noise, smells or physical contact. These comorbidities can also have an impact on the students’ everyday-life at school.

As mentioned before, the prevalence rates for ASD is rising globally (Blumberg et al., 2013; King & Bearman, 2009; Lord & Bishop, 2010). In the US, it is currently estimated that 1 out of 110 children (1 out of 70 boys and 1 out of 315 girls) is on the spectrum (Lord & Bishop, 2010). In Germany, the prevalence rate among children is unknown but it is estimated to be 6-7 children out of 1000, based on international studies (*Autismus Deutschland e.V.*, 2014). Estimates in France are 1 out of 100 children (*Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées*, 2017).

The rising prevalence rates as well as the rising numbers of students with ASD attending mainstream schooling depict a new phenomenon in society and education. This underlines the need and importance to understand what factors contribute to or prevent a successful transition to secondary schools for children with ASD. This is done by analyzing the existing literature and identifying these factors.

### Method

For this literature review, articles were selected from scientific databases (“ERIC”, “Elsevier”, “Web of Sciences”) and Google Scholar. These databases are important, well-known and established in the field of education. We started using keywords such as autism, transition, primary, secondary, inclusive education and integrative education in different combinations, in German, English and French, all in free text search. This was followed by a more elaborate search, e.g. the detailed search terms for the Web of Sciences were: ((autism\* AND trans\* AND (primary school OR elementary school) AND (secondary school OR middle school OR high school))). A snowball search using the bibliographies of the twelve resulting articles completed the search. The search was conducted in June 2018. Sixteen scientific articles were selected based on the following criteria: 1) they focused exclusively on students with ASD, 2) they dealt with the transition from a primary school to a secondary school, and 3) included research on the situation after the school change. We excluded studies 1) that focused on other school transitions, 2) dealt with the primary-secondary transition in general, 3) treated students with special needs as a homogeneous group and 4) included diagnoses other than ASD. The severity of the ASD was not considered as a specific criterion since the details on the diagnosis or severity were not given in most of the studies. Finally, all articles taken into consideration were published in English after 2000, thus reflecting the current situation in the very country they focus on (e.g. Australia, Ireland, USA; cf. Table 3-1). This is especially important since the development concerning inclusive education of students with ASD is quite a recent issue in many countries.

**Table 3-1: Article selection**

<b>Authors, Year</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>Main results</b>
Cremin et al., 2017	Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the transition to and early experience of secondary school from the perspective of parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical and emotional support for parents is beneficial</li> <li>• Unanimous opinions on strategies</li> </ul>
Dann, 2011	England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the views and experiences of key stakeholders regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 students with ASD</li> <li>• 6 parents</li> <li>• 18 staff members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition experience of students with ASD similar to those without</li> <li>• Preparation, training and communication necessary</li> </ul>
Deacy et al., 2015	Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• best practice in relation to the planning, process and strategies that support the transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 52 graduates of the Post Graduate Certificate/Diploma in SEN (ASD)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• online questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal and consistent structure of the transition process necessary</li> <li>• framework for education departments, agencies and schools</li> </ul>
Dillon & Underwood, 2012	United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• issues and concerns of parents during the transition</li> <li>• key factors for a successful transfer experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pre-transition: 9 parents</li> <li>• post-transition: 6 parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• semi-structured focus group interviews</li> <li>• in-depth-interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• individual solutions are necessary</li> <li>• parents' knowledge is useful</li> <li>• schools need to have knowledge about ASD</li> </ul>
Fortuna, 2014	England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experiences of key stakeholders in regard to the transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 students with ASD after transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDQ</li> <li>• diaries</li> <li>• semi-structured interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• key to good transition: knowing the student, communication with and by all involved, recognizing challenges, making adjustments</li> </ul>
Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016	New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parent perspectives of children with ASD who are transitioning from primary to secondary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus group discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• importance of social integration</li> <li>• informal conversations about school important</li> </ul>
Hannah & Topping, 2013	Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students' experience during the transition to secondary school</li> <li>• students' expectations and experiences of secondary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 male students with ASD</li> <li>• Age: 11;3-12;4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pre-transfer: questionnaire</li> <li>• post-transfer: group interviews, single interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transition expectations negative, transition experiences positive</li> <li>• importance of information, transition activities and support</li> </ul>

		<p>school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students' and parents' views of the support</li> </ul>			
Hebron, 2017	England, Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expand the existing research base</li> <li>• gain a greater understanding of how students with ASD become part of a new academic and social community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28 students with ASD</li> <li>• 21 typically developing students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PSSM</li> <li>• case studies based on interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• need to promote social inclusion by: knowing students, understanding/accommodating needs, support for and communication with parents, vigilance to social vulnerability</li> </ul>
Jindal-Snape et al., 2006	Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perceptions of stakeholders with regard to current arrangements to support the transition</li> <li>• perceptions of stakeholders with regard to development of practice for the effective transition</li> <li>• differences between stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 children/young people with ASD about to make the transition</li> <li>• age: 12-13</li> <li>• child, parent(s)/carer(s), primary school or communication support unit head teacher, other professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• differentiated interview schedule with open and closed questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• elimination of delays in decision making and of school exclusion</li> <li>• long-term, strategic decision-making</li> <li>• communication with all involved</li> <li>• full range of provision</li> <li>• professional resource and time available for transition</li> </ul>
Makin et al., 2017	England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• potential differences between two groups in terms of pre-transition cognitive and behavioral characteristics, post-transition success, experiences of transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 students with ASD</li> <li>• parents</li> <li>• teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SRS</li> <li>• Sensory Profile</li> <li>• SCAS for Parents</li> <li>• EPPSE</li> <li>• face-to-face semi-structured interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mainly negative experiences of transition due to systemic and school barriers</li> <li>• support for families important</li> <li>• children's voice important</li> <li>• timely decisions by administration</li> <li>• knowing students and his/her needs</li> </ul>
Mandy et al., 2015	England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feasibility and acceptability of STEP-ASD</li> <li>• STEP-ASD's effectiveness for reducing behavioral and emotional problems at school</li> <li>• investigate whether any</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 37 children diagnosed with ASD</li> <li>• public mainstream school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDQ</li> <li>• SCDC</li> <li>• WISC IV</li> <li>• post-transition monitoring interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STEP-ASD is a useful program, impacts the transition</li> <li>• often partially implemented</li> <li>• may be effective for reducing emotional and behavioral problems at school</li> </ul>

		teacher-reported effects generalized beyond school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mean age: 11.47, IQ: 85.24</li> </ul>		
Mandy et al., 2016	England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• change and continuity for children with autism spectrum disorder transitioning in mainstream education from primary to secondary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28 students diagnosed with Asperger, ASD or pervasive development disorder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADOS</li> <li>• WISC IV</li> <li>• SDQ</li> <li>• Beck Youth Inventories</li> <li>• Vineland-II</li> <li>• SPVS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children with ASD likely to have significant support needs</li> <li>• risk of peer victimization not higher than in primary school</li> </ul>
Peters & Brooks, 2016	United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• utilize parental perspectives to explore the experiences of students with AS/HFA at secondary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17 parents of children with ASD at secondary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey with open and closed questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transition success is multifactorial</li> <li>• requires: pre-transition preparation, knowing the student, training for teachers</li> </ul>
Stoner et al. 2007	United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parents' experiences and concerns related to the transition</li> <li>• facilitators and barriers to transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 parents: biological parent of a child with ASD, married</li> <li>• child with ASD enrolled in the public school system at preschool/ primary school level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple interviews</li> <li>• observations</li> <li>• documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recommendation for facilitating successful transition: communication with parents, consistent use of transition strategies, allowing time, form that follows the student through yearly transitions, assisting parents</li> </ul>
Tobin et al., 2012	Great Britain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experiences of parents of children with ASD during the transition</li> <li>• parents' hopes/ concerns regarding transition, problems they encountered, coping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 parents of children with ASD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus group discussions</li> <li>• follow-up telephone interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• importance of preparation, communication and coping skills</li> <li>• professionals should work with schools and support parents</li> </ul>
Tso & Strnadová, 2016	Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parents' experiences with the process of the transition with a particular focus on home-school collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 parents of children with ASD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of transition support for parents</li> <li>• lack of student involvement in decision-making</li> <li>• home-school-collaboration is important</li> </ul>

The criteria proposed by Evangelou et al. (2008) and presented above were used as a guideline for this literature review. They served as a lens through which the selected articles were read. In order to systematize the literature, a concept matrix (Webster & Watson, 2002) was created. The concept matrix is a tool to systematically structure the literature around concepts. It is a simple table that lists the articles on one axis and the emerging concepts on the other axis. By ticking the box when an article covers a certain concept, it gives a good overview of which concepts are common and crucial to each topic.

### Results

Each of Evangelou et al.'s (2008) criteria presented above has been considered as one concept. New concepts that emerged from the literature review and which were not covered by Evangelou et al. (2008) were added (cf. Table 3-2).

**Table 3-2: Concept matrix**

	Criteria provided by Evangelou et al. (2008)					New criteria that emerged from the literature		
	Developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence	Showing an increased interest in school and school work	Getting used to new routines and school organization with great ease	Experiencing curriculum continuity	Having settled in so well in school life that they caused no concerns to their parents	Transition Planning	Student-teacher-relationship	Teachers' well-being
Cremin et al., 2017	✓				✓			
Dann, 2011	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Deacy et al., 2015	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dillon & Underwood, 2012	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fortuna, 2014	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Hannah & Topping, 2013	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hebron, 2017	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Jindal-Snape et al., 2006	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Makin et al., 2017	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Mandy et al., 2015				✓	✓	✓		✓
Mandy et al., 2016	✓							
Peters & Brooks, 2016	✓	✓	✓					✓
Stoner et al. 2007			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tobin et al., 2012	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tso & Strnadová, 2016			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The different concepts were analyzed using the selected articles. The results drawn from this analysis are formulated into modified and extended criteria for a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD.

#### A well-planned, child-centered and inclusive transition process

The first concept that emerges in nearly all studies is transition planning. Transition planning includes the decision process for choosing which school the student is going to attend and what type of schooling is preferred. It also means transition activities such as school visits or open days, which many schools arrange. A strong focus lies on the different stakeholders and their participation in the transition planning process.

The most important decision families have to make is probably whether their child should attend mainstream education or be schooled in a specialized institution. For example, in France, students with special needs are enrolled either in ordinary classes or in specialized classes that are part of ordinary school. Students who are not considered eligible for mainstream classes, or *Unité Localisée pour l'Inclusion Scolaire* ([ULIS] special education classroom for students with special needs in mainstream schools), attend socio-medical institutions. The issue of separate schooling is also crucial in the international literature discussed in this article. Parents are in a constant struggle between adequately responding to their child's needs and not excluding him/her from the mainstream society (Tobin et al., 2012). They often have the impression that the schools are not well enough prepared in order to welcome and integrate their children with ASD (Stoner, Angell, House & Bock, 2007; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Parents sometimes lack information on the different schools and what kind of transition support can be provided. This can have diverse negative consequences: parents choose a specialized institution, although they actually prefer a mainstream setting or they are very anxious in regard to the transition and worried when their child is at school (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Makin et al., 2017).

An inclusive transition process has to take into account the voice of all stakeholders. The children's voice often goes unheard, according to recent studies (Deacy, Jennings & O Halloran, 2015; Makin et al., 2017; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). According to the literature, a close collaboration between students, parents, primary school teachers, secondary school teachers and other staff involved would be ideal. Nevertheless, this is not often the case due to time constraints, lack of trust or administrative struggles (Deacy et al., 2015; Dillon &

Underwood, 2012; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Hebron, 2017; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Makin et al., 2017; Stoner et al., 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2016).

Throughout the different studies, various transition activities are identified and evaluated. These include visits to the secondary school, open days, meetings with future teachers, etc. Most schools seem to offer this kind of activities that are generally viewed as helpful (Cremin, Healy & Gordon, 2017; Dann, 2011; Deacy et al., 2015; Hannah & Topping, 2013; Hebron, 2017). Studies focusing on the parents' perceptions show that a single visit to the secondary school or a single meeting with a future teacher is often not perceived as sufficient. It rather takes several meetings or visits in order for the children to feel comfortable discovering the school and getting to know the staff (Deacy et al., 2015; Hebron, 2017; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Peters & Brooks, 2016; Stoner et al., 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Tobin et al. (2002) also mention that open days were not seen as adequate for children with ASD. Some families report that their children had the opportunity to discover the school building when no-one else was there, others had individual school tours with teachers (Hebron, 2017; Tso & Strnadová, 2016).

In case of sensory issues, which students with ASD often face, more challenging measures may be necessary. Secondary schools can be very noisy due to the large number of students; smells and narrowness can become problematic for students with ASD (Tobin et al., 2012). For example, a school day in France can last until the late afternoon, thus sensory issues can become very stressful throughout the day. Headphones or an isolated workplace could cancel out noise, some students could use a silent room when everything becomes too much for them, extra-time for classroom changes could allow students to avoid noisy and crowded corridors (Cremin et al., 2017; Dann, 2011; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Makin et al., 2017). If sensory issues are known, they can be dealt with before problems arise.

In general, all stakeholders involved should be able to express their concerns and ideas during the transition planning process. Since the spectrum of autism disorders is broad, students with ASD are an extremely heterogeneous group. Fortuna (2014) determines that there is no approach to a successful transition from primary to secondary school that suits all students. Therefore, transition activities individually tailored to the student's needs and abilities are highly recommended (Deacy et al., 2015; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Stoner et al., 2007; Tobin et al., 2012). In order to cater to these high demands, the transition process has to be planned early and have a long-term goal targeted by all stakeholders.

### Being an equal member of the class

According to Evangelou et al. (2008, p.16), the first criterion for successful transition is: “Developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence”. Friendship and social inclusion are one of the biggest concerns students with ASD and their parents express with respect to the transition. Several studies show that peer relationships are more important for the students than academic or organizational concerns (Fortuna, 2014; Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017).

Students in general, whether they are on the spectrum or not, wish to have friends in secondary school but the social difficulties, such as understanding social conventions, often encountered by students with ASD, make friendships more complicated. The different studies show that some students are very concerned about losing their friends from primary school who do not attend the same secondary school (Hannah & Topping, 2013; Makin et al., 2017). Others did not manage to establish reciprocal peer relationships while in primary school and either hope for an improvement at secondary school or are anxious about upcoming conflicts (Dillon & Underwood, 2012). After the transition, the picture does not change much: some students manage to make friends, others do not. The studies show that the qualities of friendships differ enormously in terms of equality and reciprocity. Making friends is hard work for many students with ASD (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Makin et al., 2017; Peters & Brooks, 2016).

For some students with ASD, this leads to an increased identity struggle during secondary school. The students perceive themselves as being different and see that as a source for the problems they face (Makin et al., 2017). “Fitting in” is a big wish for many students with ASD (Cremin et al., 2017; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Self-esteem and confidence are closely linked to peer relationships, as shown by Evangelou et al. (2008).

The concerns regarding integration and being an equal member of the class are legitimate. Many studies (Dann, 2011; Evangelou et al., 2008; Mandy et al., 2015) see students with ASD as more likely to become socially excluded or even bullied. It especially affects students who do not manage to make friends, who are socially isolated and therefore more vulnerable (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Evangelou et al., 2008). It is a vicious circle, since inclusion and being part of a friends’ group could protect them from bullying and isolation (Dillon & Underwood, 2012). Some students have already experienced bullying during primary school. According to Mandy et al. (2016), being bullied in primary school does not mean a higher

chance of being bullied during secondary school. Nevertheless, Dillon and Underwood (2012) detected that students who are bullied at the beginning of secondary school are still being bullied after the first term.

This section showed that good peer relationships are useful and necessary for a smooth and successful transition. Nevertheless, research shows that students with ASD have more difficulties making friends and are more likely to be excluded or bullied. Bullying is a major barrier to a successful transition and students with special needs are more likely to become victims (Evangelou et al., 2008). This is alarming and shows that parents and teachers have to consider social issues before, during and after the transition. Social support seems essential here in order for the students to experience a successful transition.

### Academic achievement

Surprisingly, academic achievement is a concept that seems to be less relevant for both students and parents. Studies on the transition to secondary school show that students often begin with a high level of motivation, but then experience a decline in grades at the beginning of secondary school (Jindal-Snape et al., 2006). Students are concerned with the academic demands of secondary school prior to the transition. They are afraid of not being able to cope with the new learning situation and are worried about a big increase in homework or stricter teachers (Hannah & Topping, 2013; Peters & Brooks, 2016).

Parents share this concern and are worried that academic and social problems will mutually determine and influence each other (Tobin et al., 2012). The French Ministry of Education (*Ministère de l'éducation nationale, translation: Ministry of national education, [MEN], 2011*) published guidelines for the transition from primary to secondary school. These mainly focus on academic and organizational aspects and less on social ones. This example from France underlines a certain discrepancy between schools or teachers on the one hand focusing on academic issues, and on the other hand students and parents worrying about social aspects. This shows, in line with the previous section, that social concerns are greater amongst the students than academic concerns. This also seems to be true for some parents, who state that their primary concerns are not centered on the academic achievements of their child, but rather on social or administrative aspects (Peters & Brooks, 2016).

### Student-teacher relationship

The teachers, as key stakeholders, play an important role before, during and after the phase of transition. If the preparation did not include them, the secondary school teachers only come into play after the actual transition, when the student has already started secondary school,

even though the participation of teachers in the transition process could have reduced anxiety (Hebron, 2017; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006).

Many students with ASD are concerned about the number of teachers they will have to work with while in secondary school; parents express similar worries (Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Indeed, this means a significant change from primary school, where one teacher teaches several subjects and spends important amount of time with the same group of students while in secondary school, different teachers are responsible for the different subjects. If students with ASD are not able to establish positive relationships with many teachers, misunderstandings or increased stress could be a result (Dillon & Underwood, 2012).

It becomes clear that a good understanding of ASD and some experiences with students with ASD are useful in different ways: it increases parents' and students' trust, it helps teachers to plan their lessons accordingly and gives teachers more confidence and self-efficacy (Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). A wrong understanding or lack of knowledge, in contrast, can lead to frustration on all sides. Students who are afraid of a teacher may refuse to go to school, parents may become worried and teachers may misunderstand ASD-specific behavior and interpret it as opposing behavior or the result of bad parenting (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Tobin et al., 2012).

In general, this means, that teachers are an important part of the support network of a student with ASD. Even though many students with ASD do well in academics, they need teachers as reference people they can talk to in case of problems (Dann, 2011; Fortuna, 2014; Makin et al., 2017; Stoner et al., 2007). Furthermore, a good teacher-student-relationship is beneficial in order to avoid misunderstandings and frustration on both sides.

### Reference Persons

Besides the teachers, all other staff members (such as aides, social workers or school nurses) who are in regular contact with the students are important to consider. Dillon and Underwood (2012) point out that one staff member who does not adequately deal with or understand ASD is enough to reverse the student's well-being at school. Fortuna (2014) explains that secondary school staff spends less time with the students and, therefore, sometimes do not detect social problems that students may have. The relationship to reference people among the school's staff is as important as the student-teacher-relationship, which means that a good understanding and handling of ASD is crucial (Deacy et al., 2015; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Fortuna, 2014; Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017; Tobin et al., 2012).

The school staff serves as a network that provides access, support and protection for students with ASD if needed. Unstructured times such as the lunch break are often difficult for students with ASD, especially when they are more isolated (Deacy et al., 2015; Peters & Brooks, 2016). Particularly in countries such as France, where all-day schooling is usual (extracurricular activities take place in the afternoon at school; OECD, 2014), staff members who are accessible outside of lessons are important.

To sum up, this means everybody in school should have access to training on ASD and information about the student with ASD, not just the teachers (Cremin et al., 2017; Dann, 2011; Dillon & Underwood, 2012). This is why all school staff involved should be part of the transition process in order to get to know the student and to negotiate their role in both the child's transition and his everyday life at school (Deacy et al., 2015; Fortuna, 2014; Tobin et al., 2012). When teachers primarily focus on academics, other school staff becomes important for non-academic affairs, such as social interaction difficulties.

#### Navigating in the school building

Secondary schools are often much bigger than primary schools and frequent classroom changes are normal. Due to these changes, many students (with or without ASD) are afraid of getting lost and being late for class. They are aware that more independence and self-organization is required and they are not sure if they can cope with it (Dann, 2011; Deacy et al., 2015; Hannah & Topping, 2013). Like typically developing students, many students with ASD adapt very fast and do not have any problems after the first few weeks. However, some are overwhelmed by the organizational demands (Makin et al., 2017).

In several studies, students mention aids such as maps or pictures of the school, which they received either beforehand or when they entered secondary school. There are also visual timetables to illustrate their daily structure, diaries and planners to help them organize themselves (Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017; Stoner et al., 2007; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016).

In short, the navigation in the school building is a concern for many students with ASD before the transition. Although most of them adapt easily, others may need individual measures in order to feel more secure and manage navigation on their own or with support.

#### Cooperation and organization of team work

This section concerns both the cooperation of the primary and the secondary school, and also the cooperation between the different staff members within the secondary school level. Most stakeholders see the cooperation between primary and secondary schools as essential, while at

the same time acknowledging the lack of it (Deacy et al., 2015; Hebron, 2017; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006). The main purpose of this cooperation seems to be the exchange of information about the student with ASD. Some remain skeptical about this issue, preferring a fresh start for the student with ASD instead of prejudices which could undermine the relationship between staff and student (Deacy et al., 2015; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006). But in most cases, passing on information from primary to secondary school is seen as useful in order to take certain measures for the student's school life (Dann, 2011; Deacy et al., 2015; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hebron, 2017; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Stoner et al., 2006). In Makin et al.'s (2017) study, teachers from both types of school are aware of the differences between primary and secondary school. However, Evangelou et al. (2008) criticize that the schools often do not know enough about each other's work. This leads to a lack of continuity, which is unfavorable for students with ASD).

Different studies suggest having some kind of communication document that follows the student through his school career. In the US for example, every student with special needs has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) which is reviewed regularly. In the study performed by Deacy et al. (2015), parents do not agree on whether the IEP should transition with their children or not. In other countries, there is no formal document such as the IEP, which means there is no formalized passing on of information (Tso & Strnadová, 2016). In France, the *Livret Personnel de Compétences* ([LPC] translation: personal competency booklet) and the *Projet Personnalisé de Scolarisation* ([PPS] translation: individual schooling project) follow the student through his school career. The latter one is only used for students with any kinds of diagnosed special needs (MEN, 2011, 2016).

Besides information about the student, cooperation between both schools could enhance the academic and structural continuity in order to ease the transition of children having difficulties with changes in their daily routines (Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Makin et al., 2017). Tso and Strnadová (2016) argue for a clear division of roles and responsibilities among all stakeholders involved. This does not end with the student entering secondary school. Hebron (2017) points out that a transition plan conceived with all participating stakeholders proved to be a useful instrument for teachers and parents in her study if this plan is used consistently and passed on to relevant staff.

To sum up, cooperation between primary and secondary school is vital for a successful transition and has to take place before, during and after the actual transition. This can ensure curriculum continuity which Evangelou et al. (2008) name as an important factor for a

successful transition. Tobin et al. (2012) also underline the importance of continuity, not only in academic terms, but also in terms of support and communication. Makin et al. (2017) stress the importance of organizational continuity. When the student has entered secondary school, all relevant staff has to be included in this cooperation in order to work as a team which can provide consistent support and continuity for the student in transition. In France, this means regular and constructive communication and collaboration between teachers, school assistants, overseers and, if involved, the ULIS-coordinator. As an educational team, they can provide stability and orientation for the student with ASD at the new school.

### Teachers' wellbeing

It seems that it is mainly parents who claim to have good contact with the school; however, teachers also benefit from a good teacher-parent-relationship (Hebron, 2017; Stoner et al., 2007). In order to avoid “power struggles” (Tso & Strnadová, 2016) between teachers and parents, it is useful to start a collaborative relationship before the transition.

In several studies (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Hebron, 2017; Peters & Brooks, 2016), parents report a lack of expertise in dealing with students with ASD among teachers. In some cases, this shortfall might be the result of a biased perception by skeptical parents. But there are teachers admitting that they have difficulties: secondary school teachers in Jindal-Snape et al.'s (2006) study are willing to receive training in order to better understand autism, to be able to react to autistic behavior and to integrate it in their lesson preparation.

If teachers do not feel sufficiently trained, it can have a serious impact: they probably do not understand the student's behavior, the relationship to the child and its parents is strained, which in turn leads to a lack of trust among the parents and frustration on the teacher's side (Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Many teachers have the impression that parents' expectations are not realistic and that they need considerable emotional support that the schools cannot offer (Hebron, 2017; Tobin et al., 2012). A positive attitude towards teaching a student with ASD or a heterogeneous group are important and can be enhanced by adequately preparing teachers for their task (Dann, 2011; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006).

To sum up, in order to strengthen the teachers' wellbeing during the transition process, they should have access to adequate training or measures of staff development. They should be part of the transition process from the beginning in order to enable mutual trust and a good working relationship with the parents. Parents and teachers working together provide a consistent support network for the student in transition.

## Parenting

Parents are the link between the student and the new school. They facilitate the transition process and are highly emotionally involved. According to Evangelou et al. (2008), students have experienced a successful transition when they have settled in so well “that they cause [ ] no concern to their parents” (p.16).

Since transition experiences differ a lot, it is not surprising that parents in the different studies value and assess their role differently. Several studies (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Makin et al., 2017; Stoner et al., 2007) underline that parents put their children’s wellbeing in the center of their activities concerning the transition. They play different roles as protectors, interpreters, “firefighters” and animators, all at the same time. Parents often feel they have to fight a lot in order to make themselves heard and be accepted as partner in the transition process by the schools (Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Tobin et al., 2012). In Dillon and Underwood’s (2012) study, parents reported being contacted by the school whenever the schools did not know how to deal with the child and expected them to come and pick up the child. In other cases, the opposite is true: parents feel ignored or not taken seriously (Makin et al., 2017; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Studies show that parents have valuable knowledge about their children, which is very useful for the schools (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Fortuna, 2014; Hannah & Topping, 2013).

The more accessible teachers are to parents, the bigger the satisfaction with the school (Hebron, 2017; Tobin et al., 2012). In order to avoid parents either being ignored or in constant alert, the level of communication must be discussed. Furthermore, expectations concerning the different stakeholders’ involvement should be negotiated in order to avoid power struggles and disappointment (Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016).

Summarized, several studies (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Fortuna, 2014; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Makin et al., 2017; Tobin et al., 2012) show that the parents’ wellbeing is challenged during their child’s transition from primary to secondary school. There is a high level of stress, frustration and anxiety linked to the transition (ibid.). This is neither beneficial for the child, nor the transition, nor the parents themselves. It is common that parents are anxious about this phase in the life of their child; however, parents of children with ASD seem to be affected even more. This stress level can be reduced, as previous research has shown, by starting the transition process on time and involving the parents as equal partners.

## Discussion and Implications

The transition from primary to secondary school is a major event in a child's school career. The literature has identified students with ASD as a vulnerable group regarding this transition. This is due to the characteristics of ASD such as the refusal to change or social interaction difficulties, which pose challenges to the transition. In order to understand their situation better, it is necessary to define what a successful transition from primary to secondary school means for students with ASD.

Evangelou et al. (2008) developed criteria in order to describe and measure a successful transition in general. These are, to a major extent, congruent with the findings from the literature review focusing on students with ASD. Most issues that are of concern for typically developing students are of similar concern for students with ASD. However, it is obvious that ASD brings its own challenges, meaning that several aspects mentioned in the literature on transition in general do not have the same importance for students with ASD or have not been researched sufficiently yet. In van Rens et al.'s (2017) study, criteria such as gender, social status or ethnicity are identified as influential indicators for a successful transition of typically developing students. Gender is not considered a factor in the selected articles since the prevalence of ASD is much higher among boys than girls (Lord & Bishop, 2010). Social status and ethnicity are also factors that are not considered in the studies on children with ASD. Therefore, some criteria have to be adapted and modified in order to correspond with students with ASD.

The first criteria in Evangelou et al.'s (2008) study is the students "developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence". This goes together with the concept of respected membership in the class that was revealed from the literature review (cf. Table 3-3).

**Table 3-3: New criteria for a successful transition from primary to secondary school for children with ASD**

**A well-planned, child-centered transition process involving all key stakeholders has been applied, when:**

- The student is a respected member of the class.
- Academic achievement continues at the same level or slightly lower.
- The student and its teachers have a positive relationship with each other.
- The student knows the new school building and its reference persons well.

- Cooperation and teamwork organization ensure continuity in the learning process.
- Teachers feel self-efficient and satisfied in their daily work.
- Parents are familiar with the school and its staff and see it as a good place for their child.

The second one, “having settled in so well in school life that they caused no concerns to their parents”, is aimed at parents. Therefore, it is similar to the criteria of parents’ wellbeing in the literature review (cf. Table 3-3). Since the literature review shows that parents of children with ASD are highly involved in the transition process and have to deal with the school directly (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Stoner et al., 2007; Tobin et al. 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016), this criterion could be modified in order to adapt it to the reality of parents of children with ASD. As such, it would be “Parents are familiar with the school and its staff and see it as a good place for their child.” (cf. Table 3-3). This is important due to students and parents’ high levels of anxiety, revealed in the literature, and is crucial to home-school collaborations (Dann, 2011; Tso & Strnadová, 2016).

“Showing an increased interest in school and school work” is the third point in Evangelou et al. (2008, p. 16). This has not really been an issue in the selected studies since the social aspects were seen as more important by many than the academic aspects (Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Makin et al., 2017). Still, academic achievement has a role to play in the transition from primary to secondary school. “Academic achievement continues at the same level or slightly lower” (cf. Table 3-3) is a less distinct criterion, but more realistically reflects the reality of students with ASD who are in transition.

Students “getting used to new routines and school organization with great ease” has been a major issue for all stakeholders. It goes together with students knowing how to navigate in the new school building and knowing their reference persons and how to find them. Expecting “great ease” is probably too much to ask from students with ASD who are more likely to encounter difficulties due to ASD (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Hannah & Topping, 2013; Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017; Tobin et al., 2012). If they manage to get to know the building well and establish good relationships with their reference persons, it already is a substantial success (cf. Table 3-3).

The last criterion in Evangelou et al. (2008) is “experiencing curriculum continuity”, which has also been an important topic in the literature review. This mainly targets primary and secondary schools that should work together in order to enable curriculum continuity, but also the teamwork between the different staff members at the secondary school level. Therefore, a

reformulation may make this factor more distinct: “Cooperation and teamwork organization ensure continuity in the learning process” (cf. Table 3-3).

Other issues that became apparent in the literature review were not addressed by Evangelou et al. (2008) such as the overarching topic “transition planning”. Transition planning has enormous importance for the transition of students with ASD. An early start, the involvement of all stakeholders and a plan that leads all stakeholders through the transition phase are essential, as the different studies have shown.

Another issue underlined by the literature on students with ASD is the student-teacher-relationship and the wellbeing of teachers in their job. The literature review has shown that students with ASD need more support in order to effectively manage the transition phase. Therefore, teachers play an important role. A positive student-teacher-relationship is beneficial for a smooth transition (Dann, 2011; Hebron, 2017; Stoner et al., 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2016) and should be added to the list of criteria.

Some studies (Jindal-Snape et al., 2007; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016) revealed that teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared to meet the expectations of parents and students. There is often a lack of knowledge about ASD or a lack of experience with students with ASD. This can lead to difficult student-teacher-relationships and cause stress and frustration to parents and the teachers themselves (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Flavier & Clément, 2014; Stoner et al., 2007; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). When evaluating a successful transition process, teachers have to be considered as criterion, too. They should feel self-efficient and satisfied in their daily work in order to support the student during the transition (cf. table 3). The teachers’ perspectives and the role of academic aspects during the transition were missing in the article selection, which has to be considered as a weakness. However, a recent French study shows that teachers working with students with ASD have a higher risk of burn-out (Boujut, Popa-Roch, Palomares, Dean & Cappe, 2017). The literature review has shown that teachers are important stakeholders in the school life of a child with ASD. In further research, their role should be better considered.

Table 3-3 summarizes the results of the literature review by providing both the criteria of Evangelou et al. (2008) and the modified and added criteria for a transition from primary to secondary school for children with ASD.

In order to measure the success of a transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD, it is necessary to have a measuring tool. The above listed criteria can serve as a basis to develop research instruments in order to give substantive and objective insight about

the success of a transition from primary to secondary school for a child with ASD and for the other stakeholders. It can moreover identify enabling factors as well as obstacles that the stakeholders can potentially face during the time of transition. Since the criteria include the perspectives of all main stakeholders (students, parents, teachers and other school staff), they give a holistic image of the complex situation from different perspectives. The literature review has shown that it is easier for typically developing students to meet these criteria, whereas they pose difficulties to students with ASD. Nevertheless, the challenges during the transition are the same for all students, which means the criteria could also probably be used for the transition of children without ASD. Furthermore, these criteria allow the evaluation of existing transition programs such as the STEP-ASD (Mandy et al., 2015). In addition, new tools could be created based on the criteria.

There is a need for more studies on the primary-secondary transition of children with ASD using bigger samples, different research methods and expanding to different regions (Fortuna, 2014; Hannah & Topping, 2013; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Makin et al., 2017). Fortuna (2014) and Hannah and Topping (2013) stress the need of both longitudinal studies and large-scale studies including all stakeholders involved. In fact, several studies were qualitative studies with very small samples (e.g. Dillon & Underwood, 2012: N=12; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016: N=5; Hannah & Topping, 2013: N=9). Quantitative data from a bigger sample could provide a larger image of the situation in this very same context. The criteria allow for such studies and also for comparative studies between different education systems, which is especially interesting since all of the selected studies focus on only one geographical region (e.g. Ireland, England, New Zealand). We can assume that students with ASD in France have similar experiences compared to students in the UK, but due to the differences between the education systems, there might also be differences.

The rising number of children with special needs in mainstream schools in many countries leads to new phenomena and situations. The assessment of the transition from primary to secondary school for children with ASD is a new phenomenon in France and other countries, which until now had remained unknown and, to some extent, neglected. The literature shows that there is a need of understanding and efficiently handling this phase of the school career. This could result in implications for educational policies or changes in the educational system in order to better support students with ASD during their transition to secondary school.

In short, this literature review developed criteria for a successful transition from primary to secondary school for children with ASD based on the existing literature. These criteria show

that a long-term systematic approach to the transition, which includes the perspective of all stakeholders, is necessary. Based on these criteria, new research instruments can be developed and can facilitate further research on the primary-secondary transition.

### Limitations

The selected criteria offer the perspectives of children, parents and teachers on the transition from primary to secondary school. However, it has been shown that the transition process is very complex and involves even more stakeholders. These additional stakeholders, such as school aides, nurses and therapists, are only marginally reflected in the criteria.

Literature reviews on a general student population, like van Rens et al. (2017), consider criteria such as social status or ethnicity. Depending on national legislation, these types of data may be difficult for researchers to access. They have been neglected in the selected studies, but as we know from educational research that these criteria may have an impact on educational careers in general, one can assume that they also have an impact on the transition. Furthermore, the major part of the selected studies has been done in English-speaking industrialized countries, mainly the UK. These countries share a history of education policies, values and systems that is particular. Other areas of the world are less or not at all reflected in the selected studies, which only allows for a limited perspective on the subject.

### Conclusion

The literature has shown that there is a lack of studies that provide longitudinal data on large samples in different education systems. The results could inform schools, families and education policy-makers on how to improve the transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD in mainstream education settings.

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### 3.2 Article 2: Social Representations of a Successful Transition to Secondary School: Perspectives on Students With and Without Autism Spectrum Disorders

Richter, M., Rohmer, O., Popa-Roch, M., & Clément, C. (to submit). Social Representations of a Successful Transition to Secondary School: Perspectives on Students With and Without Autism Spectrum Disorders.

#### Abstract

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) seem to struggle more with the transition from primary to secondary school, whereas their number are increasing remarkably in mainstream French schools due to legislations promoting inclusive education.

The existing literature only provides very broad definitions of a successful primary-secondary transition. To complement the limited scientific definitions, we applied a free association method in order to capture the social representations of lay people on this transition. Furthermore, the study sought to find out if there were differences in the social representations when participants had to consider that a student with ASD was transitioning to secondary school during the association task.

The results revealed that adaptation, integration and good school grades were the most relevant issues concerning a successful transition according to lay people, whether or not a student with ASD was involved. Smaller differences remained, that we propose to discuss in line with the literature.

Keywords: social representations, transition, secondary school, Autism Spectrum Disorder, France

## Introduction

*“What meanings do young people, parents, and educators make of the transition and why?”* Tilleczek and Ferguson asked at a research symposium in 2007, regarding the transition from primary to secondary school (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007, p. 6). Research acknowledges that the transition from primary to secondary school is a major event in a child’s life (Akos, 2004; Coffey, 2013; van Rens, Haelermans, Groot, & Maassen van den Brink, 2017; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Children link the transition to ambiguous feelings; they are looking forward to new experiences and anxious at the same time (Topping, 2011). Secondary schools are usually bigger, there are more teachers and more subjects as well as frequent classroom changes, the former oldest primary school students become the youngest secondary school students, etc. (Akos, 2004; Bailey, Giles, & Rogers, 2015; Coelho & Romão, 2017; Coffey, 2013), all of which means an increased demand of independence and self-organization (Coffey, 2013; Gardner et al., 2014). Accordingly, the aim of this individual study was to highlight the social representations of the transition from primary to secondary school, by assessing the social representations of lay people towards students with or without ASD.

The transition from primary to secondary school has become very important in the context of inclusive education policy application. Since France introduced a law in 2005 that gives priority to inclusive education, the numbers of students with special needs in mainstream schools has been rising remarkably (Ministère de l’Education Nationale & Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l’Innovation, 2018). The existing literature states that students with special needs often struggle more with the transition process than their typically developing peers (Hughes, Banks, & Terras, 2013). This is even more true for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who are likely to encounter long-term social and academic difficulties (Dann, 2011; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantam, & Williams, 2008).

The primary school-secondary school transition of students with ASD is therefore a relatively new phenomenon for all people involved (students, parents, teachers, teaching assistants, therapists, etc.).

Meanwhile, scientific literature on this topic is quite scarce. Very few broad definitions or criteria determining a successful transition are available (cf. Evangelou et al., 2008; Griebel & Berwanger, 2006). It can be assumed that there are differences between the definitions provided by scientific studies and the socially conveyed representations among lay people, as shown by studies on lay beliefs about autism or intellectual disabilities (Dardennes et al.,

2011; Furnham & Buck, 2003; Huws & Jones, 2010; Mitchell & Locke, 2015; Russell, Kelly, & Golding, 2010; Scior, 2011).

Social representations are notions and ideas which are shared among a social group and show how people give meaning to their world (Abric, 2001), which is crucial in understanding the dynamics of social interaction and, therefore, in shedding light on the determinants of social practice. From this pragmatic perspective, social representations can have a substantial impact on behaviors in a specific social field such as education.

Thus, it has been shown that lay beliefs can influence actions. Dardennes et al. (2011), for instance, found a direct link between the parents' beliefs about the causes of their children's ASD and their treatment choices. School is a very significant part of social life and it is likely people do develop representations concerning its different aspects. A comparison between the social representations of individuals involved or not with ASD can provide interesting clues as to whether the transition for a student with ASD is understood differently from that of a typically developing student, since their meaning is conveyed through social representations.

#### Primary-Secondary Transition for Students with ASD

ASD is characterized by “*Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts*” and “*Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities*” in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). These symptoms must be present in early childhood and cause impairment in important areas of life (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In everyday life, people with ASD often have difficulty accepting changes and understanding social convention (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr, & Smith, 2006). In this perspective, the various differences between primary and secondary schools, such as more teachers, classroom changes and new classmates, can be a major challenge for students with ASD.

Thirty percent of the interviewed parents in a study by Barnard, Prior, Potter and National Autistic Society (2000) perceived their child's transition to secondary school as difficult or very difficult. The same number of parents were surprised to see how well their child was able to make the transition. Thus, ASD is not automatically linked to a difficult transition, but it could be (Barnard et al., 2000; Hebron, 2017; Makin, Hill, & Pellicano, 2017; Neal & Frederickson, 2016; Richter, Flavier, Popa-Roch, & Clément, 2019). The rising number of ASD diagnosis and an increased number of students with ASD attending a mainstream school in France (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale & Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la

Recherche et de l'Innovation, 2018) leads to the question: what does the transition from primary to secondary school mean for those directly or indirectly involved ? Their social representation of the transition may influence their actions during this important life process.

### Successful Transition

Existing studies provide information about strategies, risk factors, experiences related to the primary-secondary transition. However, they often only offer a fairly broad overview: “A *successful transition means that the child will feel good and profit from the transition to a new school environment.*” (Sirsch in: Griebel & Berwanger, 2006, p. 36). More precisely, Evangelou et al. (2008) developed five criteria for a successful transition: (1) *developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence*, (2) *having settled so well in school life that they caused no concerns to their parents*, (3) *showing an increasing interest in school and school work*, (4) *getting used to their new routines and school organization with great ease* and (5) *experiencing curriculum continuity*.

Richter, Popa-Roch and Clément (2019) developed criteria for a successful transition of students with ASD based on international studies. The criteria that determined a well-planned and child-centered transition process, involving all key stakeholders, has been applied when (1) the student is a respected member of the class, (2) academic achievement is maintained at the same or slightly lower level, (3) the student and its teachers have a positive relationship with each other, (4) the student knows the new school building and its reference persons well, (5) cooperation and teamwork organization ensure continuity in the learning process, (6) teachers feel self-efficient and satisfied in their daily work and (7) parents are familiar with the school and its staff and see it as a good place for their child.

A complementary way of addressing this issue may be to highlight the beliefs of lay people. It can be assumed that social representations of the primary-secondary transition can also influence how this transition is planned, conducted and evaluated. In order to identify what understanding lay people have of a successful transition in contrast to the broad scientific definitions, we chose to rely on the theory of social representations, which gives access to lay beliefs.

### Theory of Social Representations

The theory of social representations has its roots in cognitive and social psychology and was developed by Moscovici in 1961. It is a model that describes how people give meaning to their world. Social representations are belief systems that are constructed through interpersonal communication between two individuals or groups which give meaning to new

experiences by contextualizing them, thus enabling these individuals or groups to become familiar with and to adapt their behaviors to new situations described social representations as “*social thinking*” (p. 83); notions or ideas are socially constructed and shared. This means that they are specific to a group rather than an individual. However, we can consider that individuals are the starting points, because they and their way of thinking are part of society (Flick, 1998). Social representations are based on communication, understanding and control of the social, material and ideological environment; thus, they depend on and are influenced by context, which plays a crucial role.

A social representation is a socio-cognitive system composed of two interacting subsystems: a central system and a peripheral system. The central nucleus in social representations determines the meaning, consistency and permanence of the representation; it resists changes (Abric, 2001). In the context of our research, this central nucleus provides the most relevant elements for the participants regarding the primary-secondary transition. The peripheral system is more flexible and the most accessible and lively part of the presentation. It protects the central system and allows it to adapt to the situation (Abric, 1996).

In short, in a pragmatic approach to human social functioning, social representations enable individuals to understand the real world and can guide and justify behaviors and practices (Abric, 2011). Social representations are considered as an interface between mental beliefs and social realities (Krause Jacob & Winkler, 1995). Consequently, for our purpose, social representations can be considered as indicators of how people think and experience the transition from primary to secondary school. More precisely, this theory can help to explore whether the social representation of a primary-secondary transition is viewed differently by people who have a link to ASD and those who do not.

## Method

### Data Collection

Over time, studies have been conducted using the theory of social representations in different areas of social life and now serve as models (cf. Flick, 1998 on health and work; Krause Jacob & Winkler, 1995 on psychological interventions; Minibas-Poussard, 2003 on money, banking and savings). Interviews and free association methods have been used in these studies. The latter is well accepted by study participants and provides rich qualitative data from various research populations (Abric, 2011; Moliner & Monaco, 2017), which is the reason why it has been applied to the present study. Implicit elements can be detected more easily through this

direct form of questioning. Furthermore, it allows the calculation of quantitative and qualitative indicators (Abric, 2011).

In this study, we followed the method employed by Minibas-Poussard (2003), which was based on Vergès et al. (1994). A questionnaire was constructed to enhance the collection of spontaneous associations with the question: “What does it mean for you to succeed in the 6th grade?”. Participants were invited to write down the first five ideas or expressions that came to mind.

Studies on the primary-secondary transition of students with ASD have shown that these students need more time for the transition than typically developing students and are more likely to deal with long-term effects (Deacy, Jennings, & O’Halloran, 2015; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019; Wainscot et al., 2008). Moreover, a transition which has been perceived as successful in the beginning of the school year can be viewed differently at the end of the same school year, when difficulties such as increased academic demands or social difficulties have emerged over time (Lane, Oakes, Carter, & Messenger, 2015; Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019). Thus, it seems important to include the entire 6<sup>th</sup> school year (first year of secondary school in France) as part of the transition process in the stimulus question.

The questionnaire furthermore asked demographic data (age, sex) to better know the composition of the sample. In the introduction to the questionnaire, it was not mentioned that we were interested in students with ASD. It was only after the association question that the participants were asked whether they had an individual with ASD in their family, whether they worked with one, and whether they had a student with ASD in mind when they filled out the questionnaire. This last question was used as an indicator for the distinction between the group involved with ASD and those who were not.

### Participants

Sampling has been done *via* e-mail to contact parents and teachers associations and *via* Facebook among parents, students, teachers, teacher assistants and school groups. These target groups seemed likely to be interested to participate in a study on a school subject. In order to attract participants with an ASD link, autism-related groups on Facebook and associations were contacted as well. The questionnaire was accessed by 441 participants and 312 of them fulfilled the minimum requirement, which was to deliver at least one item for the main question.

Eighty percent of the participants were between 20 and 50 years old, 70 percent were women. Thirteen percent were thinking of a student with ASD when they answered the question about the transition. Given a prevalence of one percent of individuals with ASD in the general population (Lord & Bishop, 2010; Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2017), this is more than one could expect in a general sample, but is due to the fact that autism-related associations and groups have been contacted selectively and directly.

### Analysis

The data analysis followed different steps that are summarized in Table 3-4 and explained in detail in the following.

**Table 3-4: Data collection and data analysis process in steps**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Number of response items</b>
Data Collection	Free association method using an online questionnaire	312	1194
Developing categories	Contrasting response items with the existing literature	312	1194
Analysis Step 1	Assigning response items to categories (authors + independent coders)	274	674
Analysis Step 2	Dividing the sample into participants without link to ASD/with link to ASD	236/38	592/82
Analysis Step 3	Calculating frequencies and rank for both groups	236/38	592/82

Following the classical free association method employed by Vergès et al. (1994), the 1194 answers of the participants ( $N = 312$ ) were grouped in thematic categories. The categories are based on literature reviews regarding the primary-secondary transition in general (Evangelou et al., 2008; McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow, 2004; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007; van Rens et al., 2017), on another review that analyzes literature on students with special needs (Hughes et al., 2013) and on one other that focuses on students with ASD (Richter, Popa-Roch, et al., 2019). Twenty-three out of 30 categories can be linked to the existing literature (cf. Table 3-5).

In order to complete the list of categories, the questionnaire data was examined for frequently occurring response items. These were compared with the existing literature and defined, when possible, on the basis of this literature. The literature categories also allowed the merging or splitting of categories provided by the participants that were either too large or too small. “Social relationships”, as an example for a category, are mentioned as an important factor in

all literature reviews, but they also show that different kinds of relationships come into play in the context of transition: social relations with classmates, with adults at school, friendships. Thus, the category was divided in order to represent the variety of social relations (“friends”, “relationships to other students”, “relationships to adults”) (cf. Table 3-5).

Other categories have emerged directly from the questionnaire, and while not mentioned explicitly in the literature, have been added in order to exploit the maximum of responses that can provide answers to the research question at this exploratory stage. These are, for example, the categories “rhythm” (23 mentions in the original sample) or “transition to the next grade” (26 mentions in the original sample), that appeared often in participants’ responses (cf. Table 3-5).

**Table 3-5: List of categories, their descriptions and sources<sup>7</sup>**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Adaptation	Ability to get used to new processes, premises, routines and people	Evangelou et al. (2008), Hughes et al. (2013), Richter et al. (2019), van Rens et al. (2017)
Autonomy	Ability to organize oneself	Evangelou et al. (2008), McGee et al. (2003), Richter et al. (2019)
Integration	Ability to integrate as a full member of the class	Richter et al. (2019)
Friends	Reciprocal friendships with peers	Hughes et al. (2013), Richter et al. (2019), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007), van Rens et al. (2017)
Organization	Ability to organize school affairs, class changes, approach school tasks, homework, etc.	McGee et al. (2003), Richter et al. (2019), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007)
Relationships to other students	Relationship with other students that do not correspond to a friendship	McGee et al. (2003), Hughes et al. (2013), Richter et al. (2019), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007), van Rens et al. (2017)
Relationships to adults	Cooperation and interaction as student and teacher	McGee et al. (2003), Richter et al. (2019), van Rens et al. (2017)
Good marks	Ability to have good qualifications	McGee et al. (2003), Richter et al. (2019)
Confidence	Self-esteem, self-confidence, perceived social, physical and cognitive skills of the child	Evangelou et al. (2008), Hughes et al. (2013), McGee et al. (2003), van Rens et al. (2017)
To succeed		Questionnaire
Support	Measures or persons who ensure the student's access, support and protection in and outside of secondary school	Evangelou et al. (2008), Richter et al. (2019), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007), van Rens et al. (2017)
Rhythm		Questionnaire
Well-being	Positive social and emotional well-being, feeling good at secondary school	Evangelou et al. (2008), Hughes et al. (2013), van Rens et al. (2017)

<sup>7</sup> This is an English translation of the original French table that has been presented to the coders.

Growing up	Processes of becoming young adults	McGee et al. (2003), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007)
Fulfilment	Be enthusiastic about secondary school	McGee et al. (2003)
Motivation	A desire to do something at school, interest in school work	Evangelou et al. (2008), McGee et al. (2003), van Rens et al. (2017)
Learning		Questionnaire
Understanding	Having accurate information about what the college will be like, aware of the range of specific subjects they could study and the choices they will be able to make	McGee et al. (2003)
Competencies	Ability to develop independent study/learning skills	McGee et al. (2003), van Rens et al. (2017)
Passing to the next grade		Questionnaire
Future	Career planning, career awareness	McGee et al. (2003), Richter et al. (2019)
Pedagogy	Teaching style, subject content, consistency of student expectations and differences in teaching and learning practices, curriculum continuity	Evangelou et al. (2008), McGee et al. (2003), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007), Richter et al. (2019), van Rens et al. (2017)
Feeling of belonging	Perception of the school climate	van Rens et al. (2017)
Work attitude	Ability to stay on task	McGee et al. (2003), van Rens et al. (2017)
Longing		Questionnaire
Asking		Questionnaire
Reference points	Ability to settle in so that children do not cause their parents any concern	Evangelou et al. (2008), McGee et al. (2003), Richter et al. (2019)
Progress	Establishing clear objectives	McGee et al. (2003), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007)
Responsibility	Student participation in decision-making about their own schooling	Evangelou et al. (2008), McGee et al. (2003), Tilleczek&Ferguson (2007), van Rens et al. (2017)
Changes	Changes in the social and learning environment, biological and physiological changes associated with adolescence	McGee et al. (2003), van Rens et al. (2017)

Each answer from the questionnaire was assigned to one single category (e.g., “autonomy” or “integration”) if possible (cf. Table 3-5). If several or no categories were available, the answer was not taken into account. In order to increase reliability, inter-coder agreement has been calculated (Bryman, 2012; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). To do this, independent researchers and research assistants have received parts of the questionnaire data (between 100 and 300 response items per person) and the list of categories (cf. Table 3-5). They were invited to assign the response items to the different categories and to indicate, when this was not possible, whether there was no matching category or more than one. The coders were only informed about the general topic of the study, but not about its purpose, in order to avoid any

impact on their interpretation of the data. Every answer was coded by at least two and a maximum of four different persons. Only the answers that were classified in a category with an inter-coder agreement of at least 65% were exploited for the analysis. As a result, 674 answers out of the 1194 (56,45%) initial responses from 274 participants (almost 90% of the original sample) could be categorized.

During the next step, participants were divided into two groups based on the question of having thought of a student with ASD during the association task or not. This enabled the identification of differences that may exist between these two groups of respondents. The frequency of each category was put into relation with its rank. The ranking corresponds to the order in which the categories were named by the participants. Accordingly, *“collocation of the naming frequency of the terms together with their appearance ranking may allow us to identify the most salient elements of a representation by mapping the quantitative and qualitative properties of induced words”* (Abric, 1994 in: Dany et al., 2015, p. 491).

Frequency represents the quantitative centrality, thus the number of times a specific word or expression is given by a specific population. The rank shows the qualitative centrality, meaning that it represents which words or expressions are cognitively more available and therefore pronounced earlier than others (Dany et al., 2015). The congruence of frequency and rank may be seen as an indicator for centrality of an item for the social representation. When two groups are studied, it is necessary to consider the central nucleus of each group (Abric, 2011).

## Results

The tables (Table 3-6, Table 3-7) illustrate the results according to the *“rank-frequency-method”* (Dany et al., 2015). In the four-cell tables, one axis indicates the frequency, the other axis the rank. The differentiation between high and low frequency is a direct result of the data: a leap in the frequencies defines the limit. In Table 3-6, the limit was drawn at 41. This means that the “good marks” category was mentioned 41 times; the next most common category, “organization”, was only mentioned 29 times, which is a major leap and considerably less than half of the most common category, “autonomy”, which was named 79 times. For each category, the average rank was determined. The average of these averages is the boundary between the high and low rank.

The results are presented in two four cell tables (Table 3-6, Table 3-7), which represent the answers of those participants who did not think of a student with ASD during the association task (Table 3-6) and those who did (Table 3-7).

**Table 3-6: Social representation of a successful end of the first year at secondary school, excluding the answers of ASD-related participants (N = 236), presenting the frequency with which a category was named and its average rank**

	<b>High rank&lt;2,9</b>	<b>Low rank&gt;2,9</b>
<b>High frequency F&gt;41</b>	Autonomy (79; 2,34) Adaptation (69; 1,86) Integration (60;1,78) Good marks (41; 1,98)	Friends (57; 3,05) Growing up (42; 3,16)
<b>Low frequency F&lt;41</b>	Organization (29; 2,59) Well-being (22; 2,41) Work attitude (20; 2,45) Competencies (18; 2,43) Passing to the next grade (18; 2,16) Fulfilment (17; 2,53) Changes (16; 2,63) Rhythm (12; 2,83) To succeed (8; 2,5) Understanding (6; 2,6) Reference points (5; 2,8) Motivation (4; 2,5)	Confidence (16; 3,19) Learning (15; 3,46) Support (11; 3,55) Future (6; 3,3) Progress (5; 3,8) Asking (4; 3,25) Relationships to adults (4; 4) Relationships to other students (4; 3) Responsibility (4; 4) Longing (1; 3) Pedagogy (1; 5)

**Table 3-7: Social representation of a successful end of the first year at secondary school, considering the answers of ASD- related participants (N = 82), presenting the frequency with which a category was named and its average rank**

	<b>High rank&lt;2,63</b>	<b>Low rank&gt;2,63</b>
<b>High frequency F&gt;8</b>	Integration (11; 1,75) Adaptation (9; 1,6) Good marks (8; 1,5)	Support (9; 2,7)
<b>Low frequency F&lt;8</b>	Passing to the next grade (5; 1,4) Friends (4; 2,5) Well-being (4; 2,5) Relationships with other students (3; 2,6) Organization (3; 2) Relationships with adults (3; 2,6) Competencies (2; 1,5) Progress (1; 2) To succeed (1; 2)	Autonomy (6; 3) Growing up (4; 2,75) Confidence (2; 3) Learning (2; 3,5) Work attitude (1; 4) Longing (1; 4) Motivation (1; 4) Rhythm (1; 4)

The upper left box, showing the categorized answers which have been produced often and at high rank presents the central nucleus, which determines the meaning and the organization of the representations that both groups have about a successful primary-secondary transition. Thus, for the group of participants without links to a student with ASD, the “autonomy”, “adaptation”, “integration” and “good marks” categories appear in the central nucleus. In the group who has considered students with ASD specifically, the categories are “integration”,

“adaptation” and “good marks”. This shows that the results between both groups are quite similar, apart from the “autonomy” category.

The results in the upper right box, which are the categories that are named often but at a lower rank, differ a lot. In the group that considered a student with ASD, only the “support” category appears, which does not play a major role in the results of the other group. For them, “friends” and “growing up” are present, which were considerably less relevant in the ASD-group.

The bottom left box shows a number of categories that are mentioned at high rank, but not very often. The bottom right box presents the categories which are rarely mentioned and at low position. Both of them are not considered as relevant for the purpose of the study and are therefore neglected.

These findings show that there seems to be a remarkable similarity between both groups in terms of the central nucleus concerning the most relevant part of their social representations of a successful transition to secondary school of a student with or without ASD. However, the results presented in the upper right box as well as the notion of the “autonomy” category indicate that there are potentially differences in the perception of a successful transition between people who have a link to ASD and those who do not.

## Discussion

This study was based on the assumption that the few existing scientific definitions of a successful transition to secondary school may not correspond to the ideas socially conveyed by lay people. A free association method was applied in order to capture in a direct way the social representations lay people have regarding a successful transition to secondary school.

The results show a major congruence with the literature in terms of the importance of social, academic and organizational aspects concerning the primary-secondary transition. The structures of the social representations between the two respondent groups are similar. Their central nuclei overlap to a large extent. Lay people link integration, adaptation and good marks to the primary-secondary transition, regardless if the student has ASD or not. This is in line with former studies on the primary-secondary transition. Akos (2004) asked students to write a letter to a hypothetical new middle school student. In their advice, he found mainly organizational, academic, personal and social themes. Other studies highlight the same themes with an emphasis on student populations in general or on students with ASD (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Evangelou et al., 2008; Mackenzie, McMaugh, & O’Sullivan, 2012; Makin et

al., 2017; Waters, Lester, & Cross, 2014). In the following, we will discuss these themes of the social representation with reference to the two groups of participants in our study.

### Adaptation

Looking at the response items grouped under the “adaptation” category, it becomes clear that it is often used in a reflexive way (in French: *s’adapter*), assumingly referring to the student him or herself adapting to the new school.

Various changes that happen during the primary-secondary transition such as new buildings, new classmates, new and more teachers, classroom changes, all demand a high level of adaptation. Students express concerns relative to these changes, but they also look forward to them (Leroux-Boudreault & Poirier, 2017; Waters et al., 2014). Most students cope well with the transition situation and feel settled after a short period of adjustment (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Graham & Hill, 2003; Waters et al., 2014; West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010).

Since changes may pose difficulties to students with ASD, adaptation to a completely new environment can be considered a challenge. Studies of students with ASD during the transition show that they express similar concerns about transition and would give similar advice to new students like their typically developing peers. However, they may need some additional adaptations from the school. This includes an individual transition planning, specific measures to tackle hypersensitivity or fatigue, classroom organization issues, etc. (Dann, 2011; Deacy et al., 2015; Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019). Adaptations provided by the school for the individual students are in line with the idea of inclusive education that France is trying to develop (Legifrance, 2005). Furthermore, it may explain why adaptation is important in both groups of respondents.

### Integration

In the context of this study, we can assume that the term “integration” used by the participants refers to social relations that are viewed as essential for a successful transition in former studies conducted in France (Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019) and elsewhere (Coffey, 2013; Pratt & George, 2005). During the transition, not all primary school friendships survive, which may cause fear and sadness among students (Coffey, 2013; Pratt & George, 2005; Topping, 2011). But the transition is also a time to form new friendships and many students look forward to meeting new people. Pratt and George (2005) underline the importance of friendships in order to make sense of the new environment and to construct a social identity. They therefore criticize the focus on organizational and academic aspects of the transition they observed among school staff.

ASD is characterized by difficulties in social interactions and communication, thus one can assume that social relationships are as important for them as for typically developing students, but at the same time more complicated (Calder, Hill, & Pellicano, 2013; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011; Leroux-Boudreault & Poirier, 2017). Friendships of students with ASD are described as companionship rather than as affective relationships, rather unilateral than reciprocal (Calder et al., 2013; Kasari et al., 2011). This could explain why integration is considered very important by the participants with ASD-links in this study. Friends are significantly less mentioned by them in contrast to the comparison group, where friendships are not listed at a high rank, but with a higher frequency.

Bullying and social exclusion are barriers to integration and to a successful transition. Although their prevalence differs among the different studies, the risk of students with ASD to become victim of negative social experiences seems to be higher than for their typically developing peers (Maïano, Normand, Salvas, Moullec, & Aimé, 2016; Schroeder, Cappadocia, Bebko, Pepler, & Weiss, 2014; Sreckovic, Brunsting, & Able, 2014). This indicates that social issues need to be taken into account when planning or conducting a primary-secondary transition, whether the student has ASD or not.

### Good marks

A working social network can positively influence some organizational and academic aspects (Coffey, 2013; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). School results, like “good marks”, have been considered crucial by both participant groups. Nevertheless, the transition to secondary school is often characterized by a decrease of academic achievements (Galton, Gray, & Ruddick, 1999; Hopwood, Hay, & Dymont, 2017; West et al., 2010). Even before the transition, academic concerns such as high workload or increased homework could be observed among students with or without ASD (Mackenzie et al., 2012; Makin et al., 2017). Galton et al. (1999) argue consequently not to forget the academic aspects when constructing a transition process.

Grading and evaluation of students with ASD is described as problematic (Fleury et al., 2014; Keen, Webster, & Ridley, 2016; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Regular evaluations are often not tailored to the particularities of students with ASD, resulting in a lack of knowledge about the academic performance of students with ASD (Keen et al., 2016; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Estes, Rivera, Bryan, Cali and Dawson (2011) even report a significant gap between the intellectual abilities and academic achievements among high-functioning students with ASD. However, the group of participants with reference to a student with ASD considers

good marks as important, just like the comparison group. Studies show that the transition to secondary school may, at least for parents, lead to an anticipation of future transitions, such as to upper high school or university (Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019; Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007). For these transitions, good marks can play an important role providing or hindering education and life choices. This is true for all students and could explain why good marks have such importance in both groups.

### Autonomy and Support

An important difference between the two groups is the significance of autonomy in the participant group without ASD-links, and its rather low status in the group with ASD-links. Students with ASD seem to be viewed as less autonomous, which is underlined by the important presence of the “support” category, which has not the same relevance in the comparison group. The participant group that considered a student with ASD seems to link a lack of autonomy and, consequently, a need of support for the transition, which is in line with the literature (Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017; Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019) and validates to some extent the constitution of the sample. The participants who considered a student with ASD during the association task seem to be familiar with the abilities of students with ASD and sensitive to the difficulties that they may face during the transition to secondary school.

Other studies also show that people without any link to ASD, as well as teachers who work with students with ASD, see students with ASD as having difficulties to take care of themselves (Huws & Jones, 2010; Mavropoulou & Padelia, 2000). This could be a plausible explanation why the transition of students with ASD is considered less linked to autonomy than the transition of typically developing students. This example shows that beliefs and attitudes may have a considerable impact on social representations and, therefore, on actions linked to it.

Several studies show that teachers’ attitudes<sup>8</sup> towards inclusive education differ a lot and depend on several factors such as type of disability, specialized education or experience with students with special needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Desombre, Lamotte, & Jury, 2019). In regard to ASD, Jolicoeur (2015) shows that teachers’ social representations of ASD overlap to a major extent with the DSM-5 criteria showing that professional knowledge is present. On the contrary, other studies inform about a lack of adequate teacher training in regard to ASD (Desombre et al., 2019; Flavier & Clément, 2014; Wilkerson, 2012). Wilkerson (2012)

indicates that teachers in general have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with ASD, but at the same time a large number of them consider periods of separate schooling as necessary in order to meet the students' special needs. This underlines the need of support, that is also confirmed by existing studies (Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017).

Our results can be interpreted in two ways. They may underline the importance of comprehensive, individualized support during the primary-secondary transition, which is supported by several studies (Deacy et al., 2015; Makin et al., 2017; Stoner et al., 2007). Students with ASD have a higher risk to encounter difficulties during the primary-secondary transition. In this case, a support network is needed in order to guide the student through this potentially difficult time period and to offer tailored solutions to particular problems (Deacy et al., 2015; Makin et al., 2017; Richter, Popa-Roch, et al., 2019).

One could also interpret the results in the sense where students with ASD are generally considered less autonomous and, therefore, in need of support. This would neither reflect the large autism spectrum nor the different notions of autonomy in everyday school life. A student that needs support to organize his/her school materials might be able to independently change classrooms or participate in class. This demonstrates that the manifold faces of autism do not allow generalizations, but demand a cautious individual regard, that covers the strengths and difficulties of each student in all the different dimensions of the primary-secondary transition (Deacy et al., 2015; Makin et al., 2017; Peters & Brooks, 2016; Stoner et al., 2007). Organizational, social and academic aspects play an important role for all students transitioning to secondary school and have to be considered comprehensively (Akos, 2004; Topping, 2011).

To sum up, the findings of the present research are in line with existing results and extend them through an original design assessing lay beliefs. However, some limitations are to be addressed in future research.

### Limitations

This single study research is an exploratory work. Even if it is supported by a well-established method, the categorization of participant responses through the researchers risks data interpretation in a way that has not been intended by the participants (Moliner & Lo Monaco, 2017) and is inherent in the method. However, this process is necessary and can be very productive when the researchers have a good knowledge of the topic. Even though this has

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<sup>8</sup> Attitudes and social representations are closely linked: “the attitudes individuals have about a social object are

been the case, only about 60% of all responses could be clearly assigned to one of the proposed categories when inter-coder agreement was established. This could question the list of categories that probably did not sufficiently reflect the ideas of the participants. One could criticize that the scientific literature was used to develop those categories while seeking to go beyond the scientific definitions by applying a free association method addressing lay people. However, this research was not supposed to contrast, but rather to complement the existing research with new data obtained through a pragmatic approach.

The study participants were not asked what kind of link to ASD they had, although it could potentially have expedited the interpretation to know whether they are, for example, parents or teachers of a student with ASD or have a completely different relationship. Further research is needed to more precisely explore different types of familiarity with ASD. Despite these limitations, the present paper constitutes an original contribution to the growing literature on the schooling of children with special needs, and a better understanding of how lay beliefs can explain certain practices concerning the transition.

### Conclusion

To conclude, our results showed that lay people as well as people who are involved with students with ASD in France have largely the same ideas and objectives for a successful transition to secondary school. For both groups, integration, adaptation and good school results are the most relevant issues regarding a successful transition.

Smaller differences could still be detected, mainly in the differences in notions of autonomy and support. The study identified that these different perceptions may stem from levels of knowledge about and experience with ASD. Based on the data, we assume that the group that has considered a student with ASD during the association task is familiar with the abilities and challenges the students may have. Social representations may impact behavior. In this case, our results could lead to the conclusion that a better understanding of knowledge of ASD enhances an adjustment of practices concerning the primary-secondary transition.

However, this does not mean that the other group, without links to ASD, would provide the same social representations when considering a student with ASD transferring to secondary school. This could be an interesting departure point for further research: Would lay people without link to ASD provide the same social representations on the transition of students with and without ASD? This is an interesting and important finding in an education system that has

been strongly promoting inclusive education for the last 15 years. The increased schooling of students with special needs, and ASD in particular, in ordinary classes is still a relatively new and sometimes anxiety-provoking issue. Nevertheless, our results confirmed that the representation of the transition to secondary school is quite similar for students with or without ASD. This result can be considered as an encouraging sign of the positive effects of legislation in favor of inclusive education.

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### 3.3 Article 3: Perceptions on the Primary-Secondary School Transition from French Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their Parents

Mechthild Richter, Eric Flavier, Maria Popa-Roch & Céline Clément (2019): Perceptions on the primary-secondary school transition from French students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their parents, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2019.1643145

#### Abstract

The transition from primary to secondary school is a challenge, particularly for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). International studies report the perceptions and experiences of different involved stakeholders during the primary-secondary transition in specific context. The French education system has introduced mechanisms to promote inclusive education during the last few decades. The research takes place in this context in order to contribute to the corpus of international studies.

French students with ASD, their parents and teachers were interviewed about their perceptions and experiences regarding the transition. The semi-structured interviews were analysed through qualitative content analysis.

The findings identify the perceptions of the different participants, as well as useful strategies and typical obstacles. However, the uniqueness of each case does not allow for one-size-fits-all recommendations, but rather to tailor the transition planning and procedure for each involved stakeholder.

**Keywords:** Autism Spectrum Disorder, transition, secondary school, France, inclusive education

## Introduction

The number of students with special educational needs in French schools has doubled since the adoption of a law giving priority to mainstream education (Ministère de l'éducation nationale and Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation 2018; translation: Ministry for national education and Ministry for higher education and research) in 2005. Nevertheless, statistics show that up to one third of the mainstream primary school students with special needs have not entered or completed secondary mainstream education (idem.), among them students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). According to recent studies, the transition from primary to secondary school is more challenging for students with special needs and especially for students with ASD (Dillon and Underwood 2012; Peters and Brooks 2016) .

In the DSM-5, the main characteristics for ASD are '[p]ersistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts', which is linked to difficulties with social initiation and response, non-verbal communication and difficulties to understand the concept of relationship; and '[r]estricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities' demonstrated by atypical speech, movements and play, resistance to change, preoccupations with objects or topics and atypical sensory behaviours (American Psychiatric Association, 2013); aspects that impact the child's schooling and everyday life. Further influence can be observed due to sleeping disorders, digestive problems, epilepsy or attention deficit disorder (Mannion, Leader, and Healy 2013). Whereas individuals with ASD usually prefer to keep routines (Humphrey and Lewis 2008; Jindal-Snape et al. 2006), the transition to secondary school implies various changes in terms of interlocutors, movement and space (van Rens et al. 2017). Typical characteristics of students with ASD, such as difficulties to engage in social interactions or high sensitivity, may raise barriers for a successful transition (Cappe and Boujut 2016; Humphrey and Lewis 2008). Furthermore, studies indicate that transition difficulties can result in additional problems during secondary school such as lower academic achievement and a higher chance for social exclusion (Deacy, Jennings, and O'Halloran 2015; Wainscot et al. 2008).

In order to enable a smooth transition, the literature identifies measures with positive impact such as elaborating long-term individual transition plans, close home-school collaboration, positive attitudes among teachers and specific arrangements to cater to the needs of each student (Dann 2011; Makin, Hill, and Pellicano 2017; Tso and Strnadová 2017). However, studies (Dann 2011; Deacy, Jennings, and O'Halloran 2015; Hannah and Topping 2013)

indicate that students with ASD, despite optimal planning, need more time to complete the transition. Deacy, Jennings, and O'Halloran (2015) propose a framework that structures the transition over a three-year period, starting two years before the actual transfer and including the preparation, relationship building and monitoring of an individualised transition programme.

The transition phase is not only challenging for the students, but also for their parents who are involved in the process, by guiding their child, communicating with schools and taking decisions (Cremin, Healy, and Gordon 2017; Stoner et al. 2007). Zeedyk et al. (2003) found a similarity between students' and parents' concerns regarding the primary-secondary transition, which means that studies involving parents can help researchers better understand the students' situation.

In the present study, we focused on students with ASD in the mainstream French school system. Students in France have four years of lower secondary school starting from the 6th year of obligatory schooling. Students with ASD attend mainstream classes with or without a teaching assistant. Some students benefit from a mechanism for inclusive education, called *Unités Localisées pour l'Inclusion Scolaire* [ULIS; translation: local units for inclusive schooling] (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse 2019; translation: Ministry of National Education and Youth). These units are resource classrooms where students can repeat lessons, obtain additional support or relax under the supervision of a special needs teacher. The amount of time spent and the subjects covered by the ULIS is decided based on the students' capacities and needs.

The primary-secondary transition for students with ASD in the centralised French school system, including the relatively new mechanisms to promote inclusive education, has not been sufficiently examined yet.

In this context, we aim to respond to the following questions: How do French students with ASD and their parents perceive the transition to secondary school? Do these perceptions change over time? Which factors prevent or enable a successful transition according to the different stakeholders?

## Method

Existing studies use both qualitative and/or quantitative methods to investigate the experiences of the primary-secondary transition. The specificities of the French education system encourage a qualitative study that takes into account the diverse individual profiles of the students with ASD and the variety of their schooling situations.

### Sampling and Data Collection

The following sampling criteria were applied to the students: (1) an ASD-diagnosis, (2) transfer from a French primary school to a French secondary school in 2017 and (3) using verbal communication. Information about the study was sent out to 134 French associations linked to ASD and in ASD-related groups on Facebook. Some families could be contacted directly through the academic authorities.

Fifteen families expressed interest in the study, of which eight finally participated. All in all, eight parents and six students were interviewed (cf. Table 3-8). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants at three stages during the school year: at the beginning (October/November 2017; T1), in the middle (February/March 2018; T2) and at the end of the school year (June/July 2018; T3). In total, 39 interviews with 15 participants were conducted.

**Table 3-8: Presentation of the demographics of the participating children (Case 1-8; MC=mainstream class) and the interview length (in minutes) of the participants (P=parent, S=student, \*=in written form)**

Case	Age	Sex	Primary school	Secondary school	Diagnosis	Interview T1		Interview T2		Interview T3	
						P	S	P	S	P	S
1	11	M	MC	MC	High-functioning autism	68		*			
2	11	M	MC	MC	Asperger	39	29	32	35	36	12
3	10	M	MC	MC	Asperger	30	9	30	11	14	7
4	11	M	ULIS, MC	MC	Asperger	28	7	41	15	27	10
5	12	M	MC	MC	Asperger	24	11	41	9	28	9
6	11	M	MC	MC	High-functioning autism	33	11			25	6
7	12	M	MC	MC	ASD	122	4	99	4	88	
8	11	M	ULIS, MC	ULIS, MC	ASD	44		49	*	67	

Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to systematically collect data in order to answer the research question. They allow time and space for the participants to speak about what they think is important (Rapley, 2007), to allow unknown aspects to emerge and to become part of the data. The interview questions were based on criteria that were developed based upon a literature review (Richter, Popa-Roch, & Clément, forthcoming).

All participants were informed orally and in written form about the content of the study, the scope of their participation and the use of their data. They were asked for oral and written consent before the interview. The project has been validated by the ethics committee of the University of Strasbourg.

### Data Analysis

The interviews were analysed through Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) that uses category systems in order to systematically analyse textual data (Mayring 2014). A deductive category assignment was chosen.

The analysis followed systematic steps: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) developing category systems based on the literature (cf. Table 3-9) for each participant group (3) coding the data by assigning parts of the textual data to a certain category using the MAXQDA software and, (4) compiling the results using MAXQDA and interpreting in accordance with the research questions (Mayring 2014).

**Table 3-9: Final category system for the participant group “parents”, which shows the a priori categories from the literature and how they developed during the different coding processes**

<b>Categories from the literature</b> (Richter, Popa-Roch, and Clément 2019)	<b>Categories obtained through QCA</b>
A well-planned, child-centered transition process involving all key stakeholders has been applied, when:	<b>Transition planning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision process for/against a specific school</li> <li>• Reasons/for against “inclusive” education</li> <li>• Transition activities</li> </ul>
The student is a respected member of the class.	<b>Membership in the class</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making friends</li> <li>• Fitting in/Being normal</li> <li>• Social difficulties</li> </ul>
Academic achievement continues at the same level or slightly lower.	<b>Academic achievement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schoolwork in class</li> <li>• Evaluation/Grading</li> <li>• Specific arrangements</li> </ul>
The student and its teachers have a positive relationship with each other.	<b>Getting along</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing the building</li> <li>• Knowing reference people</li> </ul>
The student knows the new school building and its reference persons well.	<b>Child characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autonomy</li> <li>• Emotional situation</li> </ul>
Cooperation and teamwork organisation ensure continuity in the learning process.	<b>School organisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational team</li> <li>• Role of the teachers</li> <li>• Role of the school director</li> </ul>
Teachers feel self-efficient and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of the AVS</li> </ul>

satisfied in their daily work.	• Role of the administration
	• Parent-School-Communication
Parents are familiar with the school and its staff and see it as a good place for their child.	<b>Parenting/Family situation</b>
	• Parental/Family stress
	• Parents' uncertainty/doubts
	• Parents' worries
	• Parents' expectations
	• Homework
	• External activities/ support
	<b>Evaluation after transition</b>
	• Wishes
	• Changes
	• Useful measures
	• Advice
• Obstacles	
• Concerns	

During the first coding process, some of the categories appeared to be too large or vague. In a second coding process, new (sub)categories were generated from the material itself which led to another modification of the category systems and a third coding process (cf. Table 3-10).

**Table 3-10: Example of the coding process in two phases: 1st coding using the categories from the literature, 2nd coding assigning more detailed subcategories**

<b>Text extract of an interview with a mother</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Coding</b>	<b>Same text extract</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Coding</b>
I don't know how he is doing,[...] he was with some of the students who knew him since he was a small kid, so [...] they know he's like that [...].He had one or two difficult situations, but they were solved very quickly. Otherwise, he still has trouble understanding social relationships etc. But he made some friends, um: so, here we go.	Assignment of a category from the literature review: Membership in the class	I don't know how he is doing,[...] he was with some of the students who knew him since he was a small kid, so [...] they know he's like that [...].	Assignment of subcategory: Fitting in/Being normal
		He had one or two difficult situations, but they were solved very quickly. Otherwise, he still has trouble understanding social relationships etc.	Assignment of subcategory: Social Difficulties
		But he made some friends, um: so, here we go.	Assignment of subcategory: Making friends

The finalised category systems including coding rules and anchor samples, allowed a rigorous analysis. In order to ensure trustworthiness, a detailed research protocol has been presented (Bryman 2012; Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Furthermore, data has been analysed with inter-coder

agreement: the authors explained the category system to independent researchers and provided them with part of the interview transcriptions and asked them to code the data using the category system. The agreement between the coding of the authors and the coding of the independent coders was of 79,16 %.

## Results

The interviews' analysis results are presented following the eight main categories obtained through the QCA, which are: (i) transition planning, (ii) membership in the class, (iii) academic achievement, (iv) getting along, (v) child characteristics, (vi) organisation, (vii) parenting and (viii) evaluation of the transition (cf. Table 3-9).

### Transition Planning

Transition planning was an important topic for the parents. The parents in the study chose to send their children to a mainstream school and cite two main reasons: it is their child's right: *'[...] For us, it's the mainstream school. That's his place, it is his right.'* (Parent 5, T1), and/or the fact that they want their child to learn with and like other children.

*School choice.* The secondary school was chosen carefully, based on the parents' own criteria. Typical criteria were: a small school, located in the neighbourhood, hosting an ULIS. However, some felt that the neighbourhood school is either not appropriate for their child: *'I didn't see [Student 4] there.'* (Parent 4, T1), had heard negative stories or there were not enough places available. Schools that were further away demanded more logistics from the family to conduct or organise transport. Usually, the parents decided which school the child would go to, but in one case, the child was allowed to make the final decision.

*Preparation activities.* Students and parents made use of transition activities such as open house days, school visits, integration days and preparatory meetings. Apart from these institutionalised transition activities, the families prepared their children by explaining how secondary school works and practicing the way to school. Often, professionals like speech therapists or psychologists contributed to these preparations. In several cases, the new secondary school offered a school start without having older students around.

All these measures were evaluated positively by all stakeholders. The more activities were offered and the more individual they were, the more useful they were seen by the participants.

### Acceptance in the Class

*Friendship.* For the students in the study, this was the most important topic: *'In my secondary school, it's good. And I have some friends there'* (Student 4, T1). All students said that they

had friends in their class and, often, these were new friends. The adults were not always sure about the quality of these relationships: *'He has people who are kind, [...] But real friends, with whom we build a real privileged relationship, no, he doesn't have that.'* (Parent 7, T1). On the contrary, students described their friendships as playing together, but also supporting each other: *'sometimes we laugh and sometimes we help each other'* (Student 4, T2). Many of the reported friendships were stable over the schoolyear.

*Social difficulties.* Three parents reported severe problems of teasing, name-calling and physical harassment starting either at the beginning or in the middle of the first year of secondary school. Misunderstandings or other social difficulties were mentioned often: *'he still has trouble understanding social relationships, etc.'* (Parent 6, T3).

Two of the affected students expressed determinedly that they were not different: *'I'm not seen as an autistic anymore, but as someone normal'* (Student 5, T1). The mother of another student reported: *'he doesn't want to hear any more about anything - autism or Asperger's syndrome. He even wrote to this psychiatrist to ask him for a new diagnosis. [...]he doesn't want to be that.'* (Parent 3, T3).

However, all students were considered well accepted in their new classes throughout the schoolyear by themselves and their parents.

### Academic Achievement

The academic performance of the students in this study reflected the large autism spectrum: two students in the study had a discrepancy of several schoolyears in comparison to their classmates, whereas other students achieved high above average.

*Students' preferences.* Some students in the study preferred the structured way of learning in a secondary school: *'I finally like how we work in history and geography, it's the way we work.'* (Student 2, T2). They liked or disliked certain subjects for different reasons: being good at it, interest, liking a teacher or teaching style. Several students expressed that they found certain teachers *'bizarre'* (Student 2,3 and 5, T3).

*Learning difficulties.* The parents observed difficulties like misunderstandings of instructions or dealing with abstract concepts. Hypersensitivity and fatigue affected concentration and work attitude, as reported by parents and students: *'It's not only the schooling, there is also socialisation, there is the light, there is the noise, there is hunger, and there are many things that are making it hard.'* (Parent 1, T1).

*Specific arrangements.* Specific arrangements to deal with this situation were important for some of the students in this study: the right to use an MP3 player, a fidget spinner and a

corner in the class to relax. Modification and reduction of the timetable were necessary for two students at the end of the schoolyear. Despite these measures, two students experienced a period of exclusion from certain lessons due to a lack of staff or behavioural issues.

Other measures concerned exams: the presence of a teaching assistant during exams or more time. Some students did not receive marks, either because they were '*almost impossible to evaluate*' (Parent 7, T2), due to their discrepancy or to communication difficulties, or because the school used a different evaluation system to assess competencies.

### Getting Along

*Knowing the building.* Some students remembered difficulties finding their classrooms in the beginning, however, half a year later, they knew their school well, which was confirmed by their parents. Two students even named the classroom changes as an advantage of secondary school: '*Well, it makes me get some fresh air and at least, that way, I can work better*' (Student 2, T1).

*Knowing the reference persons.* The students chose different staff members as their references: teachers, teaching assistants, education advisors and school nurses.

### Child Characteristics

*Autonomy.* The students expressed that they had been anxious at the beginning, but that they soon felt at ease in secondary school. Several parents acknowledged that the fact of being a "big" student helped their children to gain confidence and autonomy: '*Suddenly, he has grown up. He prepares his things a bit the day before and he knows his agenda, he knows who and what he has to do*' (Parent 6, T1). They also admitted that some support is still necessary: '*Obviously, he doesn't have the same autonomy as the others.*' (Parent 1, T1).

Many parents were surprised by their children's level of adaptability and perceived them as happy and proud to be secondary school students: '*So he's doing pretty well. He appreciates what he does, he's happy.*' (Parent 6, T3). On the other hand, they describe the new school year as challenging for their children, especially concerning fatigue and hypersensitivity, as has been reported above.

### Organization at the School Level

*Role of teachers.* In general, parents and students were happy with the new teachers. Whereas most parents were impressed by the investment of teachers to adapt their lessons: '*the teachers actually arrange, for example, the tests and questions, the French teacher only grades him on one part.*' (Parent 5, T2), one mother was very disappointed: '*There is no*

*willingness on their side to find solutions'* (Parent 7, T1). According to the parents, most of the teachers did not have experiences with students with ASD. The parents acknowledged this situation and offered support by explaining the particularities of their child to the teachers, which was perceived as beneficial in most cases.

*Role of the teaching assistants.* All students in this study had a teaching assistant, either part or full time, personal or shared. They were seen as essential for the parents, though in some cases, the student had settled in so well after a few weeks or months that the teaching assistant was not considered important anymore. The tasks of the teaching assistant depended on the needs of the student: refocusing, reformulating instructions and taking notes. In two cases, the teaching assistant also intervened during the breaks to enhance peer relationships and to prevent bullying. In one case, a lack of cooperation with the educational team and a high workload led to a burn-out of a teaching assistant in the middle of the schoolyear.

*Home-school-communication.* Communication was seen as crucial by many parents: *'We communicate a lot, once again, it's communication, communication.'* (Parent 1, T1). The interviews showed that school-home-contact was not limited to teacher-parent contact. Like the students, the parents had different reference persons, e.g. the teaching assistant or the school nurse. The means of communication were various: e-mail, telephone, personal meetings, text messages. Several parents stressed the importance and convenience of online portals that allowed contacting school staff, but also provided overview on homework and schedule changes.

Meetings during the schoolyear to discuss the school life of the child, potential arrangements and changes, were seen as constructive by the parents. In general the schools were perceived as accessible, despite the increased number of contact persons.

### Parenting

*Parental stress.* Parental stress was reported in all cases, increased with the transition to secondary school and remained at a high level during the school year. Parents stated that they struggled with doubts and anxiety: *'Many sleepless nights, a lot of anxiety. A lot of unanswered questions'* (Parent 7, T1).

*Concerns.* Parents expressed organisational, social and academic concerns. Organisation-wise, it concerned the way to school, navigation within the school and dealing with changes. Another source of concern was acceptance by the teachers and other students, especially when the child had already experienced bullying before. There was concern that the lessons would not be sufficiently adapted and that the children would react badly to stimuli at school: *'At*

*first, we were afraid of the sound of the bell, which was very, very loud, about the smells in physics and chemistry classes and so on.* (Parent 1, T1).

The later interviews showed that the students dealt quite well with their new situation. However, the school day demanded a lot and several parents stated that their children were extremely exhausted or showed challenging behaviour after school: *'So here at home, and for some time now, he becomes very aggressive'* (Parent 8, T3).

*Homework.* In this context, homework became *'the nightmare'* (Parent 2, T1). Several parents described that doing homework in the evening took a lot of time, led to daily arguments and often was simply too much: *'We were at almost two hours every night, at the beginning of the year, plus on weekends we had to do 6, 7 hours more, so it was a lot of work.'* (Parent 6, T3). Some reported that this situation improved over time or that they selected homework that they found useful. Nevertheless, homework remained a stressful issue until the end of the schoolyear.

Only a few students used the opportunity to do their homework at school, since many of them were too exhausted to stay there longer. Consequently, the arguments and stress took place within the family. In two families, the children received support from external tutors that did homework and revised with them regularly.

### Evaluation of the Transition

*General evaluation.* In the first interviews, all parents said that they were satisfied with their child's transition. Several were positively surprised by their child's abilities and the benefits of the process:

On the other hand, in terms of development, it was extraordinary. His ability to respond to others, to reach out to others, to create games. When he arrives at school, he has his friends waiting for him. [...]. So, social interactions and the benefit of the social environment, is 100% achieved. (Parent 7, T2)

The same mother described the first year at secondary school as *'academic failure'* (Parent 7, T3). At the end of the schoolyear, the parents still claimed that their children's transition was successful, however the ups and downs had raised new concerns. The students in general preferred secondary school over primary school.

*Expectations.* Several parents stated an increased autonomy since the beginning of secondary school. Asked about their expectations for their children's schooling, the parents expressed hope that their children would become even more autonomous.

*New concerns.* Some parents were aware that the invisibility of ASD could lead to misunderstandings with teachers, classmates, but also with society in general. Professional

careers became another concern for many parents at the end of the schoolyear, especially when the children performed poor academically.

*Useful measures and advice.* Parents and students suggested strategies to prepare and make a smooth transition to secondary school for students with ASD (cf. Table 3-11).

**Table 3-11: Strategies to prepare and make a smooth transition to secondary school for students with ASD retrieved from the interviews with parents and students**

	<b>Students</b>	<b>Parents</b>	
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School visits</li> <li>• Understanding how to get from one room to the other</li> <li>• Staying calm</li> </ul>	<u>Preparation at the school level</u>	
		<u>Preparation at the family level</u>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early anticipation (at least one year before)</li> <li>• Secondary school-like classes in the year before the transition taught by secondary school teachers</li> <li>• School visits (several if possible)</li> <li>• Preparation meeting(s) with the school's principal and the teachers</li> <li>• Transparent communication about the ASD</li> <li>• Considering the individual profile of the child</li> <li>• Introducing the child to all school staff (including secretary, caretaker etc.)</li> <li>• Integration days</li> <li>• Open doors</li> <li>• Choosing the class (to avoid bullies from primary school)</li> <li>• Exchange between primary and secondary school teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching as much information as possible</li> <li>• Considering an ULIS for children with major difficulties</li> <li>• Small book with phone numbers, Photos of the building and the staff, etc.</li> <li>• Preparing for social situations with classmates</li> <li>• Trusting the capabilities of the child</li> <li>• Staying calm</li> <li>• Events offered by associations, where students can meet older students with ASD</li> <li>• Practicing the way to the school</li> <li>• Organising the school material using colours</li> <li>• Ensuring well-being for parents and children</li> </ul>
<b>First days at secondary school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the school's rules</li> <li>• Remaining unnoticed to avoid bullying</li> <li>• Being on time</li> <li>• Being nice to classmates and teachers</li> <li>• Knowing reference persons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School trip with the new class</li> <li>• School start without older students around</li> <li>• Individual meetings with the teachers</li> <li>• Meeting with school's staff and external professionals</li> <li>• Teaching assistant present from the first day on</li> </ul>	
<b>During the school year</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revising every lesson</li> <li>• Listening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being involved at school (e.g. parent representative)</li> <li>• Direct communication between parents and teaching assistant</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not being discouraged by bad marks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regular meetings with school staff</li><li>• Presence of specialized teachers and qualified teaching assistants</li><li>• External support (speech therapy, psychologist, etc.)</li><li>• Having a double set of textbooks (school, home)</li><li>• Consistency, persistence</li><li>• Being present and available for communication with the school</li><li>• Remaining vigilant</li><li>• Constant observation, communication and adaptation</li></ul>
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The students thus showed a relatively good knowledge of their difficulties and recommended practical measures: being on time, knowing the functions of secondary school and remaining calm, which is not about preparing for the transition, but about daily life in the secondary school.

The parents' focus is on the preparation: they would advise other parents not to stress, but to invest time and effort in the transition planning:

Anticipate, anticipate, anticipate. You absolutely have to go to the secondary schools, meet the teachers and ask them, even though I know it bothers them, and absolutely see them between noon and 2 o'clock, and ask to participate in a pedagogical meeting.[...] If they close the door, we have to enter through the window. [...] (Parent 7, T2).

For them it was important for their children to be familiar with the school building and the school staff. Furthermore, they underlined the importance of transparency and honesty about ASD in communication with the new school.

## Discussion

The transitions to secondary school for the students in this study were in general perceived as successful by all participants: *'For me, now, he's a high school student.'* (Parent 6, T3). This positive evaluation is supported by former research stating that the transition is not necessarily more complicated for students with ASD (Barnard et al. 2000). However, as the results confirmed, the transition is a long-term process that needs time and is prone to changes. Consequently, the positive perception of the transition remained the same over the school year. However, the perception of the school year itself was variable. Often, an initial euphoria was replaced by social, academic, administrative or communication difficulties. In some cases, the situation improved towards the end of the school year, while in others, modifications of the timetable or other measures became necessary.

When comparing the results to the criteria of a successful transition (Richter, Popa-Roch, and Clément 2019), it appears that the French context is consistent with international literature in many respects, e.g. increased parental stress (Cremin, Healy, and Gordon 2017; Tso and Strnadová 2017) or difficulties to assess academic performance (Keen, Webster, and Ridley 2016; Kurth and Mastergeorge 2010). Other aspects are different or even opposed, e.g. the role of the student-teacher-relationship.

*Planning phase.* Findings of increased parental stress during the transition phase is supported by studies (Cremin, Healy, and Gordon 2017; Dillon and Underwood 2012; Tso and Strnadová 2017), but insecurity and anxiety have also concerned the students in this study.

Consistent with the literature (Dann 2011; Deacy, Jennings, and O'Halloran 2015; Dillon and Underwood 2012), individualised transition activities are highly appreciated and seem to support a smooth transition. Specific arrangements in order to tackle hypersensitivity, nervousness and fatigue are useful (Dann 2011; Makin, Hill, and Pellicano 2017a). However, this study indicates that they need to be planned ahead and adapted constantly, but still are not always sufficient.

These results suggest that an individualised transition planning, adapted to the needs of each stakeholder, is helpful in preparing for the actual change of school. Nevertheless, long-term observations and modifications seem to be necessary to ensure positive progress.

*Social issues.* According to studies (Schroeder et al. 2014; Wainscot et al. 2008), students with ASD have a higher risk to become victims of bullying. Also, in this study, bullying remained a particular risk for students with ASD that can occur at any time. Nevertheless, in general, the students felt well accepted and their parents shared this impression.

*Academic issues.* Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010) emphasised that little is known about academic skill developments of students with ASD. Keen, Webster, and Ridley (2016) argued that this is because standardised measures are often not appropriate for students with ASD. The examples of the two students in this study with learning discrepancies confirm these assessment difficulties. The question of evaluation is crucial: does school measure outcome or progress? This is a crucial question for a school system supposed to encourage inclusive education.

*Role of teachers.* The literature underlines the important role of teachers in the context of inclusive education for children with ASD (Flavier and Clément 2014; Gavaldá and Qinyi 2012). Lack of experience in teaching students with ASD can become problematic and lead to a lower level of confidence (Segall and Campbell 2012; Young, Mannix McNamara, and Coughlan 2017).

Despite parental worries that teachers may not be well prepared for their children, the efforts of most teachers, experienced with students with ASD or not, were highly appreciated by the participants. Therefore, one could assume that an open and positive attitude on the part of teachers is as important as knowledge and experience of ASD, which is supported by the literature (Dann 2011; Jindal-Snape et al. 2006; Segall and Campbell 2012). This could mean that regular teachers are better prepared for heterogeneous classes than parents often expect.

*Relationships.* The student-teacher-relationship was not an important topic for the participants, contradicting to some extent the existing literature, which considers a positive

teacher-student relationship to be crucial for the transition and inclusion of the student with special needs (Dann 2011; Makin, Hill, and Pellicano 2017; Segall and Campbell 2012; Stoner et al. 2007). One of the particularities of the French school system is the multi-professional teams that can serve as reference for the students. This is a challenge for coordination and organisation, nevertheless, it can be seen as a strength of the French school organisation, since the literature shows that sharing the responsibility for students with ASD is recommended (Cappe and Boujut 2016; Humphrey and Lewis 2008).

*Homework.* Homework was mentioned as a major stress factor by parents and students, but the offer to do homework at school was rarely used. The French Ministry of National Education introduced the measure *devoirs faits* (Translation: Completed homework) during the school year 2017-2018, in particular for students with special needs. It allows students to do their homework under professional supervision at school (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse 2018). However, this solution does not seem to sufficiently cater the needs of families with children with ASD in this study. As this is a new measure, it will be important to evaluate this mechanism in order to better adapt it to the target population.

*New concerns.* As soon as the first months of secondary school were over, the transition to adulthood and professional career became a concern for the parents in the study. They expressed similar concerns and distress about future transitions, demonstrating that transition in general remains a source of anxiety for parents of children with ASD (Cheak-Zamora, Teti, and First 2015). Examples of good-practice and further research on the various dimensions of different transitions could probably help to overcome insecurity and anxiety.

### Limitations

Despite efforts to balance the perspectives and perceptions of both stakeholder groups, the parents' perspective still dominates. This group showed the highest participation in the study and was the subject of most other studies (Dillon and Underwood 2012; Peters and Brooks 2016; Tso and Strnadová 2017). Both in this study and previous ones, mothers were the main informants, resulting in an overrepresentation of maternal perspectives and perceptions.

Interviewing children, especially children with ASD, contains another difficulty. The parents and the researchers prepared the children for the interview by explaining the aim of the study, their role within it and that there were no wrong answers. Furthermore, the students were given red and yellow cards as non-verbal signals to skip questions or stop the interview.

Nevertheless, some did not understand the situation, were afraid to give wrong answers, did not want to talk about negative experiences or had the impression they did not explain well

enough. This behaviour is common in interviews with children (Fuchs 2008; Harrington et al. 2014; Nathanson and Crank 2004).

In many cases, the parents were present during the interview to offer their children a safe environment. This in turn may have influenced their responsiveness, as they may answer differently in the presence of their parents. However, in this study, the presence of the parents was regarded as rather helpful and encouraging.

The dimensions that have to be considered during the transition process are various and complex. Further research would be necessary to deepen each of them in order to be able to develop clear recommendations for the transition process.

### Conclusion

This study shows that there are distinct measures that could simplify transition preparation, such as individualised transition planning, timely attributions of school places and teaching assistants, early and inclusive orientation meetings (cf. Table 3-11).

Obstacles often seem to be related to a lack of communication or to administrative procedures: unclear expectations, lack of information, late decisions. The stress and insecurity of the stakeholders can have a major impact on the process. In secondary school, the ASD characteristics and comorbidities can pose challenges such as fatigue due to sleep disorders (Mannion, Leader, and Healy 2013), lack of flexibility, difficulties in maintaining social contacts (Humphrey and Lewis 2008; Wainscot et al. 2008).

The originality of this study is its longitudinal approach, which seems to confirm the assumption that the transition is a long-term process. For the students, this process ended during the first months of the school year. Most of the parents saw the transition as successfully finished at the end of the school year, but some claimed that the process continues, since modifications will constantly be necessary. This perception is in line with the suggestions of Deacy, Jennings, and O'Halloran (2015) that propose a 3-year transition framework.

The sample for this study has been small and does not allow generalisations. However, it gives perspectives for future research: each dimension that was filtered out of the material must be further investigated to better understand it. The fundamental role of teachers has been underlined in the literature and corroborated in this study. However, there are only a few studies on teachers' perspectives regarding the transition. A larger sampling would make it possible to improve the evaluation of certain measures in practice. The uniqueness of each case does not allow one-size-fits-all recommendations. Instead, a constant observation seems

to be necessary as well as a willingness to adapt and modify established routines in order to ensure the wellbeing of all stakeholders in the transition phase.

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## 4 Part IV: Discussion

This chapter provides an overall discussion of the results obtained in this research project in the light of existing studies and official texts by the French Ministry of Education. The first part of this chapter revisits each of the research questions (cf. chapter 2.1). Results that have not been included in the articles (such as the interviews with teachers and with the participants of the second cohort) are referenced in this section in order to reinforce the evidence for the development of the recommendations. The strength of this research project is the combination of different methodologies and data sources (cf. chapter 2.2). However, some overlaps might be noticed as the results of each study have already been discussed individually in the articles. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the construction of recommendations for a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD based on the discussion. Recommendations have implications for education policy and effects on those who are affected by them. The French policies in place as well as those that are envisaged are discussed in light of the developed recommendations. Furthermore, light is shed on potential barriers that were identified.

Apart from social and political implications, this study also has methodological implications. The choice of methodology, as well as data collection and data analysis procedures are reflected and discussed. Consequently, discussing the methodology allows limitations to emerge as well as ideas for further research projects.

## 4.1 A Successful Transition

The first research question revisits the definition of the successful transition from primary to secondary school. Its departure point was definitions and criteria that already exist in the literature. It has been approached using three different methods. In the following the study results in regard to the question how the transition is defined is compared to the definitions concerning students with ASD.

### 4.1.1 Successful Primary-Secondary Transition in general

When revisiting the definition of the successful transition from primary to secondary school the existing literature (cf. chapter 1.2) only offers limited results. There is a quite general definition by Sirsch (2003, in: Griebel & Berwanger, 2006, p. 36): “*A successful transition means that the child will feel good and profit from the transition to a new school environment.*” Furthermore, (Evangelou et al., 2008) offer more specific criteria for a successful transition:

- 1) developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence
- 2) having settled so well in school life that they caused no concerns to their parents
- 3) showing an increasing interest in school and school work
- 4) getting used to their new routines and school organization with great ease
- 5) experiencing curriculum continuity

These definitions are quite broad and were developed in international studies, which may not reflect the situation in the French education system. To complement these definitions study 2 obtained the social representations of lay people in France on a successful transition to secondary school. The results showed, that integration, adaptation, good academic results and autonomy are the most relevant and stable elements of the social representation. Compared to the criteria of Evangelou et al. (2008) there is a large congruence. The notions of integration, adaptation and autonomy can be found in their criteria as well as good school results, to a minor extent.

The criteria from the literature and the social representations interlinked show that social, academic and organizational aspects are challenging during the transition, which is in line with existing studies that focus primarily on these different aspects (cf. Akos, 2004; S. Bailey & Baines, 2012; Coffey, 2013; Hopwood et al., 2017; Pratt & George, 2005; Wentzel et al., 2004).

However, there is also a relevant body of research focusing on the well-being of students during the transition (Coelho & Romão, 2017; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006; Lester & Cross, 2015; Virtanen, Vasalampi, Torppa, Lerkkanen, & Nurmi, 2019; West et al., 2010), which is only indirectly reflected in the above mentioned criteria. Virtanen et al. (2019) found out that a considerable number of students, who had a low level of well-being at the transition, improved their level of well-being during the first year of secondary school. The authors linked these positive results to factors that are inherent in the Finnish school system and allow students to experience continuity in terms of school work and social relationships. Additionally, they underlined the importance of the support provided by teachers, parents and peers. This is in line with a corpus of literature that examines the impact of different stakeholders on the transition and evaluate it as crucial (Coffey, 2013; Davis, Ravenscroft, & Bizas, 2015; Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000; Hanewald, 2013; van Rens et al., 2017; Virtanen, Vasalampi, Kiuru, Lerkkanen, & Poikkeus, 2019; Virtanen, Vasalampi, Torppa, et al., 2019; Zeedyk et al., 2003). The same stakeholders (teachers, parents, peers) are reflected in the criteria of Evangelou, Taggart, et al. (2008).

To sum up, well-being and support are considered as important factors for a successful transition in the literature but are not explicitly reflected in the criteria by Evangelou, Taggart, et al. (2008). Furthermore, the authors identify students with special needs as especially vulnerable during their primary-secondary transition. This leads us to the question, if the transition to secondary school is defined differently regarding students with ASD, who are in the focus of this research project.

#### 4.1.2 Successful Transition for Students with ASD

Regarding students with special needs or ASD particularly, no definition of the primary-secondary transition was found, although studies indicate, that their transition may be different and more complicated (Deacy et al., 2015; Foulder-Hughes & Prior, 2014; Makin et al., 2017). Consequently, we analyzed studies on the transition of students with ASD in order to find out to what extent the existing criteria (Evangelou et al., 2008) reflect the situation for students with ASD and where they need to be modified.

In study 1 it has been found that a well-planned, child-centered transition process involving all key stakeholders has been applied when 7 criteria are met:

- 1) The student is a respected member of the class.
- 2) Academic achievement continues at the same level or slightly lower.
- 3) The student and its teachers have a positive relationship with each other.
- 4) The student knows the new school building and its reference persons well.
- 5) Cooperation and teamwork organization ensure continuity in the learning process.
- 6) Teachers feel self-efficient and satisfied in their daily work.
- 7) Parents are familiar with the school and its staff and see it as a good place for their child.

These criteria include the key stakeholders, who support the transition (teachers and parents in criteria 6 and 7) and which seem to be the same as for typically developing students. Also, social aspects can be identified in criteria 1, academic aspects in criteria 2 and organizational aspects in criteria 4 and 5. The criteria complement the findings from studies on the primary-secondary transition for typical developing students by applying them to a group of students that is considered more vulnerable and at risk of being affected by long-term consequences (Deacy et al., 2015; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Tobin et al., 2012; Wainscot et al., 2008). This shows that there are differences that need to be considered. To deepen the understanding of these differences further studies were conducted.

In study 2 (cf. chapter 3.2) the social representations of people who have considered a student with ASD during the transition when responding to the question “What does it mean for you to succeed in the 6th grade?” were explored. A major congruence with the social representations of lay people, who had not considered a student with ASD in the same study, appeared regarding the main issues which are adaptation, integration and school results. However, the notion of “autonomy” that is a very strong one in the group of these lay respondents is much weaker in the group considering a student with ASD, while the “support” category has much higher importance. With regard to the literature, it can be assumed that autonomy and support are potentially linked to each other. Studies underline a lack of autonomy in some students with ASD and accordingly, a higher need in terms of support to compensate this lack during the transition (Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017; Richter, Flavier, Popa-Roch, & Clément, 2019).

In order to validate and complement the results obtained from studies 1 and 2, individuals who were directly affected by a primary-secondary transition have been interviewed in study 3 (cf. chapter 3.3): students with ASD, their parents and their teachers.<sup>9</sup> This study showed that the individual experiences with the transition differ from each other and depend on factors such as the student’s profile, the place of instruction or a functioning communication network.

Most participants viewed the transition of the students in the sample as successful. The students linked their successful transitions to having friends, being interested in school work, liking the teachers and getting used to the new environment. With this list of factors, they reflect almost completely the criteria of Evangelou et al. (2008) that were identified for the general student population and also the criteria of study 1 on students with ASD. Parents and teachers see a successful transition as linked to satisfying academic results, acceptance in the class, a support network that is in place and functional, the general well-being of the child as well as its personal development.

The notion of support that has also been revealed in the study on social representations (study 2) and is missing in the criteria of Evangelou et al. (2008) can be identified here. All students in the interview study had some kind of additional support: e.g. a teaching assistant or a computer. However, the level of support differed: for some students support was only necessary for the transition phase at the beginning of the school year, in other cases further

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<sup>9</sup> Part of this data has been presented in article 3, however, the interviews with teachers and with the second cohort offer some additional information that has not been discussed in the published article, but is used to enrich this discussion.

arrangements were required at the end and/or for the coming school years (Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019), findings that are also reflected in other studies (Hebron, 2017; Makin et al., 2017). However, personal aspects such as well-being and personal development are not explicitly mentioned in the results of study 1 and 2, which means that study 3 has brought in this new aspect, which is in line with the literature (Cheak-Zamora, Teti, & First, 2015; Fortuna, 2014; Hannah & Topping, 2012; Leroux-Boudreault & Poirier, 2017; Neal & Frederickson, 2016). In only two out of seventeen cases in study 3, parents evaluated their child's transition as not successful. As reasons for this situation they mainly named a lack of adaptation to the needs of their child by the teachers and a malfunctioning home-school-communication. Former studies as well as study 1 and 2 confirm that these are essential elements for a successful transition for students with ASD (Beaupré, Gauthier, & Germain, 2017; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Foley et al., 2016; Hebron et al., 2015; Hoy, Parsons, & Kovshoff, 2018; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2017).

Many, though not all, parents and teachers interviewed in study 3 believed that the transition is more difficult for students with ASD than for typically developing children. They name the ASD-typical refusal of change, the comorbidities, but also the schools' lack of knowledge and experiences on and with ASD as main challenges. Despite these difficulties, the transition itself and all the changes that come with it were seen as beneficial for the students. The structured environment, clear timetables and specialist subject teachers were named as positive factors by parents which is in line with the literature (Neal & Frederickson, 2016).

In sum, the three different studies complement each other and constitute a solid foundation to research a successful primary-secondary transition for students with ASD. They show that there are differences between the transitions of students with and without ASD, however, the main challenges, which are social, academic, organizational and personal aspects, seem to be the same. These findings indicate that the transition is an individual experience that may be perceived and lived differently by every involved stakeholder. In order to develop recommendations for a successful transition, it is consequently necessary to understand the stakeholders' situation and their experiences with the transition (Fortuna, 2014).

## 4.2 Perception of the Transition in France

Former studies demand research using mixed-methods approaches or more qualitative data, also from different countries, in order to contribute to the limited corpus of literature (Able, Sreckovic, Schultz, Garwood, & Sherman, 2015; Fortuna, 2014; Hebron, 2017; Hughes et al., 2013; Topping, 2011). Study 3, therefore, employed semi-structured interviews in order to

obtain information on the primary-secondary transition of students with ASD, their parents and teachers in France. In order to understand the situation of the different stakeholders, the interviews concerned factual information about the preparation, planning and implementation of the students' transition. Furthermore, the participants were asked how they experienced this transition and how they evaluate it. With a longitudinal approach we collected data at three different times during the 6<sup>th</sup> school year. This allowed observing whether and how the perceptions and evaluations, concerning the transition change over time. This fills a literature gap as no studies on the primary-secondary transition of French students with ASD were found.

Part of this data has been presented in article 3 (chapter 3.3), however, the interviews with the second cohort provided additional information. The teachers' perspectives were not presented in the article, but are highly relevant for research project. Furthermore, two more students who were supported by an ULIS could be recruited shedding light on this situation. In the meantime, the government implemented and announced new measure for the transition and/or inclusive education.

#### 4.2.1 Preparation, Planning and Implementation of the Transition

In the following, we will discuss aspects of the transition, which emerged in study 3, chronologically and put them into their political context by referring to existing studies and official texts. In terms of transition planning this covers the school choice and transition activities. Once at secondary school other issues such as the organization of learning arrangements and social relations become important.

##### Transition Planning during 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

According to most of the adult participants the decision-making processes and the transition planning started early in most cases, though "early" can signify very different points of time. Some parents stated to have discussed the transition already several years before it actually took place, whereas teachers often only get involved at the beginning of the new school year. Normally, students are attributed automatically to the public school (pre-school, primary, lower or upper secondary school) which is closest to their place of residence by the *carte scolaire* (school map) (MENJ, 2018b). This is also the case for students with special needs (Legifrance, 2005). If parents prefer to send their child to another school, they have to request this transfer officially. Students with special needs are prioritized in this process (MENJ, 2018b). McNerney et al. (2015) underline that parents in their study perceived the choice of secondary school for children with ASD differently and included more decisions than for their

children without ASD. Some parents in study 3 argued, that they have been similarly worried about the transition of their children without ASD, however, several acknowledged that transitions, in general, are more difficult to manage for their children with ASD: “*Well, I think [Student 16] has a lot of trouble with everything that is transition, so the leap into the unknown is very complicated for him, it's always been.*”(study 3, parent 16, T1).

The answer to the question whether the student should attend a mainstream class with or without an additional ULIS or any other type of full-time or part-time instruction, was very clear for many parents in study 3, especially when the students performed well academically. Where school results were weak and behavioral issues occurred more often, the question was more difficult to answer for the parents. The level of adaptation that is necessary for the academic performance of students with ASD in a mainstream class seems to be a crucial indicator for the school choice. Also, the ministerial transition tools such as the school booklet, national assessments or refresher courses target potential academic deficits (MENJ, 2017). This is problematic since studies show that evaluations are often not adequate for students with ASD and therefore, do not necessarily reflect their actual academic performance (Estes et al., 2011; Fleury et al., 2014; Keen et al., 2016; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Zorn & Puustinen, 2017).

The presence of students who follow the lessons easily and who achieve average or even very good results without major adaptations in a mainstream class seems to be rarely questioned, neither by the parents nor the schools. Where specific adaptations are clearly necessary and/or average academic results are not achieved, parents and teachers view a specialized setting as the better option and, by implication, mainstream settings as not sufficiently capable to cope with a heterogeneous student population. This is not only the case in France, but also (Jindal-Snape et al., 2005) state that Scottish parents would prefer inclusive education, but under the condition that teachers are trained. Barnard et al. (2000) in the UK also state, that as long as this is not the case, specialized settings are preferred and are viewed as better catering to the needs of students with ASD.

Hamilton and Wilkinson (2016) warn that particularly in rural areas school choice can be limited. This is also true for France and may demand the organization of transport by the parents or external agents. When parents wish to have the support of an ULIS for their child, transport may become a problem even in city areas, since only a few schools have an ULIS which is specialized in students with ASD.

A change of the administrative district or to a private institution may lead to a lack of cooperation between primary and secondary school. In general, such cooperation was reported in some, though by far not all, cases in study 3 and its quality varied. This contradicts the measures of the ministry, that establishes an exchange between both school types through the primary-secondary school council or the annual revisions of the PPS by the ESS (MENESR, 2014; MENJ & MESRI, 2017). Whereas the ESS have been mentioned by the interview participants, the council, which is supposed to be responsible for the revision of the PPS at the transition to secondary school (MENESR, 2014), has not been an issue. This could indicate that either the ESS replaced the council or that the council simply did not take place.

Other transition activities contrarily were named often. According to the participants in study 3, most primary schools organize visits to secondary school for all 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students. Visits and other transition activities serve different objectives: they enable parents to receive information about the school and to establish contact with school staff. Furthermore, students can get familiar with the new school. Parents, students and teachers have the opportunity to get to know each other and to build a solid foundation for a continuing constant dialogue, which is viewed as essential for a successful transition by the study participants as well as in the literature (Beaupré et al., 2017; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). However, one visit may not be sufficient for a student with ASD (Deacy et al., 2015; Hebron et al., 2015; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Peters & Brooks, 2016; Tso & Strnadová, 2017).

Despite most of the parents in study 3 who could discuss their children's needs with the new school team or at least parts of the team, several did not know if a teaching assistant would be present on the first day of secondary school. For them this situation was a major source of stress and they saw administrative difficulties responsible for it. The literature underlines the importance of comprehensive transition preparation in order to reduce stress among the stakeholders (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; Dann, 2011; Foley et al., 2016; Maras & Aveling, 2006).

### At Secondary School

Once in secondary school, the stakeholders reported in their interviews that most schools offered some kind of welcoming program for the new students. Scavenger hunts were popular as well as school rallies that allowed new students to discover their new environment. A smooth arrival phase is also evaluated as beneficial by other studies (Deacy et al., 2015; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). For most of the teachers in study 3, the first day of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade was also the first day that they met their new students with ASD. The interviews

showed that teachers were often only informed at the beginning of the school year that they will have a student with ASD in their class, which hinders their participation in transition planning, although it is recommended in the literature (Beaupré et al., 2017; Hebron et al., 2015; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006).

During the school year, specific arrangements were established and often later modified, because they were either not necessary anymore or not sufficient (Makin et al., 2017). In several cases in study 3 meetings between parents and school staff took place in order to discuss the student's development and potential changes. Sometimes modifications of arrangements were still necessary at the end of the school year, e.g. a reduction of the timetable for the last weeks before the summer holidays.

Social aspects were mentioned concerning the transition planning but played an inferior role. Some parents had the opportunity to influence the constitution of the new class, in order to either assure, that their child attends the same class as a primary school friend or to avoid attending the same class with former primary school bullies. In most cases, the classmates were not informed about ASD, though this is recommended by international literature (Able et al., 2015; Bradley, 2016). Apart from one case, where a class teacher decided to work on social competencies with his student with ASD, other formalized support measures for social integration could not be identified, although former studies indicate that this may be useful (Bradley, 2016; Calder et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2014; Hart & Whalon, 2011).

In sum, the social, academic and organizational aspects are reflected in the transition planning and implementation, though to varying extents. Social aspects seem to play a minor role compared to academic and organizational aspects. This situation is described in international studies (Dann, 2011; Topping, 2011), however; scholars warn not to forget the social issues (Coffey, 2013; Pratt & George, 2005).

#### 4.2.2 Experience and Evaluation of the Transition

It has been mentioned that transitions are a very individual experience and can proceed very differently. In this context, study 3 sought to find out how the stakeholders lived with the process and how they evaluated it. The main issues which were identified by the study participants were the school choice, which was an important topic for parents and the lack of knowledge on ASD perceived by the teachers.

The school choice was perceived as a stress factor by many parents and reflects the struggle described by Tobin et al. (2012) as wanting “*specialist provision in a mainstream environment*” (p. 83), though “*specialized education and inclusion may well have conflicting*

*aims and structures.*” (Glashan et al., 2004, p. 55). The ULIS could be seen as providing this balancing act: In two cases the parents were convinced, that their children needed special needs education and would not be able to follow full-time instruction in a mainstream classroom. Both students received support by an ULIS at the secondary level, but this choice was not easily made. Not only the parents but also the professionals they had consulted had the impression, that there is no adequate offer for the particular profiles of these students.

The variety of schooling options and the possibility to combine them, are understood as a rich offer that covers for a variety of different situations, students with special needs may face (MEN, 2018a). However, in study 3 parents perceived this system as overwhelming and difficult to understand. This led to insecurities and anxieties not only regarding the unknown they were expecting, but also concerning decisions they had already made: *“But the obstacles yeah it was a lot of thinking, a lot of asking yourself questions: ‘Is this the right choice?’”* (study 3, parent 8, T1).

Despite the law that clearly states that public schools have to accept any student and adapt to his or her needs (MENJ, 2019b), a few parents reported that students were sometimes not accepted at the neighborhood schools. The reason was usually a lack of places, but parents had the impression it might have been because of their child’s profile. For several this meant to enter a private school: *“You can’t put a child where it’s not wanted.”* (study 3, parent 12, T3). This is a situation that happens often: the public school attendance of students with special needs dropped from 90,3% at primary level to 83,3% at secondary level in 2017 (MEN & MESRI, 2018b). This situation is not further specified in the ministerial documents (MENESR, 2014; MENJ, 2017). However, a change from a public primary to a private secondary school was often named as a reason for a lack of cooperation between the two schools.

The clear majority of parents stated to have found the right school for their child and trust the professional team to take care of it adequately. This confirms the criteria we developed in study 1, which indicate, that for a successful transition parents need to be satisfied with their child’s secondary school. Giving a very general picture, the students saw their new school as positive: they reported to do well academically, though some had difficulties to follow certain courses. They spent their unstructured times with friends. They knew their school and their reference persons. In general they liked their teachers, which was largely confirmed by parents and teachers.

The teacher sample was very small, but in large parts their results are congruent with those of parents and students. The teachers reported that they had a good relationship with their students with ASD and understood their particularities well. The educational team was seen as well organized, though cooperation with the primary school was not always given. The teachers were in regular contact with the parents of their students with ASD and felt that parents trusted both the teachers as well as the educational team to adequately take care of their child. Most teachers liked their job, reported to have access to training and did not have the impression that having a child with ASD in their class increased their workload remarkably.

However, some teachers reported to perceive their lack of knowledge on ASD as a stress factor and also a source of feeling incompetent in terms of teaching. They suggested to have specific training on ASD, not necessarily before the transition like Adreon and Stella (2001) say, but after they got to know the student. In the literature teacher training is often suggested as a measure to promote inclusive education (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Cappe et al., 2016; Flavier & Clément, 2014; Gavaldá & Qinyi, 2012; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2000; Young et al., 2017). However, studies warn that theoretical knowledge of ASD is not sufficient (Glashan et al., 2004; Young et al., 2017). Teachers state to have learned through experience, not through specialized training in McGillicuddy and O'Donnell's (2014) study.

Teacher training in France is transforming and new teachers are more and more aware, that they may be working with students with special needs. A new platform *Cap Ecole inclusive* (<https://www.reseau-canope.fr/cap-ecole-inclusive.html>) is supposed to provide best-practice examples as well as teaching materials. Furthermore, additional resource teachers were employed for the running school year 2019/2020 (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018).

Thus in general, the transition was viewed as complicated, but positive, which was surprising to some extent, since the literature shows a more negative picture (Beauguitte, 2006; Cappe et al., 2016; Makin et al., 2017; Zeedyk et al., 2003). However, we observed, that this positive view was not stable in the interviews, but rather variable.

### 4.2.3 Perception Development over Time

The regular interviews at three different times of the school year (in the beginning, in the middle and at the end) showed a range of ups and downs the stakeholders experienced throughout the transition process. This overview over one school year shows that the

transition needs the most effort before secondary school starts and in the middle of the new school year. In most cases, the beginning and the end seem less problematic. One can assume that the beginning is kind of a trial-phase for all stakeholders. After the first months potential difficulties as well as demanded actions became apparent, which was perceived as stressful by all participants. However, these actions seemed to be beneficial, since at the end of the school year the situation seemed to have calmed down in many cases and participants looked to the future with cautious optimism.

Developments, which are presented in the following, concerned the specific arrangements for students with ASD, a fair grading scheme, social relations with classmates and the students' general well-being.

In the middle and at the end of the school year existing specific arrangements for the students with ASD were questioned, either because they were no longer perceived as necessary or as not sufficient. Arrangements were usually a joint decision between the educational team at the school and the parents, which means that they were negotiated and discussed. This procedure could assumingly explain why teachers in study 3 experienced a higher workload during the second trimester. Studies from France (Beaupré et al., 2017; Boujut et al., 2017; Cappe et al., 2016; Flavier & Clément, 2014) and elsewhere (Able et al., 2015; Glashan et al., 2004; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2000; McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014; Tobias, 2009) indicate that many general education teachers do not feel prepared to implement new measures for students with special needs. A lack of confidence and support aggravates the situation in their studies and is confirmed by the teachers in study 3. General education teachers in particular stated to not know enough about ASD and therefore relied on ideas of others. Where a constructive network of professionals existed, measures were discussed, implemented and evaluated regularly. Arrangements were seen as useful to improve the students' situation, but they also demanded more time and effort to be agreed at and to be installed from the school's staff (Cappe et al., 2016).

With the end of the first trimester, the evaluation of students with ASD became an important topic, especially for low performing students. Already in the first interviews teachers did not know how to grade their students with ASD, especially when they received adapted teaching, but in the follow-up interviews, it became a major issue. This problem has been addressed in several studies (Keen et al., 2016; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Zorn & Puustinen, 2017), however, a solution is often pending. The ministry announced the implementation of a working group that has the task to improve the adaptations of exams (MEN & MESRI, 2018a;

MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018). Thus, it seems that this issue has been recognized as important. However, this working group rather focuses on exams for the school-leaving diploma, which means that it does not offer solutions for the everyday situations the teachers in the study experienced. In one case a teacher reported that her colleagues perceived the arrangements and the adapted evaluation of the student with ASD as unfair to the classmates.

The classmates themselves were reported to perceive the special rights of some students with ASD (e.g. being allowed to eat in class or to leave the classroom) as unfair and jealousy-provoking. In several cases, parents and teachers reported that an information session about ASD or about special needs in general, has been arranged during the running school year. This could indicate, that after the first few months with a student with ASD it was perceived as necessary to address this issue and to enable a dialogue between the students. The conflict between a fresh start without labels and difficult situations between students that need explanations (Stoner et al., 2007), is reflected in this development.

In regard to well-being all stakeholder groups agreed, the students were proud of being at secondary school and felt more at ease after a few weeks: *“At first he left, he was pale, I felt he was not at all at ease, then gradually I saw that things were getting better and better”* (study 3, parent 15, T1). Nevertheless, in the middle and at the end of the school year all stakeholder groups stated fatigue and stress as a severe issue that impacted the students learning:

These days he also has small injuries, [...] he bites his lower lips, and he keeps biting himself, [...] chewing [his T-shirt], making it wet, passing his tongue, which makes it completely drying out, thus it causes him small wounds, so that's a little, a little anxiety, fatigue, little things. (study 3, teacher 17, T2).

Higher anxiety levels in students with ASD during the transition are stated in the literature (Fortuna, 2014; Hannah & Topping, 2012) and may also affect the relationship with the parents and the homework situation in the evening. In some cases this situation calmed down again until the end of the school year, but in other cases it also aggravated the situation and demanded new adjustments. The additional hours of pedagogical, individualized and educational support, which all 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students may benefit from (MENJ, 2018a), could be beneficial in this context. They were not explicitly mentioned by the participants, but are probably still integrated in the timetables.

By the end of the school year most interview participants still evaluated the transition as successful, but they also expressed, that the year was difficult, exhausting and unstable: *“So,*

*beginning of the year great, middle of the year complicated, and now the end of the year is a bit better.*” (study 3, parent 5, T3). At the same time, all stakeholders seemed to anticipate the transition to the next grade. In this context, they expressed both a general optimism, but also concerns in terms of workload, new subjects and teachers, fighting the fatigue and social issues potentially evolving with adolescence.

In this context some participants expressed the thought that the primary-secondary transition lasts during the entire time of secondary school since new transitions will happen, new arrangements will become necessary, new teachers with new teaching methods will have to construct a relationship to the very student and adapt their lessons: *“Not completely for me. The second transition will be to learn little by little, to be autonomous and how it will be with ‘half a teaching assistant’”* (study 3, parent 17, T3). This shows, that the transition can become a never-ending story of consecutive transitions (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). Considering the increased stress level of all participants involved in the primary-secondary transition, it is necessary to find strategies to improve the transition situation and to identify the obstacles which may interfere with them.

### 4.3 Enabling and Hindering Factors

In the previous chapter organizational, academic, social and personal factors, which play an important role in the context of the primary-secondary transition were identified. In the following the focus is on strategies or enabling factors to cope with the different situations, but also on obstacles, that may interfere with them. During the interviews in study 3 it became apparent that many strategies, which were perceived useful by all the participants, were in place to ease the transition. The following table (Table 4-1) represents the strategies that the different participant groups identified in study 3 for the time before the actual school transfer, but also the obstacles potentially getting in their way. These are strategies the study participants themselves have experienced and evaluated as positive. Consequently, the obstacles presented are the obstacles they encountered or presumed to be the reasons for the difficulties faced. The focus is clearly on a comprehensive transition planning, which anticipates difficulties that may occur during the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Academic aspects were not considered important during this phase, most strategies refer to organizational aspects.

**Table 4-1: Strategies and barriers identified by the study participants for the time of transition planning**

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Barriers</i>
<b><i>Organizational aspects</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early anticipation and gathering of information                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Advice from primary school</li> <li>○ Private networks</li> <li>○ Parent associations</li> <li>○ Information events</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of ability/initiative/networks to obtain information</li> <li>• Impression not to find an adequate institution</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timely request for a teaching assistant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duration of administrative processes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School visit(s)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introducing the child to all school staff</li> <li>○ Getting to know different rooms and places</li> <li>○ Integration days</li> <li>○ Understanding how to get from one room to the other</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Late school choice</li> <li>• Secondary school not accessible</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attribution of class teachers to their class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class teacher not known</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation meeting(s) with the school’s principal and the teachers                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transparent communication about the ASD</li> <li>○ Open communication about experiences/fears/insecurities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time and organizational constraints</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchange between primary and secondary school                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Common projects</li> <li>○ Exchange of information</li> <li>○ Creation of a transition plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of cooperation                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transition from public primary school to private secondary school</li> <li>○ Change of school districts</li> <li>○ Time and organizational constraints</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Booklet with phone numbers, photos/maps of the building and the staff, etc.</li> <li>• Practicing the way to the school</li> <li>• Organizing the school material using colors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of detailed information</li> <li>• Lack of initiative/ability</li> </ul>
<b><i>Social aspects</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing the class (avoiding bullies from primary school)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class not yet constituted</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending same school as primary school friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary school friends attend different school</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing for social situations with classmates</li> </ul>	
<b><i>Personal aspects</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing fear and stress</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Trusting own abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of the “unknown”</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Insecurity through lack of information</li> </ul>

The focus on organizational aspects remained important after the school transfer and was joined by academic considerations (Table 4-2). The sheer number of strategies and obstacles indicates again, that the transition process is ongoing and does not end with the arrival at secondary school.

**Table 4-2: Strategies and barriers identified by the participants for the time after the school transfer**

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Barriers</i>
<b><i>Organizational aspects</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the school’s rules</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being on time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigation/orientation issues</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online-Portals               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communication between family and school</li> <li>○ Homework</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of agreement on               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Type of communication</li> <li>○ Intensity of communication</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental involvement at school</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Parents-teaching assistant</li> <li>○ Parents-teachers</li> <li>○ Teachers among each other</li> <li>○ Teachers-teaching assistant</li> <li>○ Teachers-school management</li> <li>○ Inclusion of external professionals/partners</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of communication               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overwhelming number of contact persons</li> <li>○ Time constraints</li> <li>○ Differently perceived importance</li> <li>○ Imbalanced communication</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular meetings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Parents-educational team</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of meetings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Time constraints</li> <li>○ Low number of participants</li> <li>○ Differently perceived importance</li> <li>○ Difficulties to reach agreements</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork among school staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of teamwork               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No common strategy</li> <li>○ Time constraints</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapted timetable               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In case of fatigue/exhaustion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational constraints</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a double set of textbooks (school, home)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom organization               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Structured workplace</li> <li>○ Fixed seating plan</li> <li>○ Teaching assistant and other students close</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of space/Classroom changes</li> <li>• Presence of teaching assistant may interfere with social relations to the other students</li> </ul>
<b><i>Social aspects</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remaining unnoticed</li> <li>• Being nice to classmates and teachers</li> <li>• Making friends</li> <li>• Knowing reference persons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misunderstandings</li> <li>• Exclusion, bullying</li> <li>• High number of potential reference persons</li> <li>• Less time with each potential reference person</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School trip with the new class</li> <li>• School starts without older students around</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential anxieties</li> </ul>
<b><i>Academic aspects</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support through a teaching assistant               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Staying focused</li> <li>○ Mediation in group work</li> <li>○ Repetition and explanation of instructions</li> <li>○ Taking notes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of presence of a teaching assistant               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Absence of a teaching assistant</li> <li>○ Insufficient number of hours</li> <li>○ Late arrival</li> <li>○ Miscomprehension of teaching assistants as adaptation measure</li> <li>○ Lack of students’ autonomy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapted teaching               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Repeating instructions individually</li> <li>○ Alternatives to writing (e.g. taking notes on computer)</li> <li>○ Structured/reduced tasks and worksheets</li> <li>○ Avoiding abstract terms</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of adaptation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lack of experience and knowledge in regard to ASD</li> <li>○ Misunderstandings, feeling of inability</li> <li>○ Lack of adequate teaching methods</li> <li>○ Lack of competencies (e.g. to work with a computer)</li> <li>○ Higher workload</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapted exams               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Presence of a teaching assistants</li> <li>○ Additional time</li> <li>○ Reduced number of tasks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of injustice</li> <li>• Organizational and time constraints</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapted homework               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Possibility to have close homework supervision at school</li> <li>○ Reduced number of tasks</li> <li>○ Determining maximum time</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of knowledge gaps               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Feeling of injustice</li> <li>○ Difficulties handling the calendar</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b><i>Personal aspects</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipating and explaining changes</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures to reduce sensory stimuli               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ MP3-Player</li> <li>○ Hearing protection</li> <li>○ Organized and structured workplace</li> <li>○ Safe place</li> <li>○ Priority card for the canteen</li> <li>○ Temporarily advanced or later classroom changes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhaustion/tiredness</li> <li>• Lack of concentration</li> <li>• Meltdowns</li> <li>• Lack of persons to accompany the student</li> <li>• Time constraints</li> </ul>

Many of the proposed strategies can be found in existing studies. In the following, we will discuss the strategies the participants in study 3 identified through their own experience in order to complement the measures suggested in former studies and ministerial texts. This will be the basis to construct recommendations for a successful transition to secondary school for students with ASD in the following chapter.

### 4.3.1 Useful Strategies

In this section the strategies that have been presented in the tables (Table 4-1, Table 4-2) above are discussed. These strategies concern transition planning aspects such as gathering information on secondary school and preparation meetings, adaptation of teaching, maintenance of social relationships, and finally, the well-being of all stakeholders.

There is large a agreement between study 3 and existing ones that proactive transition planning is necessary for a successful transition from primary to secondary school of students

with ASD (Deacy et al., 2015; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Stoner et al., 2007; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). Several strategies were identified by the participants in study 3 and are supported by the literature. In order to gather information, transition activities are seen as useful by the participants in study 3 as well as by participants in other studies (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Neal & Frederickson, 2016). The literature, moreover, recommends transition meetings prior to the school transfer (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Mandy et al., 2015; Nuske et al., 2019). In study 3 such a meeting has only taken place in a few cases:

a pedagogical meeting at the beginning of the school year, a few days before the beginning of the school year, where there were all the future teachers of [Student 17] [...], the whole administrative team of the college, the school doctor, the school nurse, the school psychologist. (study 3, parent 17, T1).

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This case of an interdisciplinary team bringing primary and secondary school staff together as well as external professionals was rare but considered as beneficial and an ideal transition start, which is confirmed by the literature (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Nuske et al., 2019). The meetings of the ESS or the primary-secondary school council (MENESR, 2014; MENJ & MESRI, 2019) are theoretically completely in line with this, however, in many cases they did not take place in this inclusive manner. The pre-entry meetings with parents established in 2019 can be seen as a further positive step towards a better planned transition (MENJ, 2019a). Meetings remained an important strategy and were valued highly by parents and teachers when they took place during the school year. Ongoing communication between the different actors of the transition is seen as a key element for a successful transition. The home-school-communication, which is seen as crucial by many studies (Cremin et al., 2017; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Tobias, 2009; Tso & Strnadová, 2017) was also important in study 3. Parents underlined that showing presence has been a very useful strategy for them to stay in contact with the different teachers and other school staff. Important and useful tools were online portals, through which parents could establish contact with teachers and had an overview of the homework situation.

In terms of academics the adult participants referred to adaptation as a necessary strategy to manage the transition to secondary school. This covered adapted teaching, adapted homework and adapted grading. Teachers stated that they gave more attention to their student with ASD by repeating the instructions or reducing the number of tasks. A change of teaching practices did not take place in most cases, instead, teachers relied on teaching assistants and the parents' support. In general, both parents and teachers felt that the level of adaptation the students received was sufficient. The new online platform *Cap Ecole inclusive* that was established in

2019 may support teachers in adapting more, if necessary (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2019a).

Social aspects were important, but less strategically planned. The students identified some general strategies that they found useful, such as being nice to everybody. Parents and teachers mentioned friends from primary school as important intermediaries between the student with ASD and the new classmates: *“He has a very good friend in the class with whom he already had very good contacts in primary school. And so, it's this relationship, it continues, so I mean she also takes care of him a little bit.”* (study 3, teacher 6, T3). The literature confirms that friends may play an important role (Coffey, 2013; McNeerney et al., 2015; Pratt & George, 2005).

Last but not least, personal aspects were mentioned as positively impacting the transition process. The students in study 3 perceived themselves and their attitude by staying calm and persevere as an enabler for a successful transition. Furthermore, they pointed out to be aware that they have support from their classmates and school staff. This positive view on the transition is despite all potential anxiety not surprising. Other studies state that students look forward to the transition and may experience it as a positive process (Dann, 2011; C. Graham & Hill, 2003; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Hebron, 2017; Neal & Frederickson, 2016).

The well-being of parents in study 3 was linked to the organizational factors such as access to information, support from the school and external agents and the impression that everything works as it is supposed to: *“I was reassured from the first week, I saw how it was organized, how he was.”* (study 3, parent 8, T1). This is in line with former studies that mention information and support as important for parents during the transition process (Dann, 2011; Nuske et al., 2019). Pre-entry meetings as newly established may be very helpful in this context (MENJ, 2019a).

Teachers in study 3 reduced their stress and anxiety through information on ASD they found online or in exchange with the parents or colleagues, which is another strategy recommended by the literature (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Nuske et al., 2019). A positive attitude towards inclusive education and students with ASD was also considered helpful: *“because it's [Student 14] we are interested in. And not Asperger's autism.”* (study 3, teacher 14, T3). Training on and experience with students with ASD were mentioned as supporting factors for the teachers' feeling of competence and self-efficacy both in study 3 and elsewhere (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Cappe et al., 2016; Flavier & Clément, 2014; Gavaldá & Qinyi, 2012; Mavropoulou & Padelidiadu, 2000; Young et al., 2017). The online

platform *Cap Ecole inclusive*, as well as the additional resource teachers, probably support this situation (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018).

In sum, the study participants identified a wide range of strategies that touch organizational, academic, social and personal aspects. Some seem to be regularly in place, such as transition activities, others need to be individually tailored to the concerned stakeholders and the individual situation. However, the tables (Table 4-1; Table 4-2) also contain barriers, which the stakeholders identified and that may aggravate the implementation of some strategies.

### 4.3.2 Obstacles

Many barriers the stakeholders identified in the interviews are characterized by the absence of useful strategies presented above (Table 4-1, Table 4-2). In the following, the barriers, which were perceived as important by the participants of study 3 are going to be discussed. These concern a lack of communication opportunities in different communication constellations, difficulties to adapt to the student with ASD, emotional aspects and, finally, social difficulties. In general, organizational and time constraints were mentioned as main obstacles in regard to different issues concerning the transition.

Teachers identified the difficulties to organize meetings or have otherwise regular exchanges with their colleagues or other school staff as a barrier. An ULIS-coordinator states: *“So I have to be available a lot in the halls, in the teachers' room, outside, you know.”* (study 3, teacher 8, T3). Where a lack of communication between school staff existed, parents perceived the organization as deficient and as an additional stress factor: *“There's no one doing this coordination work, actually. [...] That's it, it's a big problem, because every time we have to go, redo our little speeches and pray that the teacher will hear us.”* (study 3, parent 11, T1). This shows, on the one hand, the parents' pressure to be present and to assure that communication is maintained between stakeholders (Cremin et al., 2017; Makin et al., 2017; Nuske et al., 2019). On the other hand, it shows the need for collaboration in multi-professional teams, which costs time and other resources (Able et al., 2015; Glashan et al., 2004; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Schad, 2017).

Although teachers in study 3 underlined the importance of communication and collaboration, they also perceived it as stressful and additional work, which is another barrier. Other studies confirm this situation (Able et al., 2015; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Schad, 2017) and show that the time factor plays an important role, which is often neglected. This also concerns the home-school-communication. In study 3, most adult participants stated that there was a

well-established and constructive communication between parents and schools. Nevertheless, in a few cases, parents did not feel heard: “*We have a feeling somewhere of, how to say, always disturb or [...] and then I want to tell you, the professionals also have the habit of talking to the parents as if the parents do not understand anything.*” (study 3, parent 9, T2). These parents had a more negative opinion with regard to the transition and the new school, which is confirmed as a barrier by former studies (Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). In a newsletter in 2019, the ministry announces to integrate time for communication with parents into primary teachers’ schedules. Nevertheless, the teachers of other school types are not mentioned (MENJ, 2019a).

With regard to academic aspects, the importance of adaptation to every student has been underlined. An absence of such is consequently perceived as obstacle by the different stakeholders. Some parents complained, that teachers do not adapt enough: “*When I see his notebook, I see one thing too, which is that no adaptation is made.*” (study 3, parent 9, T1). This may be explained by the presence of teaching assistants, since (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007) indicate that teachers may feel less need to adapt to their student with ASD: “*we rely a lot on his teaching assistant*” (study 3, teacher 14, T2). In this case, teachers are missing out on information about their student and his or her learning process, although this knowledge is considered crucial (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Fleury et al., 2014; Nuske et al., 2019).

Another explanation for the lack of adaptation is a perceived lack of competencies and teaching methods: “*when we're really facing difficulties, I can't tell you that we've found effective strategies so far.*” (study 3, teacher 14, T2), a barrier that has been reported in other studies, too (Able et al., 2015; Berzin & Brisset, 2008; McGillicuddy & O’Donnell, 2014). As a result, a majority of adaptation is actually done by teaching assistants according to parents and teachers in study 3, which may become an obstacle, too. Giangreco and Broer (2005) come to the conclusion, that it is paradoxical that the least qualified staff supports the students with the largest learning challenges. They state that the job of teaching assistants is often unattractive and not clearly defined. The authors furthermore mention negative consequences of one-to-one support and the absence of proof that this support has any positive impact on performance. Sharma and Salend (2016, p. 125) sum up:

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ineffective and separate instruction delivered by untrained and unsupervised [teaching assistants] as well as their constant physical presence inadvertently undermine the inclusion, learning, socialization and independence of students with disabilities, and the pedagogical roles of their teachers.

Other studies support this alarming judgment (Farrell, Alborz, Howes, & Pearson, 2010; Giangreco et al., 2012; Paquet, Forget, & Giroux, 2009; Symes & Humphrey, 2012). The working conditions and tasks for teaching assistants in France are comparable to those in the mentioned international studies (Cappe et al., 2016; MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018). Therefore, the situation that teaching assistants do most of the adaptation as reported in study 3, should be considered as a potential barrier.

The well-being of teachers is challenged during the transition and this is closely linked to the organizational and academic aspects discussed above. The teachers in study 3 identified as obstacles to not always understand their students with ASD, to not find adequate teaching methods, to not know how to deal with behavioral issues (violence, fatigue) and to face difficulties evaluating the students. Some students did not attend school full time since they benefit from care and education in medico-social institutions or at home. This again had an impact on organizational aspects at the school level: e.g. timetables needed to be adapted and more communication was necessary.

Parents perceived their own fears and insecurities in regard to the “unknown” as an obstacle: *“But it's difficult to prepare a child when you're afraid yourself. And not to transmit your fears to him.”* (study 3, parent 5, T1). This could become a barrier, since parents are the students' main transition partners (McNerney et al., 2015; Nuske et al., 2019; Stoner et al., 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). The students also perceived their emotional situation as an obstacle, e.g. when they were exhausted, afraid of a teacher or missed their primary school teacher: *“And since every trimester the level of difficulty increases, well like that has made me very tired.”* (study 3, student 2, T3).

More important obstacles for the students were social difficulties: bullying, social exclusion and misunderstandings: *“There are many things, so I don't want to list them. He tells lies to others, which are not true. About me. He's stealing my school bag. And he calls me names.”* (study 3, student 15, T1). These findings were not surprising, since social relations are particularly challenging for students with ASD (Calder et al., 2013; Kasari et al., 2011), especially during the primary-secondary transition (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Deacy et al., 2015; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Wainscot et al., 2008).

To sum up, the different stakeholders identified a wide range of useful strategies for a successful transition from primary to secondary school and at the same time obstacles potentially interfering with them. These touch mainly academic and organizational concerns.

The experiences of the French study participants are largely congruent with studies from other countries (Dann, 2011; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Neal & Frederickson, 2016; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). Nevertheless, the particularities of the French school system play a role and need to be considered. The same is true for the uniqueness of each transition case. Both of these aspects need to be taken into account for the development of recommendations for a successful transition.

#### 4.4 Recommendations for a Successful Transition for Students with ASD

In order to answer the last research question, how a successful transition can be established for students with ASD the results of the three different studies are put together. The transition and its various dimensions are shared by many different stakeholders and are at the same time perceived differently by each of them.

The stakeholders provided interesting ideas and strategies for a successful transition. Furthermore, it became apparent, that a number of measures established by the ministry seem to go into a promising direction. These measures are going to be discussed concerning the question, to what extent they are already implemented and working. Where existing measures are not seen as sufficient or as detailed enough according to the results of the three studies or former ones, new propositions or extensions are developed.

These recommendations are supposed to be useful guidelines for stakeholders who have not yet been confronted with the transition from primary to secondary school or would like to improve it. However, all recommendations will have to be adapted to each case and each stakeholder.

The results of study 3 showed that the transition process is long and poses challenges at different times. In order to construct the recommendations, we will therefore follow a chronological order from the transition preparation to the summer holidays before the school transfer and finally, to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the first year at secondary school.

##### Transition Preparation during 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

As several studies have shown the transition from primary to secondary school is a major event in a student's life, but at the same time also a normal process (Cantali, 2019). Based on the parents' interviews and former studies a sufficient preparation is beneficial for all involved stakeholders. Parents indicated different starting dates: the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, during the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Deacy et al. (2015) suggest a start two years before the actual transfer.

In most studies, which underline the importance of preparation and also in the official documents of the French ministry, no time period is mentioned (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Dann, 2011; Makin et al., 2017; MENJ, 2017; Stoner et al., 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). The interviews showed that parents started to think about the transition to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade after the first weeks of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Using this timeframe would mean to start transition planning for the secondary transition at the beginning of the last year of primary school.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Transition planning start	Transition planning should start at the beginning of 5 <sup>th</sup> grade.

Parents need to have enough information on potential secondary schools and instruction options for their children (McNerney et al., 2015). The variety of schooling options also demands to gather information on various possibilities. This includes private institutions and schools that are further away, as study 3 has shown. Primary schools and the experiences of other parents can be useful sources of information. Information is available to some extent, but it is not always obvious to find the right person or other sources of information, even for parents who make the effort. Parents with limited French language skills, parents who do not know the complex system of instruction and support options or parents who are not organized in associations or receive other kinds of support, may encounter difficulties to make an informed decision (Nuske et al., 2019; Tso & Strnadová, 2017).

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Information for parents	The assignment to a school is done via the school map. Further information for students with special needs can be found on the websites of the regional academies responsible. To better inform and guide parents departmental dialogue units were established in 2019 that enable dialogue for parents in the period from June to October (MENJ, 2018b, 2019a).	Information needs to be comprehensible and easily accessible for all parents. This could mean to provide material also in foreign languages. A parent-teacher conference at primary school may be organized to explain to parents, where they can find information, whom they may contact to receive further information (departmental dialogue units). In order to start the transition planning early, the departmental units would need to be active throughout the year.

In order to gather information on schooling options, parents seem to use formal and informal networks. Open doors and any other possibilities to get into contact with the potential new school are important in this context for all stakeholders (Cremin et al., 2017; Dann, 2011; Deacy et al., 2015; Hebron et al., 2015; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). These give parents the opportunity to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of their child and to gather information about the school's attitude towards and its experiences with students with special needs

(Adreon & Stella, 2001; Beaupré et al., 2017; Glashan et al., 2004; Neal & Frederickson, 2016; Nuske et al., 2019).

Several visits and meetings are probably necessary in order to give the student the opportunity to discover the school, including when no other students are present, and to meet future teachers or other school staff (Deacy et al., 2015; Hebron et al., 2015; Peters & Brooks, 2016; Stoner et al., 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2017).

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Transition activities	Open doors are supposed to be organized by school principals. They leave parents and students time and space to ask questions about internal regulations, the handling of absences, communication with parents, etc. (MENJ, 2018b).	Low-threshold offers such as open doors are important measures which secondary schools should maintain and, if necessary, extended. To ensure dialogue opportunities parents of 5 <sup>th</sup> -grade students should be actively invited and be offered a meeting with the school principal or an experienced teacher. In the meeting a transparent communication about the parents' objectives, the child's abilities and deficiencies as well as the school's possibilities for inclusive education is important. Future 6 <sup>th</sup> -grade class teachers should be present during this day and use the opportunity to get to know potential future students and their parents.

This demands an early decision for a specific school and also cooperation with the school, which needs to organize the allocation of resources in order to conduct these visits. According to the results of study 3, additional meetings often happen due to parents' initiative and mean an additional workload for teachers including investment of free-time.

The secondary school and its teachers are usually not involved that early due to the late attribution of class teachers, although this would probably be beneficial (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Beaupré et al., 2017; Hebron, 2017; Richter, Popa-Roch, & Clément, 2019). This can cause stress at the beginning of the school year, especially when the teachers do not have prior experience teaching students with ASD. The late information keeps them from meeting the child and its parents before or to gather knowledge on ASD.

Some studies recommend the nomination of a transition coordinator, who is responsible to plan, coordinate and supervise the transition process and serves as a reference person for all stakeholders (Barnes-Holmes, Scanlon, Desmond, Shevlin, & Vahey, 2013; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Makin et al., 2017).

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Role of class teachers	Secondary school teachers should be part of the primary-secondary school council and, perhaps, the meetings of the ESS. The	In order to play an active role in the transition preparation the future class teachers should be attributed to their classes during the running school year. If this is not possible the reference teacher should act as transition coordinator and transfer all information and establish the parents' contact

	reference teacher is responsible for the coordination of the ESS (MENESR, 2014; MENJ & MESRI, 2019).	with the new class teacher as soon as attribution has been completed. Transition activities should be integrated into the school's year planning to avoid that teachers or other school staff need to work overtime in order to be part of the transition process.
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The teachers in study 3, who often met their students with ASD only during the first day of the school year, recommended having a meeting with the parents of the student with ASD during the first days of the school year to know more about the student and establish the contact to the parents. Nevertheless, the literature and also some cases in study 3 indicate, that an earlier date is useful in order to prepare the transition before secondary school starts (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Deacy et al., 2015). For such a meeting it would be useful to invite all teachers and relevant school staff as well as external professionals who are involved in the child's care. This means a considerable organizational effort, but this and former studies show that a regular and transparent communication with all involved actors can be very beneficial in order to deal with the new situation (Beaupré et al., 2017; Cantali, 2019; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Hoy et al., 2018; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019; Tso & Strnadová, 2017).

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
First meeting	A revision of the PPS is advised in the transition period. The ESS includes the student, the parents, school staff and external professionals. The primary-secondary-school council meets twice a year, is organized, according to needs, in full autonomy and can use the expertise of outside professionals (MENESR, 2014; MENJ & MESRI, 2017).	It should be clarified if the ESS or the council is responsible for the transition planning of students with special needs. A meeting with all relevant stakeholders (families, relevant secondary school staff, external stakeholders) should be organized in order to discuss the organization of the student's secondary school life such as agreeing on specific arrangements (specific rights, relaxing opportunities, use of a computer, etc.). The stakeholders should also discuss how a regular communication can be ensured, this means communication tools but also the frequency of contact.

An inclusion of the students themselves in the decision process for the secondary school has been rarely the case in this project, but is recommended in the literature (D'Alessio, 2013; Makin et al., 2017; Neal & Frederickson, 2016; Richter, Popa-Roch, et al., 2019; Tso & Strnadová, 2017) and by those families who have experienced it. This allows detecting potential anxieties, but also the personal preferences of students, which may differ from those of the parents.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Role of students	Students have the possibility to express themselves during the meetings of the ESS (MENJ & MESRI, 2017).	Students should be part of the transition team, which includes hearing and respecting their voice when it comes to the decision for an instruction mode and a specific school.

Information provided by the primary school can be beneficial for secondary school teachers to prepare the year (Goos & Decelle, 2016; Makin et al., 2017), especially since many teachers in study 3 as well as in other studies (Able et al., 2015; Beaupré et al., 2017; Cappe et al., 2016; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, 2000) indicate that they never had specific training on autism. Nevertheless, a constructive long-term collaboration between the two schools has only been reported in two cases in study 3. Also, Goos and Decelle (2016) have shown that teachers of both school types often do not have a sufficient understanding of the programs and methods of the other school type.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Primary-secondary cooperation	The ministry supports a close exchange between primary and secondary school teachers. The primary-secondary school council enables this exchange in regard to the transition. Furthermore, joint projects between primary and secondary schools are promoted (MENJ, 2011).	Cooperation between primary and secondary schools also needs to be established when the schools are in different administrative districts or concern private institutions.

The absence of teaching assistants during the first days or weeks of primary school was among the main obstacles for parents and teachers in study 3 and they name the MDPH as responsible for this delay.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Attribution of teaching assistants	The ministry acknowledges deficits concerning the employment of teaching assistants. More teaching assistants are and will be employed and their working conditions are supposed to be improved (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018).	A shorter duration of attribution of teaching assistants, as well as an earlier attribution, should be envisaged in order to reduce insecurities among the stakeholders.

During the transition process, the support of external partners such as psychologists or other therapists or parent associations can also be helpful. This needs agreement and communication between all involved actors in order to guide the child in the same direction.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Role of professionals	The ESS include the professionals and ensure exchange between all personnel involved with	The ESS should be used to discuss the upcoming transition and agree on

	the student (MENJ & MESRI, 2017).	a joint transition preparation.
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### Summer Holidays between Primary and Secondary School

In study 3 the participants reported having used the summer holidays for the preparation. The preparations done in the families are consequently not covered by the ministerial texts. They are still mentioned here since the study participants perceived them as useful for the transition. Like the parents, the students need information about secondary school, the new routines and other changes they are going to face (McNerney et al., 2015). Older siblings who had already overcome the transition to secondary school and knew how secondary school works were especially helpful conversation partners for students and parents: *“his brother and sister, they were talking to him about secondary school, how it works”* (study 3, parent 14, T1). Parents, who did not have older children used their own experiences or those of friends or relatives as a source.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Open dialogue	Parents should establish an open dialogue with their child on the functioning of secondary schools, the child’s worries and other transition issues. Siblings, friends or neighbors may be included in this dialogue, if it is considered useful.

In two families who participated in study 3, the parents created together with their child and with guidance from psychologists, a folder or, respectively, a booklet with important information for the start at secondary school: photos and a map of the school building, photos and names of all school staff, the school rules, reminders what behavior is inadequate and starting phrases for conversations. Similar measures have been found in other studies and were evaluated as very useful for the students (McNerney et al., 2015; Nuske et al., 2019; Stoner et al., 2007).

One teacher in study 3 suggested a letter addressed to the new secondary school students that welcomes them to secondary school, assuring them that there is a place for them and indicates a meeting time and place for the first day of school. This way the students would possess a written document they can rely on during periods of doubt or insecurity (Nuske et al., 2019).

<b>Topic</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Practical preparations	Practical preparations should be added to the exchange of information in order to enable the student to be an actor in his or her own transition. Support by external professionals could contribute to the child’s preparation.

### Arrival at Secondary School

In study 3 some participants experienced not only the first week, but the entire school year as the arrival phase of the transition process. Study 3 and former studies (Deacy et al., 2015; Foley et al., 2016; Tso & Strnadová, 2017) showed that some students take the entire year or more to get used to secondary school.

Following the first meeting, which should take place before the actual school transfer, meetings in the middle of the school year seem to be very useful. This allows the exchange between all involved stakeholders about their experiences and impressions as well as the discussion of potential changes: *“That's really very good. [...] so we've all thought about a new schedule together”* (study 3, parent 17, T2). In general, parents and teachers perceived these meetings as reassuring and constructive, although they may reveal bad news, new problems or additional work. A meeting is a good moment to discuss to what extent certain arrangements are useful and how a transition to less support or no support at all can be conducted.

The end of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade also means the end of *cycle 3* which is supposed to consolidate the knowledge and competencies of primary school as a basis for *cycle 4*, the further learning stage (MEN, 2018c). Though a transition between grades in the same school is less challenging than the transition from primary to secondary school, it remains a transition and, therefore, a potential risk. Parents anticipated this transition early and it closely to the transition to adult and professional life (Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019). The fact that parents think in long terms, whereas teachers often evaluate the current situation can lead to a discrepancy and misunderstandings: *“the parents' concern is to say ‘Yes when he no longer wants to do that, when he grows up and becomes a teenager’. That's it, but we [the teachers] can't judge too much about the future. We see the present.”* (study 3, teacher 14, T3).

Topic	Existing measures	New/additional recommendations
Follow-up meetings	The ESS revises the PPS once a year (MENJ & MESRI, 2017). The primary-secondary-school council meets twice a year, is organized, according to needs, in full autonomy and can use the expertise of outside professionals (MENESR, 2014).	In the middle of the school year a follow-up meeting with all stakeholders should be organized to enable exchange on the academic, social and personal development of the student. This exchange facilitates the evaluation of arrangements, which may need to be adjusted. Furthermore, the introduction of new measures can be discussed and agreed on. A meeting at the end of the school year allows another exchange on the students' development and serves as preparation for the upcoming transition to the next grade. Parents' concerns regarding the educational and professional future of their child should be anticipated by the school and taken seriously in meetings.

Other organizational aspects concern the daily work of teachers. The placement of the student with ASD in the classroom was the object of several adjustments in some cases. Often the student was placed in the first row and between the teaching assistant and a classmate at a fixed workplace. Apart from behavioral aspects, visual-spatial difficulties and hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli are very common among students with ASD and need to be considered (Leekam, Nieto, Libby, Wing, & Gould, 2007; Tavassoli et al., 2018). A structured workplace was not often mentioned in the interviews but can be very useful in order to develop the student's work and organization autonomy (Able et al., 2015; Ferraioli & Harris, 2011; Tobias, 2009).

In terms of school-work the need of support, identified in study 2 became apparent. Some students in study 3 seemed to need the help of teaching assistants in order to stay focused, especially when ADHD had been diagnosed additionally. Others did not feel concerned when teachers addressed the entire class, but rather needed individual and very precise instructions. Many teaching assistants in study 3 supported the students in writing tasks, since these pose major difficulties for many students with ASD: *"She helps me, she writes my lessons sometimes."* (study 3, student 5, T2). In several cases the handling of a computer was regarded as a solution to this problem. However, no school had the capacity to teach students how to take notes with a computer. This learning process was done outside of school, either with the parents or with occupational therapists. Nevertheless, teachers sometimes remained skeptical or did not feel competent to support the student using a computer.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Classroom organization	The PPS contains all measures that may be necessary to support the student at school and should be revised at least once a year (MENJ & MESRI, 2017).	The organization of the classroom should be anticipated based on information obtained in the preparatory meetings (sensory issues, visual-spatial problems). The students' placement in the classroom needs to remain an object of observation and, if necessary, adjustment. Constant observation of the students' learning process by teachers and other school staff is necessary in order to be able to adapt to specific difficulties. Specific arrangements to facilitate writing tasks should be anticipated and discussed with all relevant stakeholders. If the stakeholders agree on the use of the computer, this strategy has to be followed and supported by all stakeholders.

Group work can become an issue when social relations are difficult (Able et al., 2015; Symes & Humphrey, 2012). The examples of two students in study 3 showed that classmates avoided group work with their classmate with ASD, in particular when it was graded since they had

the impression that the student with ASD does not listen to them and has difficulties to accept their ideas and opinions. In both cases, the mediation of an adult was necessary and helpful. Furthermore, projects that were supposed to be done in groups outside the school hours were made easier, when the school provided a room at school where the students could work together and receive help from an adult, if necessary.

Topic	Existing measures	New/additional recommendations
Group work	For 6th-grade students educational support which includes guided studying is ensured (MENJ, 2018a).	It should be considered that group work may need adapted working conditions and mediation by an adult. The hours for educational support could be used to ensure good working conditions.

Several families in study 3 and other studies reported major difficulties to motivate and support their children to do homework, which became a major issue for parents and students during the school year (Cremin et al., 2017; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Hebron et al., 2015; Makin et al., 2017; Nuske et al., 2019; Peters & Brooks, 2016; Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019). A reduction of homework had been employed in some cases, but this again needed a close communication between the different teachers and the parents (Tso & Strnadová, 2017).

Although most students had access to homework supervision at school (*Devoirs faits*) (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2018) this offer was rarely used (Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019). The program *Devoirs faits* has only been introduced in 2017, when this research project started. It would be premature to draw conclusions now. Nevertheless, the results of the study indicate that the offer might not be adequate in its present form for the student population investigated.

Topic	Existing measures	New/additional recommendations
Homework	<i>Devoirs faits</i> means, that every child should be able to work individually, in a calm environment to do exercises or repeat lessons with the possibility to receive help, if necessary (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2018).	An exchange about homework between parents and school is important to detect overload. In this case homework reduction may be useful to fight fatigue and exhaustion. <i>Devoirs faits</i> should be evaluated concerning its usefulness for students with ASD and adapted, if necessary.

In general, the social life of the student at school often was perceived as a “*great mystery*” (study 3, parent 17, T3) for the parents. Teachers stated not to know much either, since they are usually not present during the breaks and do not necessarily see the students every day. At the same time, study 2 has shown that integration is of vital importance for a successful transition. Although most students reported having friends, misunderstandings and conflicts still occurred and seemed to be particularly difficult to understand for students. Mediation of

adults at school and at home was often necessary to discuss certain events, to re-explain and find a constructive way to deal with the situation.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Social issues	For 6th-grade students individual support is assured.	Schools need to ensure that a staff member or classmates pay attention to potential social misunderstandings or exclusion processes the student with ASD may face. The student needs to have a space where these situations can be evaluated and solved. The hours of individual support may be considered here.

According to the results of study 3, classmates were usually not explicitly informed about the ASD. Some examples from study 3 show that it is useful for all classmates to understand what ASD is and what it means for their classmate with ASD (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). In study 3, this was done either by ULIS-coordinators who informed systematically all concerned classes about ASD or by professionals from outside the school. Even though some of these interventions were only done at the end of the school year they were still evaluated positively. Ideally, they would be at the beginning of the new school year with a constant dialogue on issues such as exclusion or disability. In cases where this dialogue existed, teachers reported improvements in the class dynamics and a better understanding of differences:

[...] they have better understood that indeed, [Student 17]'s brain does not function like theirs that he may have gestures or movements, needs that are different [...]. And since it comes from someone who's more professional than us it touches them more, they say 'well yes then yes we have to accept that and [Student 17] is like that we take him as he is'. (study 3, teacher 17, T3).

<b>Topic</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Information about ASD	If the student with ASD and the parents agree, classmates and school staff should be informed about the student's ASD. If such an agreement is not given, a more general dialogue on special needs, differences and exclusion should be established in the institution.

Specific rules for students with ASD, such as leaving the classroom or using objects to reduce stress were common arrangements in order to adapt to the student in study 3. However, they need to be part of a comprehensive common strategy that is applied by all school staff. This shows that constant observation, communication and collaboration are necessary. Often these decisions also concern the parents or external professionals, in other cases, it is only the teacher and the teaching assistant, who have to agree on a common strategy.

The role of the teaching assistant was mentioned as very important by several parents and teachers in study 3, but it seems not always to be well defined, which has also been found in other studies (Cappe et al., 2016; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Sharma & Salend, 2016). A clear share of responsibilities among the members of the educational team and, if relevant with the parents, seems to be beneficial.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Common strategy	Teachers develop the measures of support that the teaching assistants provide. Further training is offered improving the cooperation of teachers and teaching assistants in order to support students with special needs adequately (MENJ, 2019a).	The educational team should follow a common strategy, which implies the regular exchange and clear share of responsibilities. This strategy and its implications should be transparent for all stakeholders.

Most teachers in study 3 found strategies to adapt to their students' style of learning during the school year, in other cases they claimed there was a lack of teaching methods and instruments. In schools that have an ULIS, a special needs teacher is present and can serve as a resource for the mainstream teachers. If this is not the case teachers sometimes felt left alone with the situation. Opportunities for exchange with colleagues or with the former primary school teachers were perceived as beneficial and are vital for team work (Richter, Popa-Roch, et al., 2019). Furthermore, the general education teachers in study 3 stated a need for specific training on ASD.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Existing measures</b>	<b>New/additional recommendations</b>
Access to information	More resource teachers are employed in order to serve as reference persons for other teachers. Furthermore, the new online platform <i>Cap Ecole inclusive</i> provides information, best-practice examples and materials (MENJ, 2019a).	Teachers need to be provided with access to information and to exchange with other teachers in regard to classroom management and teaching of heterogeneous groups. Every teacher should have one reference person at the same school in order to discuss urgent questions immediately.

At the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the transition to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade may become an issue. Most students will have new class teachers and new subject teachers, as well as new teaching assistants or, in some cases, teaching assistants will no longer be available. Communication and collaboration networks have to be developed for and with all of these new persons in order to support the student. The student may need further support to face and to deal with new changes. This fact explains why for many stakeholders in study 3 and other studies the transition does not feel completed at the end of secondary school (Deacy et al., 2015; Richter, Flavier, et al., 2019; Tso & Strnadová, 2017):

Yes, the transition is over. De facto. Because we don't have a choice. But what was in failure from the start of the school year in September, October, November and December is still in failure. So, from this point of view, the transition is not complete since it has not been made. (study 3, parent 7, T3).

The constant transitions that include new persons, new places and new routines demand constant observation, planning and adjustments.

Topic	New/additional recommendations
Long-term process	The transition should be viewed as a long-term process by all stakeholders, which means to accept continuous communication, collaboration and adjustments.

To sum up, the recommendations touch different stakeholders at different times during the transition, which has proved to be a long-term process without a defined end. Not all recommendations are new ideas, most of them can be supported by several former studies. Nevertheless, they provide ideas on how to extend and modify existing measures in order to specifically target students with ASD transitioning to secondary schools. The three studies showed that this specialized regard is still necessary, although the transition challenges are similar, whether student are affected or not by ASD. However, as indicated, the existing measures as well as the proposed modifications and additions may be hindered by obstacles, which cannot be completely ruled out. The implications of this situation are discussed in the following.

#### 4.5 Political and Social Implications

The following graphic (Figure 4-1) shows the continuity of a long-term transition process from primary to secondary school illustrating major steps that may occur and be dealt with at different times. It shows that constant communication and cooperation remains necessary throughout the process between all stakeholders, which means not only the key stakeholders (students, parents, teachers) but all people involved in the transition.

During the transition preparation main information needs to be gathered and exchanged in order to establish a transition plan with clear responsibilities. This is necessary in order to reduce stress, uncertainties and anxieties, which were reported by all stakeholders in study 3. At secondary school, organizational, academic, social and personal aspects were identified in the three studies (cf. chapter 3) and the literature as the main areas of change. They may affect the different stakeholders at different periods and, therefore, need to be constantly observed



**Table 4-3: General recommendations and potential obstacles**

<i>General</i>	
<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Potential obstacles</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• early transition planning start</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• late school choice                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ lack of information</li> <li>○ lengthy administrative procedures</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• forming a transition team consisting of the student, parents, primary and secondary school teachers, secondary school principal, other relevant secondary school staff members, external professionals                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ nominating a transition coordinator (reference teacher)</li> <li>○ considering the transition as a long-term process: accepting continuous communication, collaboration and adjustments</li> <li>○ positive mindset towards inclusive education</li> <li>○ agreeing on a joint transition preparation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• late school choice</li> <li>• lack of willingness to cooperate                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ communication difficulties</li> <li>○ lack of early anticipation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• negative attitude towards inclusive education</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organization of a preparatory meeting (end of primary school) with the transition team:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ open exchange on the student’s profile and its implications for inclusive schooling</li> <li>○ specific arrangements (e.g. placement in the classroom)</li> <li>○ mode and frequency of communication</li> </ul> </li> <li>• organization of a follow-up meeting (middle of the school year)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ academic, social and personal development of the student</li> <li>○ evaluation and adjustment of arrangements (e.g. computer)</li> <li>○ homework</li> </ul> </li> <li>• organization of a follow-up meeting (end of the school year)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ academic, social and personal development of the student</li> <li>○ evaluation and adjustment of arrangements</li> <li>○ preparation for transition to next grade</li> <li>○ anticipation and taking seriously parents’ concerns regarding the educational and professional future of their child</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethical aspects                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ sharing of personal information with different stakeholders</li> </ul> </li> <li>• time and organizational constraints                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ low number of participants</li> <li>○ differently perceived importance</li> <li>○ time constraints</li> </ul> </li> <li>• communication difficulties                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ overwhelming number of contact persons</li> <li>○ imbalanced communication</li> <li>○ difficulties to agree on a common strategy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The measures proposed by the ministry in France do not address students with ASD in particular. The research project showed that the measures for a general student population usually also match the situation of students with ASD to a large extent, though probably not entirely. This implicates that different and/or additional measures may be necessary to facilitate a smooth transition for this student population.

Table 4-3 shows that an early school choice is necessary to start the transition preparations soon in order to successfully follow other recommendations. The ideas presented above (Table 4-3) are not completely new, transition teams and meetings have been recommended by other studies and not only for students with ASD (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Akos, 2004; Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Cantali, 2019; Davis et al., 2015; Hebron, 2017; Jindal-Snape et al.,

2006; Mandy et al., 2015; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007; van Rens et al., 2017). However, based on the interviews in study 3 and the literature, they could be specified in terms of timing, frequency, participation and content, giving a clear guideline for a proactive transition planning.

The ESS and the primary-secondary school council can be seen as an ideal departure point to follow the recommendations. They consist of several relevant persons, who could form the recommended transition team under the supervision of the reference teacher, who is responsible for the revision and implementation of the PPS. The ESS and the council are, furthermore, supposed to meet regularly, which is in line with the recommendations above. Therefore, the council and the ESS already provide a solid fundament for a comprehensive transition planning, if responsibilities are clearly defined. Deficits in the handling and implementation of the PPS have been identified in studies (Berzin, 2007; Lesain-Delabarre & Delaubier, 2013), which could be an indication for the lack of meetings that could be observed in some cases in study 3. Special attention has to be paid to students who do not enter the public school they are automatically affiliated to, but private schools or schools in another administrative district.

It should be assured that the parents and external professionals are involved in the transition team according to the recommendations (Table 4-3), which is the case for the ESS, but not necessarily for the primary-secondary school council. Nevertheless, the ministry seems to have acknowledged the importance of parental involvement elsewhere: according to the newsletter from June 2019, pre-entry meetings are supposed to be established at every school starting from 2019. It is not specified which stakeholders are part of this meeting, but the pre-entry meeting is supposed to be followed by a conversation with the parents, a primary or secondary school teacher and possibly, a teaching assistant. This should take place after the pre-entry meeting and before the autumn holidays (MENJ, 2019a).

Parents are considered the main transition partners for their children (Peters & Brooks, 2016; Stoner et al., 2007; Tobin et al., 2012), however, the discussion has shown, that their involvement depends to a large extent on the institutional conditions and the willingness of other transition partners to cooperate. Parents of students with ASD are known to have a lower level of life quality (Cappe & Boujut, 2016; Osborne & Reed, 2008; Sankey, Derguy, Clément, Ilg, & Cappe, 2019). On the other hand, the parents participating in study 3 also showed a high level of initiative to support their children and the school during the transition, which could be used effectively (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Fortuna, 2014).

Consequently, they recommended other parents to remain persistent: “*The advice is to keep going. And it's a battle with institutions, you have to know that.*” (study 3, parent 5, T3), but they also mentioned the limits of their power: “*So we played, we won, but we could have lost.*” (study 3, parent 7, T2). These limits have also been identified in the other studies (Hamilton & Wilkinson, 2016; Nuske et al., 2019; Stoner et al., 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2017), which is why the recommendations developed through this research project address the parents only as supporters of their children (Table 4-4).

**Table 4-4: Recommendations addressing parents and potential obstacles**

<i>Parents</i>	
<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Potential obstacles</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• including students in the decision process</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preparing the child               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ open dialogue with the child</li> <li>○ practical preparations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fear of the unknown</li> <li>• insecurity through lack of information</li> </ul>

The main obstacles that have been identified for teachers (Table 4-5) are time and organizational constraints, as well as a lack of training concerning students with ASD, which leads to a feeling of incompetence and in the worst case to refusal.

**Table 4-5: Recommendations addressing teachers and potential obstacles**

<i>Teachers</i>	
<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Potential obstacles</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exchanging information between school types</li> <li>• joint projects between primary and secondary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of cooperation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ transfer to private secondary school</li> <li>○ change of school districts</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><u>At primary school:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parent-teacher conference to explain to provide parents with information</li> <li>• encouraging parents to establish contact with the secondary school</li> <li>• practicing secondary school student competencies (e.g. handling the calendar)</li> </ul> <p><u>At secondary school:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being present during transition activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of awareness among teachers</li> <li>• organizational and time constraints</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing strategy for the collaboration with a teaching assistant               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ clear share of responsibilities</li> <li>○ support for orientation and work organization</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of presence of a teaching assistant               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ absence</li> <li>○ insufficient number of hours</li> <li>○ late arrival</li> <li>○ miscomprehension of teaching assistants as an adaptation measure</li> <li>○ lack of students' autonomy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• classroom organization</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adapting contents and teaching methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of adaptation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ lack of experience and knowledge in regard to ASD</li> <li>○ misunderstandings, feeling of inability</li> <li>○ lack of adequate teaching methods</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• constant observation of and communication on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ students' learning process</li> <li>○ group work</li> <li>○ social misunderstandings or exclusion processes</li> <li>○ homework situation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher workload</li> </ul>

In an inclusive education system all teachers should be able to handle heterogeneous learner groups, probably in collaboration with specialized teachers (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009). In the current state of the French school system, the special needs education teachers are mainly present in the ULIS, whereas the mainstream teachers remain exclusively in the mainstream classrooms. Exchange rather happens on the fly and based on the teachers disposition to be present for colleagues. A deeper collaboration, which needs time resources, could be beneficial for both students and teachers and would be a further step towards inclusive education since all students would have the possibility to benefit from specialized regard (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

However, study 3 also showed that general education teachers are probably better equipped to teach heterogeneous groups than assumed by parents or the teachers themselves. Most of the parents were satisfied with their work and the special needs education teachers underlined the pedagogical abilities of their general education colleagues. Nevertheless, the idea, that *“all that can be deployed for [the student with ASD] is also very beneficial for all the others.”* (study 3, teacher 17, T1), does not seem wide-spread, although it may increase the acceptance of specific arrangements and differentiation. Several aspects addressing the teachers depend on the organization of secondary schools (Table 4-6) and administrative procedures (Table 4-7).

Secondary schools seem to have acknowledged how challenging the transition is for involved stakeholders. Most participants reported visits, meetings or other transition activities, which facilitated the transition for parents and students. However, organizational and time constraints were the main obstacles; meetings or regular communication were difficult to realize. One can assume, that times for communication with parents, colleagues or other staff are not integrated into teachers' schedules, but are added upon the regular workload.

Schad (2019, p. 16) encourages the creation of a “*climate of open and supportive workplace communication and positive interactions between colleagues*” in order to increase job satisfaction, which in turn may reduce the risk for burnout among teachers (Boujut et al., 2017; Schad, 2017). The ministry’s newsletter announces additional dialogue time for meetings with parents (MENJ, 2019a), but only for primary school teachers. An extension to all teachers may be useful to consider.

**Table 4-6: Recommendations addressing secondary schools and potential obstacles**

<i>Secondary schools</i>	
<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Potential obstacles</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offering information and dialogue at open doors or other low-threshold activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parents’ lack of ability/initiative/networks to obtain information</li> <li>• time and organizational constraints</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transition activities and preparatory meetings should be integrated into the school’s year planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time and organizational constraints</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if class teachers are not yet attributed nominating a member of the staff to join the transition planning team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of awareness among teachers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enabling short and easy communication paths between parents and teachers or other relevant staff through an online portal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication difficulties               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ overwhelming number of contact persons</li> <li>○ imbalanced communication</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• informing classmates and school staff about ASD</li> <li>• establishing a dialogue on special needs, differences and exclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethical considerations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing teachers with access to information, training, equipment, exchange and collaboration with other teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of resources, information and time</li> </ul>

Teachers would be better able to participate in transition planning, if they knew beforehand that they would have a student with ASD in class and if a teaching assistant will be present. Most administrative issues addressed in the recommendations are related to the development of an inclusive school in France (Table 4-7).

**Table 4-7: Recommendations addressing the administrative level and potential obstacles**

<i>Administrative and political level</i>	
<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Potential obstacles</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of guidance for parents in order to find an adequate instruction option</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perception that mainstream schools are not prepared for students with ASD</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing schools with further resources if necessary               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ short training on ASD</li> <li>○ information material</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• financial constraints</li> </ul>

○ suggestions for classroom management and teaching practices	
• shorter duration of attribution of teaching assistants	• complexity of administrative processes
• evaluation and adjustment of <i>Devoirs faits</i>	
• integrating content on teaching in heterogeneous groups and basic information on special needs in teachers' initial and continuous training	

Teacher training in France is transforming and new teachers receive training on dealing with heterogeneous classes. The new online platform *Cap Ecole inclusive* may provide further support for teachers (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018), though practical experience plays an important role (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014) and should therefore be complemented by continuous training that allows teachers to expand their skills.

According to the newsletter, the ministry plans to achieve a “*fully inclusive*” school by 2022 (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018). The increase of students with special needs in mainstream schools is presented as a proof that the schools meet the demands of society. However, France has been criticized by international observers for the separation of students, particularly of students with ASD in medico-social institutions (Conseil des droits de l'homme, 2019). The new national strategy on autism plans a stronger integration of instruction options in mainstream schools for students attending medico-social institutions.

ULIS are introduced as a measure for inclusive education in official documents (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018). Students supported by an ULIS attend lessons in the mainstream class when a team decides that they are able to follow the lesson based on their knowledge, skills, work attitude and behavior. This contradicts to some extent the international inclusion principles that demand an adaptation of the school to the child and not the other way round and to avoid exclusions within the mainstream school (Ainscow, 2005; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; D'Alessio, 2013; World Conference on Special Needs Education, 1994). ULIS can be seen as a means for integration, but as an inclusion measure they remain controversial. Nevertheless, the autism strategy as well as the plan for an inclusive school by 2022, contains an expansion of ULIS at all school types, especially at the pre-school level (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du

Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018; Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b).

The results of study 2 indicate that the primary-secondary transition is viewed by lay people as a process the student has to adapt to. This may indicate that a mindset for inclusive schools which adapts to the students is not yet reflected in the society, which in turn could explain why parents still report difficulties considering mainstream schools as an adequate schooling option for their child with ASD. On the other hand, the number of students with ASD attending mainstream schools is rising. Furthermore, a number of measures that have been implemented or announced are in line with the recommendations developed in this thesis project.

Most of these measures for the primary-secondary transition are not focused on students with ASD, but they seem to cover their needs to a large extent. Furthermore, new measures which have recently been introduced such as a raise of pre-school attendance of young children with ASD (Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018b) do not target the transition directly, but may have an impact on school transitions of future student cohorts. It was confirmed, that the needs of students with and without ASD during the transition to secondary school do not differ extremely, though differences remain. Some additional attention to the particularities of students with ASD would be necessary in order to be in line with the recommendations that were developed in this research project.

Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of implementation as several measures look well in the texts, but were not mentioned by any of the study participants or mentioned as missing. This lack could either be explained by a lack of resources or by the time period of the research project. Many measures were only introduced during or after the time of data collection, such as homework support in 2017 or pre-entry meetings in 2019. Their impact could, therefore, not be fully captured. A continuation of the project or a new research project evaluating these measures would be necessary to know if they improve the transition experience of the involved stakeholders.

## 4.6 Methodological Implications

The results do not only provoke a discussion on political implications but also challenge the methodological choices taken in this research project. In order to find out how a successful transition from primary to secondary school can be planned and conducted for students with ASD, three different studies have been conducted (cf. chapter 3). Their combined results were

used to develop recommendations for this transition (cf. chapter 4.4). In the following, the usefulness of this methodological approach is going to be discussed in the light of the experiences that were gained during the process and the quality of the data.

The entire research project was conducted in the French education system, but it was based on literature that focuses on other education systems. This is because it covers a research gap in France, which has been covered to some extent in studies of other countries. These studies provided both topics that may be relevant in the context of transition as well as methodological hints. They have to be viewed in their national context and cannot be simply transferred to another country (Waldow, 2011). However, the literature review showed that the anglophone studies from different countries covered similar aspects of the transition process, which indicates that there are similarities in the transition process despite the different organization of national education systems.

Furthermore, the question of a primary-secondary transition of students with ASD is embedded in the debate on inclusive education. Provoked by international institutions inclusive education developed as a global trend in many education systems (Ainscow, 2005; D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009). Like France, many other countries restructure their education systems in order to become inclusive. Comparative studies on education play an important role in this context and show how different countries share the same challenges and try to find solutions that are tailored to their national context by concurrently following international developments (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Giangreco et al., 2014; L. J. Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011).

The use of different methodologies has achieved rich results in regard to the question of a successful transition. The procedure began with international literature and was followed by the collection of empirical data from the field. This step was necessary in order to account for the particularities of the French education system and its implications for the transition. The method triangulation enabled the collection of thick and rich data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Nevertheless, a stronger focus on quantitative methods could be envisaged. Surveys or questionnaires provide factual information and detect connections between different factors. Study 3 showed that interviews provide better insights into processes, whereas questionnaires could depict long-term trends. Questionnaires on the primary-secondary transition exist (S. Bailey & Baines, 2012; Mackenzie, McMaugh, & O'Sullivan, 2012; Sirsch, 2003), but they were neither focused on students with ASD nor perceived as adequate for the French context.

Though questionnaires could provide a better idea of the big picture, qualitative methods would probably remain necessary to explain certain phenomena. This may be explained by the explorative character of the different studies. Moreover, study 3 shows that the transition is a very individual process. In combination with the various profiles of students with ASD, this leads to a diverse range of individual transitions, which could not be reflected in generalized quantitative data. Since the target group (students with ASD transferring to secondary school) is rather small, it will be a challenge to collect enough data to obtain a representative sample for a quantitative study. A close collaboration between research, the political and administrative institutions and a certain number of schools could probably be useful in order to enlarge the sample.

In this study, the literature revealed the lack of a definition of a successful transition. In order to research a transition process a well grounded definition seemed crucial. Consequently, criteria for a successful primary-secondary transition for students with ASD were developed in study 1 that served as the basis for the construction of research instruments in study 3. However, a completely explorative approach would also have been possible. One could imagine narrative interviews with different stakeholders who can share any experience they consider relevant in the context of transition without being guided from topic to topic by an interviewer. These interviews could be used for snowball-sampling, which would probably include a range of stakeholders, who were not presented in this study.

Apart from interviews, other qualitative methods are imaginable. Some studies used students' drawings, structured diaries or letters (Akos, 2004; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). However, these demand more time and effort from the student and therefore risk lower participation. This study also showed that writing is a major difficulty for students with ASD. Thus diaries would need to be very structured and not too demanding, which limits their scope at the same time. For the analysis of drawings or diaries a conversation or interview with the child would be necessary to be sure to interpret the data in the intended way. However, this could have been a source of rich information complementary to the interviews with the students.

Despite the difficulties the student interviews posed and the limited data that could be retrieved from them, this study underlines the importance to include students in research that concerns them. Since students with ASD may experience their lives differently (Barrow & Hannah, 2012; Conn, 2015), it is important that they themselves provide information. A parent commented on study 3: *"I was surprised by his answers because it's true that we have*

*a different perspective so it's true that this is still important to share all this with the teachers and with the teaching assistant” (study 3, parent 15, T2).*

The triangulation of data sources proved that students sometimes perceived their situation differently compared to their teachers and parents. If parents and teachers do not understand the students, they cannot provide satisfying information on them for the research. Only the students can try to explain themselves and their perception of the situation (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999; McNeilly, Macdonald, & Kelly, 2015). The study also showed that this is not easy in many cases, which raises ethical questions: Do under-aged children freely decide to participate in a study or are they guided by their parents? Although studies argue, that especially students with special needs need their parents' support for decisions like this, it limits their free choice as a matter of course (McNeilly et al., 2015).

The inclusion of children in the research process needs more and a different kind of preparation (Conn, 2015; Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999; Fuchs, 2008; Nathanson & Crank, 2004). An adequate research method should be chosen. Many research methods are based on communication, which can be a challenge in the research with individuals with ASD, who by definition have difficulties with communication (APA, 2013). Semi-structured interviews can still be considered an adequate method in comparison to other qualitative methods. The interview guide allows the asking of specific questions along with follow-up or modified questions. A narrative or biographical interview with only one opening question would have been even more complicated.

As has been discussed above, other research methods that do not need verbal communication are to be considered, although they may contain other challenges. Barrow and Hannah (2012) propose computer-assisted interviewing and also ethnographic approaches could be envisaged, especially since longitudinal data on a long-term process is useful.

A longitudinal study design has been developed based on the literature indicating that the transition to secondary school takes more time for students with ASD than the first few days of the new school year (Deacy et al., 2015; Hargreaves et al., 1990; Tso & Strnadová, 2017). The research project covers the entire first school year at secondary school. The results confirm that this procedure is advantageous, since it captures developments in the long-term, which could not be captured by a single interview. This may indicate that additional data from an even later time could be interesting, e.g. in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, in order to see how the transition to the next grade has been managed in comparison to the primary-secondary transition.

In this study, students, parents and teachers were identified as key stakeholders and the sampling of study participants started with the families and followed an indirect procedure. This was a necessary compliance with the guidelines of the ethics committee which evaluated and validated the research project (cf. Annex F). The small potential study population, time constraints and ethical considerations were obstacles in the sampling process and the reason for the small sample size. Inverse sampling could have achieved a larger participation of teachers. However, the process would have required contacting the academic inspections, followed by contacting the schools before communicating with teachers, which is very time-consuming. In addition, this method still does not provide contact with the families.

To sum up, the methodology, which has been developed for this research project, has been adequate in order to respond to the research questions. Its particular strength was the application of different methods to approach research questions from different angles. Furthermore, the triangulation of data sources allowed a comprehensive picture of the primary-secondary transition of students with ASD in France. An important factor was the longitudinal design that captured developments and changes in the long-term, which proved to be important in order to understand the different challenges the various stakeholders may encounter at certain times.

## 4.7 Limitations

Like any research project, this one also has its shortcomings. Some limitations have already been mentioned in the individual studies (cf. chapter 3), however, others concern the construction of the research project as a whole and therefore need to be discussed comprehensively.

Although several studies (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Leroux-Boudreault & Poirier, 2017) offer before and after data on the transition, it was decided for this research project to focus on the time after the school transfer. The main concern was, that a pre-transition data collection would impact transition planning, or in the worst case, provoke anxieties among participants regarding the question if preparation aspects are missing. The idea was to explore how the transition in France is planned and conducted, therefore, it was important not to interfere with the procedures implemented. Nevertheless, one can argue that information about the preparation phase obtained in the retrospective is less valid, since memories are faint (Bryman, 2012; Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999; Tollefson, Usher,

Francis, & Owens, 2001). For example, the students had difficulties remembering the procedures that have happened before the summer vacation.

It has been said that the sample of students and teachers for study 3 was probably too small to achieve data saturation. Apart from that its composition can be criticized. The final recommendations touch stakeholders that have not been included in this research project, such as the reference teachers, teaching assistants or school directors. Their implication could have enriched the results since they could have provided additional and different regards. Primary school teachers who know their students very well, for example, are an ideal interlocutor between students, parents and secondary school teachers. Their role was probably underestimated in this study and could have provided interesting results. In addition, teachers recommended teaching assistants as further interview partners since they spend more time with the students and are probably better informed about the students' everyday life. The inclusion of teaching assistants has been considered but rejected due to time constraints and the guidelines of the ethics committee that had validated the original sampling of key stakeholders.

The study focuses on a specific group in an already specific student population: students with ASD who attend a mainstream secondary school. It, therefore, neglects the various schooling options students with special needs in France have. The students who are instructed at home or in a medico-social institution probably experience a completely different transition. In order to get the whole picture a wider range of schooling realities would need to be included.

But even then it remains the specific group of students. In the school year 2017/2018 about 130 000 students with intellectual disabilities, among them students with ASD, attended a mainstream school, meaning a mainstream class, perhaps with the support of an ULIS. At the same time ca. 35 000 students were taught in medico-social institutions (MEN & MESRI, 2018b). Furthermore, a 13%-decrease of attendance between primary and secondary school can be observed among students with ASD. These numbers indicate that a significant number of students with ASD do not reach the secondary school level. If the recommendations developed in this study reach their aim to provide better conditions for the primary-secondary transition, they may enable and increase the secondary school attendance of students, who are nowadays not considered for mainstream education at secondary level. Nevertheless, the situation of these students and the reasons for this situation are not reflected or mentioned in this research project. This would be important complementary information, which could be obtained in further research.

## 4.8 Perspectives

Some ideas for further research projects have been announced in the previous sections. In the following projects, which may expand the existing project, deepen the understanding of particular results or improve the study design, are presented.

This research project identified a wide range of topics in the context of transition. Each of the various dimensions of the primary-secondary transition would benefit from further investigation in order to complete the picture. The question of evaluation of academic performance is one topic that is of international interest and needs to be researched to achieve inclusive education systems as targeted in many countries. A working group has been announced to work on this question in France (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018), thus it could be interesting to follow the work process and evaluate its outcomes.

Communication and cooperation have been identified as the most important aspects for a successful transition. However, establishing them is a complex challenge that may provoke school development processes. A scientific evaluation of these processes would be interesting in order to construct role models, which can be transferred to other schools or even other countries.

Another very relevant research question would be, to what extent the recommendations developed in this study concerning to students with ASD can be beneficial for other students with other kinds of special needs, or even typically developing students. The fact that students with ASD often have comorbidities, that need to be considered in the transition process is an indicator that the needs of students with ADHD, as one example, are probably covered to some extent by the developed recommendations.

Comparative studies between different education systems may offer interesting insights as the first study has shown. International studies have been used to develop criteria for a successful transition, which were in large parts applicable to the French context. These criteria could be employed to evaluate existing or new transition tools.

The sampling for study 3 can be criticized and needs to be improved for further studies. The sampling conditions remain difficult, however, this study provided ideas on how to proceed differently. An expansion of the sample is highly recommended for several reasons. First, the teachers' perspectives have not been sufficiently represented in this research project, although teachers are among the key stakeholders. Second, a larger sample would allow the collection of quantitative data, to have a clearer idea of how the primary-secondary transition in France

is organized and which measures are successfully implemented. Third, a number of stakeholders who are involved in the transition have been neglected in this research project. This refers, for example, to teaching assistants or the primary school teachers and can be expanded to school directors, the school administration, reference teachers, therapists and many more. A case study design could be employed in order to depict the transition process in its entirety taking into account its complexity and interdisciplinary challenges.

## 4.9 Conclusion and Outlook

This research project aimed to find out how a successful transition from primary to secondary school for students with ASD can be established. As a first step it provided criteria for a successful transition (study 1). These criteria enable the construction of transition programs or the evaluation of existing transition tools, specifically designed for students with ASD.

Study 1, moreover, led to the construction of the empirical studies (study 2 and 3). Study 2 confirmed the results of study 1 and identified to what extent the social representations of the transition are different depending on whether people consider or not a student with ASD transitioning to secondary school. It showed that adaptation, integration and good school results are of main importance for both groups, but also the relevance of support, that was only strong with regard to students with ASD.

Study 3 confirmed the results of studies 1 and 2 to a large extent. It gave an important insight into how the transition from primary to secondary school of students with ASD is planned, organized, conducted and perceived in France. Enablers and barriers in the context of transition were identified by the stakeholders and discussed with the existing literature. This enabled the development of recommendations for a successful transition to secondary school for students with ASD in France. The recommendations integrated existing and new measures that have been implemented or announced for a better transition to secondary school. These measures were discussed and, where necessary, modifications, clarifications or extensions were suggested based on the results of the three studies as well as former research.

Therefore, this research contributes to the small corpus of international literature by providing context about another country. The French education system and education policy has on the one hand its own particularities, but on the other hand, it follows similar global trends and, therefore, faces the same challenges as other countries.

The focus of French policies on individuals with ASD was beneficial for this project. The autism plans have led to a visibility of ASD in different policy fields, which did not exist

before and does not exist for other kinds of special needs or marginalizations. A number of research or other projects concerning autism have been launched and several measures to promote inclusive education and a better transition have been introduced or announced during the time of the research project. An exchange between research and practice might be very useful in this context, in order to aid in the evaluation and improvement of these processes. A good example for such collaboration is a guide for the transition from lower to upper secondary school, which has been published in 2019 by the Académie Strasbourg. It uses a very comprehensive approach, addresses various potential stakeholders and covers a wide range of aspects, that are also relevant for the primary-secondary transition (Académie Strasbourg, 2019).<sup>10</sup>

D'Alessio (2013) claims that inclusive education demands a radical change of school. Although France aims to achieve a fully inclusive school by 2022 (MEN & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018), this radical change is rather avoided. This has implications regarding the primary-secondary transition. In a fully inclusive school some challenges and questions would not arise such as the school choice. However, the maintenance of various schooling options is privileged and seen as a step towards inclusive education, although it contradicts the international definitions of inclusive education to some extent and complexifies the transition situation for the stakeholders.

Nevertheless, many useful measures concerning the primary-secondary transition are already formally established and more promising ideas have been announced within the current state of the education system. Other strategies are not formalized and leave their allocation limited, thus providing some students, parents and teachers with excellent transitions and leaving others behind with disappointment. A number of recommendations would demand school development processes concerning the roles of teachers at the transition, the organization of work in interdisciplinary teams at primary and secondary school and the cooperation with parents and external agents.

*“Research shows that more needs to be done to facilitate transitions and that educators have the ability to do so.”*, Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007, p. 5) state in regard to the general primary-secondary school transition and it can be added, that also students, their parents and other involved stakeholders have these abilities. The research project showed that a successful primary-secondary transition for students with ASD is not a miracle or a question of luck, as it

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<sup>10</sup> A collaboration between this research project and the Académie Strasbourg has been established in order to enable exchange and mutual support regarding research on transition issues of students with ASD.

was sometimes perceived by the study participants, but a complex challenge that demands veritable joint efforts and perseverance by a large number of stakeholders.

# Résumé français

## Introduction

Après la publication de la loi sur l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes en 2005, qui privilégie l'éducation inclusive plutôt que l'éducation spécialisée et séparée pour les élèves ayant des besoins éducatifs particuliers (Legifrance, 2005), le nombre d'élèves ayant des besoins éducatifs particuliers fréquentant les établissements scolaires ordinaires a plus que doublé (Ministère de l'Education Nationale & Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation, 2018). Au niveau secondaire, il y a presque quatre fois plus d'élèves ayant des besoins éducatifs particuliers inscrits dans les écoles ordinaires qu'en 2006. En moyenne, ce nombre augmente de 7,3% par an depuis 2013.

Dans ce même mouvement est observé un nombre croissant d'enfants présentant un Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme (TSA) qui réalisent une transition de l'école primaire à l'école secondaire (collège). Cette transition est événement majeur dans la vie d'un enfant, qu'il ait ou non un besoin particulier (Akos, 2004; Coffey, 2013; Symonds & Galton, 2014; van Rens, Haelermans, Groot, & Maassen van den Brink, 2018). Les élèves atteints de TSA ont plus de difficulté à faire la transition et sont plus susceptibles de rencontrer des difficultés à long terme (Batten, 2005; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Mandy et al., 2016; Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantam, & Williams, 2008).

Ce qui suit donne un bref aperçu de la façon dont le TSA est défini, et comment et dans quelles conditions la transition s'effectue dans le contexte de l'éducation inclusive. Notre contribution de recherche dans cette thèse est constituée de trois études présentées ici. Au cours de la discussion, les résultats des différentes études seront discutés afin d'élaborer des recommandations pour une transition réussie.

## Contexte théorique

### Trouble du spectre de l'autisme

Selon le DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) le TSA est un trouble neurodéveloppemental qui se caractérise par des « déficits persistants de

communication sociale et d'interaction sociale dans des multiples contextes » et des « comportements, d'intérêts ou d'activités restreints et répétitifs ». Ces symptômes doivent être présents dès la petite enfance et causer une déficience dans des domaines importants de la vie (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Dans la vie quotidienne, les personnes atteintes de TSA ont souvent de la difficulté à accepter les changements et à comprendre les conventions sociales (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr, & Smith, 2006).

Les études supposent que 50 à 75 % des personnes atteintes de TSA ont une déficience intellectuelle (Mannion, Leader, & Healy, 2013; Matson & Shoemaker, 2009). De plus, des concomitances médicales ou psychiatriques surviennent souvent en combinaison avec le TSA : anxiété, dépression, Trouble du Déficit de l'Attention Hyperactivité, trouble oppositionnel, épilepsie, troubles du sommeil, problèmes digestifs (Gabis, Pomeroy, & Andriola, 2005; Haute Autorité de Santé, 2010; Mannion et al., 2013; Simonoff et al., 2008). Il est important d'en tenir compte, car elles ont possiblement des conséquences importantes sur la vie de l'élève à l'école.

## La transition primaire-secondaire

Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007, p. 2) décrivent les transitions comme des « processus temporels qui traversent les questions sociales, académiques et procédurales ». Cette définition contient la notion de divers changements et les applique de façon structurée à la transition scolaire. La transition au collège signifie de passer d'une école, où les élèves sont les plus âgés, à un établissement, où ils sont de nouveau les plus jeunes. Les collèges sont généralement des établissements plus grands, les cours sont dispensés par plusieurs enseignants, les changements de salle de classe sont plus fréquents, de nouvelles matières sont ajoutées, etc. Cela signifie une demande accrue d'indépendance et d'autonomie pour s'organiser (Akos, 2004; Bailey, Giles, & Rogers, 2015; Coelho & Romão, 2017; Coffey, 2013; Pratt & George, 2005; van Rens et al., 2018). Surtout, la transition se fait parallèlement au début de la puberté (Akos, 2004; Bailey et al., 2015; Dillon & Underwood, 2012).

Les études reconnaissent que les élèves ayant des besoins particuliers ont plus de difficultés à faire face à la transition que leurs pairs au développement typique (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Evangelou et al., 2008; Foley, Foley, & Curtin, 2016; Galton, Gray, & Ruddick, 1999; Hughes, Banks, & Terras, 2013). En particulier les élèves atteints de

TSA ont plus de difficulté à faire la transition et sont plus susceptibles de rencontrer des difficultés à long terme (Batten, 2005; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Wainscot et al., 2008).

Les élèves français passent au collège à l'âge de 11 ans. Pour cette transition du primaire au secondaire, le Ministère de l'Éducation (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2011, 2017) se concentre sur deux aspects principaux : la continuité de l'apprentissage et le travail en commun des enseignants. Le tableau suivant (Table 0-1) résume les outils et les mesures de transition qui sont censés être en place afin de faciliter la transition pour tous les élèves.

Table 0-1: Outils de transition dans le système éducatif français

<b><i>Continuité de l'apprentissage pendant les préparatifs de la transition</i></b>	
Livret scolaire unique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• documenter les compétences</li> <li>• favoriser la communication entre l'école, l'élève et la famille</li> </ul>
Conseil école-collège	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assurer la continuité pédagogique et éducative par des réunions (principal du collège, inspecteur de l'éducation nationale chargé de la circonscription du premier degré, personnels désignés par le principal du collège, membres du conseil des maîtres)</li> </ul>
PPRE Passerelle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• déterminer les mesures à prendre pour surmonter les difficultés que peuvent rencontrer les élèves ayant de faibles résultats scolaires</li> </ul>
<b><i>Continuité de l'apprentissage après la transition scolaire</i></b>	
Devoir faits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• temps pour faire les devoirs sous supervision au collège</li> <li>• réduire les inégalités en matière d'aide aux devoirs à domicile</li> </ul>
Accompagnement pédagogique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diversification et différenciation</li> </ul>
Accompagnement personnalisé	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• l'enseignement complémentaire dans certaines matières</li> </ul>
Accompagnement éducatif	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• temps d'études dirigées</li> <li>• participation à des activités culturelles, artistiques ou sportives</li> <li>• renforcer l'utilisation des langues vivantes</li> </ul>
<b><i>Travail en commun des enseignants</i></b>	
Echange d'informations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meilleure connaissance des attendus, des contenus et des programmes respectifs</li> </ul>
Projets interdegrés	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• partager les cultures pédagogiques</li> </ul>
Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cibler les objectifs et préciser la méthodologie et les moyens</li> </ul>

Si les modalités et obstacles de l'inclusion au primaire pour les élèves avec un TSA sont bien documentés (Paquet, Clément, & Magerotte, 2012), ce n'est pas le cas pour le secondaire où l'inclusion est plus récente. Considérant que le contexte socio-culturel et institutionnel diffère entre la France et les pays anglo-saxons, tant dans la formation des enseignants, l'organisation

de la scolarité que des services offerts aux élèves, il importe de s'interroger spécifiquement sur la transition du premier au second degré pour les élèves avec un TSA.

Par ailleurs si, comme évoqué, des modalités sont mises en œuvre pour faciliter la transition, il n'est paradoxalement pas défini ce qu'est une transition réussie.

## Méthodologie

Le présent projet de recherche vise à expliquer ce que signifie une transition réussie du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves présentant un TSA. De plus, il cherche à obtenir des informations sur la façon dont la transition est organisée, réalisée et perçue et sur les facteurs qui la favorisent ou l'entravent. Ces informations sont utilisées pour améliorer la situation des élèves atteints de TSA en transition vers le collège en France en élaborant des recommandations pour une transition réussie qui peuvent être appliquées par les familles et les établissements scolaires.

Cette thèse porte sur quatre grandes questions de recherche avec des sous-questions supplémentaires.

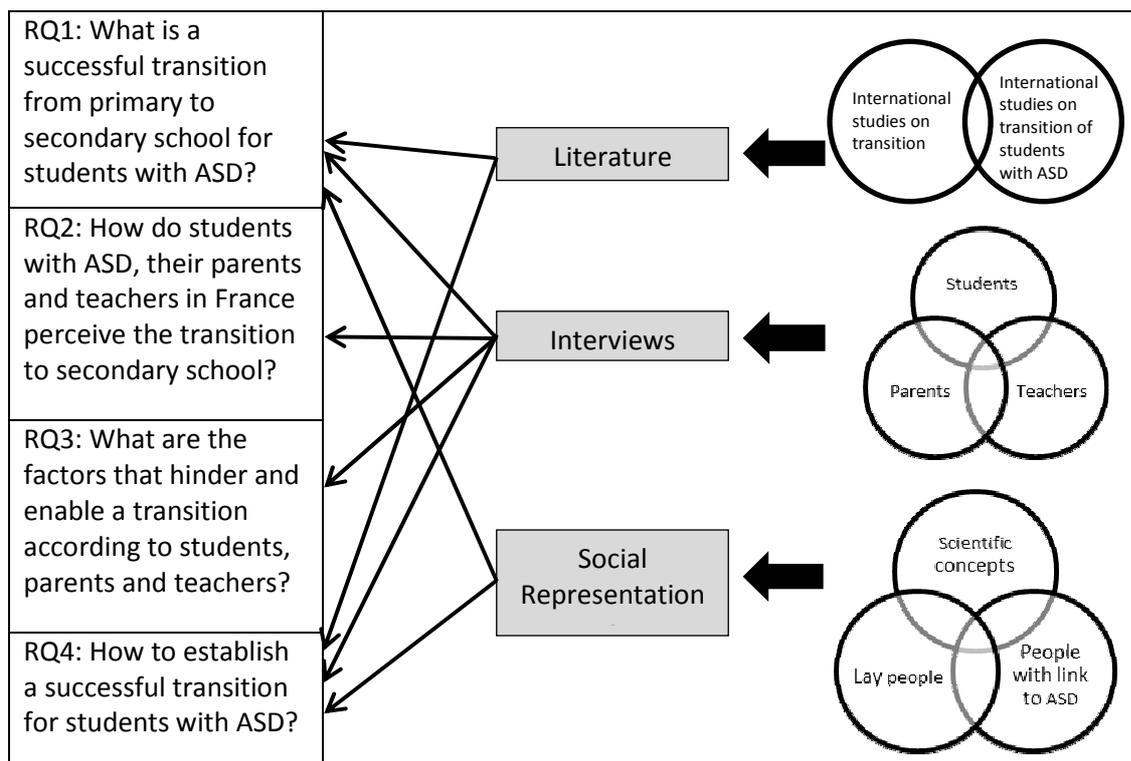
1. Qu'est-ce qu'une transition réussie du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves atteints de TSA ?
  - a. Comment définit-on une transition primaire-secondaire réussie en général ?
  - b. Y a-t-il une différence entre les élèves avec et sans TSA en ce qui concerne la transition ?
2. Comment les élèves atteints de TSA, leurs parents et leurs enseignants en France perçoivent-ils la transition vers le collège ?
  - a. Comment la transition vers le collège est-elle préparée, planifiée et conduite ?
  - b. Comment les différentes parties prenantes vivent-elles et évaluent-elles cette transition ?
  - c. Ces perceptions changent-elles avec le temps ?
3. Quels sont les facteurs qui, selon les élèves, les parents et les enseignants, freinent et facilitent la transition ?
  - a. Quelles stratégies les participants jugent-ils utiles pour faciliter la transition entre le primaire et le secondaire ?
  - b. Quels obstacles les participants identifient-ils en ce qui concerne la transition ?
4. Comment établir une transition réussie pour les élèves atteints de TSA ?

Les études existantes sur la transition primaire-secondaire montrent que des approches qualitatives (Cremin, Healy, & Gordon, 2017; Dann, 2011; Fortuna, 2014; Jindal-Snape et al., 2006; Tobin et al., 2012; Tso & Strnadová, 2017) et quantitatives (Deacy, Jennings, & O'Halloran, 2015; Mandy et al., 2015, 2016; Peters & Brooks, 2016) sont appliqués pour examiner certains phénomènes dans le cadre de la transition. Étant donné que les questions de recherche de ce projet sont larges et ciblent différentes questions relatives à la transition primaire-secondaire, une approche mixte, où les approches qualitatives et quantitatives se complètent (Hannah & Topping, 2013; Makin, Hill, & Pellicano, 2017) a été utilisée.

De plus, un plan d'étude qui tient compte de plusieurs acteurs a été élaboré suivant un modèle d'études multi-informateurs telles que celles de Makin et al. (2017) ou Jindal-Snape et al. (2006), et ce afin de reconnaître la complexité de la situation de la transition. D'après des études antérieures, les élèves atteints de TSA, leurs parents et leurs enseignants ont été identifiés comme des acteurs clés. Une triangulation des sources de données (Flick, Uwe, von Kardorff, Ernst, & Steinke, Ines, 2004; Oppermann, 2000; Thurmond, 2001) pourrait être réalisée. En effet, les trois groupes de participants offrent trois perspectives différentes sur le même phénomène. Au cours de l'analyse, ces différentes perspectives ont été comparées et contrastées les unes aux autres, ce qui améliore la compréhension de la transition pour chaque groupe de participants, mais tient également compte de la complexité de la transition. Dans ce projet, la triangulation a d'ailleurs pour but de rendre les données plus robustes afin d'en améliorer la validité en contrastant les résultats obtenus à partir de différentes sources (Oppermann, 2000).

Le tableau suivant (Table 0-2) montre comment les questions de recherche ont été abordées à l'aide de différentes méthodes et de la triangulation des sources de données.

Table 0-2: Utilisation de différentes méthodes et sources de données et leur application pour répondre aux questions de recherche (QR=question de recherche)



Trois études ont été réalisées : d’abord une revue de la littérature, puis une étude sur les représentations sociales d’une transition réussie et enfin une étude empirique dans laquelle les principaux acteurs (élèves, parents, enseignants) ont été interrogés sur leurs expériences et leurs perceptions de la transition.

## Contributions à la recherche

### Etude 1 : Revue de la littérature

Richter, M., Popa-Roch, M., & Clément, C. (2019). Successful Transition From Primary to Secondary School for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 33(3), 382–398.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2019.1630870>

Afin de savoir comment une transition de l’école primaire à l’école secondaire peut être menée avec des effets bénéfiques à court et à long terme, il est nécessaire de définir clairement ce qu’une transition réussie signifie réellement. Evangelou et al. (2008) est la seule étude récente qui présente les critères d’une transition réussie du primaire au secondaire :

- développer de nouvelles amitiés et améliorer leur estime de soi et leur confiance en soi
- être si bien intégrés dans la vie scolaire qu'ils n'ont causé aucune inquiétude à leurs parents
- manifester un intérêt croissant pour l'école et le travail scolaire
- s'habituer très facilement à leurs nouvelles routines et à l'organisation de l'école
- faire l'expérience de la continuité du programme d'études

Les élèves ayant des besoins particuliers sont mentionnés dans l'étude d'Evangelou et al. (2008), mais ils n'en sont pas l'objet principal. Ces critères ont néanmoins servi de lignes directrices pour l'analyse bibliographique sur les élèves atteints de TSA.

### Méthodologie

Seize articles scientifiques ont été sélectionnés sur la base des critères suivants : 1) ils se sont concentrés exclusivement sur les élèves atteints de TSA, 2) ils ont traité de la transition d'une école primaire à une école secondaire, et 3) ils ont inclus des recherches sur la situation après le changement d'établissement. Nous avons exclu les études 1) qui portaient sur d'autres transitions scolaires, 2) qui portaient sur la transition primaire-secondaire en général, 3) qui traitaient les élèves ayant des besoins particuliers comme un groupe homogène et 4) qui comprenaient des diagnostics autres que les TSA.

Afin de systématiser la littérature, une matrice conceptuelle (Webster & Watson, 2002) a été créée. Chacun des critères d'Evangelou et al (2008) présentés ci-dessus a été considéré comme un seul concept. De nouveaux concepts qui sont ressortis de l'analyse documentaire et qui n'ont pas été abordés par Evangelou et ses collaborateurs (2008) ont été ajoutés.

Les critères d'Evangelou et al. (2008) sont, dans une large mesure, conformes aux conclusions de l'analyse bibliographique portant sur les élèves atteints de TSA. La plupart des questions qui préoccupent les élèves en développement typique sont du même ordre pour les élèves atteints de TSA. Cependant, il est évident que le TSA pose ses propres défis, ce qui signifie que plusieurs aspects mentionnés dans la littérature sur la transition en général n'ont pas la même importance pour les élèves atteints de TSA ou n'ont pas encore fait l'objet de recherches suffisantes. Sur la base de l'analyse documentaire, les critères d'Evangelou et al. (2008) ont été modifiés et élargis (Table 0-3).

Table 0-3: Nouveaux critères pour une transition réussie du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves atteints de TSA

<b>Un processus de transition bien planifié et centré sur l'enfant, impliquant toutes les principales parties prenantes, a été mis en place, si...</b>
L'élève est un membre respecté de la classe.
Les résultats scolaires se maintiennent au même niveau ou à un niveau légèrement inférieur.
L'élève et ses professeurs entretiennent une relation positive entre eux.
L'élève connaît bien le nouveau bâtiment scolaire et ses personnes de référence.
La coopération et l'organisation du travail en équipe assurent la continuité du processus d'apprentissage.
Les enseignants se sentent autonomes et satisfaits dans leur travail quotidien.
Les parents connaissent bien l'école et son personnel et y voient un bon environnement pour leur enfant.

### Discussion

Les critères énumérés ci-dessus peuvent servir de base à l'élaboration d'instruments de recherche afin de donner un aperçu substantiel et objectif de la réussite de la transition du primaire au secondaire pour un enfant atteint de TSA et pour les autres acteurs. Elle permet en outre d'identifier les facteurs favorables ainsi que les obstacles auxquels les parties prenantes peuvent être confrontées pendant la période de transition. Étant donné que les critères tiennent compte du point de vue de toutes les principales parties prenantes (élèves, parents, enseignants et autres membres du personnel scolaire), ils donnent une image holistique de la situation complexe sous différents angles. L'analyse documentaire a montré qu'il est plus facile pour les élèves au développement typique de satisfaire à ces critères, alors qu'ils posent des difficultés aux élèves atteints de TSA. Néanmoins, les défis pendant la transition sont les mêmes pour tous les élèves, ce qui signifie que les critères pourraient aussi probablement être utilisés pour la transition des élèves sans TSA. De plus, ces critères permettent d'évaluer les programmes de transition existants ou de créer de nouveaux outils.

### Etude 2 : Représentations sociales

Richter, M., Rohmer, O., Popa-Roch, M., & Clément, C. (à soumettre). Social Representations of a Successful Transition to Secondary School: Perspectives on Students With and Without Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Les représentations sociales sont des notions et des idées qui sont partagées au sein d'un groupe social et qui montrent comment les gens donnent un sens à leur monde (Abric, 2001),

ce qui est crucial pour comprendre la dynamique des interactions sociales et, par conséquent, pour mettre en lumière les déterminants de la pratique sociale. Dans cette perspective pragmatique, les représentations sociales peuvent avoir un impact substantiel sur les comportements dans un domaine social spécifique comme l'éducation.

L'école est une partie très importante de la vie sociale et il est probable que les gens développent des représentations concernant ses différents aspects. Une comparaison entre les représentations sociales des personnes qui ont une référence ou non au TSA peut fournir des indices intéressants pour savoir si la transition d'un élève atteint de TSA est comprise différemment de celle d'un élève en développement typique, puisque leur signification est transmise par les représentations sociales.

### Méthodologie

Une méthode d'association libre a été utilisée sur le modèle de (Minibas-Poussard, 2003), basée sur (Vergès, Tyszka, & Vergès, 1994). Un questionnaire a été élaboré pour améliorer la collecte des associations spontanées avec la question : « Pour vous, qu'est-ce que réussir sa 6<sup>e</sup> ? ». Les participants ont été invités à noter les cinq premières idées ou expressions qui leur sont venues à l'esprit.

Les 1194 réponses des participants (N = 312) ont été regroupées en catégories thématiques. Les catégories sont fondées sur des revues de la littérature (Evangelou et al., 2008; Hughes et al., 2013; McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow, 2004; Richter, Popa-Roch, & Clément, 2019; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007; van Rens et al., 2018). Chaque réponse a été classée dans une seule catégorie (p. ex. « autonomie » ou « intégration »). Chaque réponse au questionnaire a été catégorisée par au moins deux et jusqu'à quatre chercheurs ou étudiants. Seules celles qui ont été classées dans une catégorie avec un accord interjuges d'au moins 65% ont été utilisées pour l'analyse ; 685 réponses de 279 participants ont pu être catégorisées avec cette méthode.

Au cours de l'étape suivante, les participants ont été divisés en deux groupes en fonction de la question « Lorsque vous avez répondu à la question "Pour vous qu'est-ce c'est "réussir sa 6<sup>e</sup>?", pensiez-vous à un élève avec autisme ? ». Cela a permis d'identifier les différences qui peuvent exister entre ces deux groupes de répondants. La fréquence de chaque catégorie a été mise en relation avec son rang.

Une matrice (Table 0-4, Table 0-5) à quatre champs permet une représentation visuelle des résultats. Dans la matrice, il y a un axe qui indique la fréquence avec laquelle les catégories sont nommées (élevée, faible). L'autre axe indique, si ce nommage intervient assez tôt (rang élevé) ou plutôt tard dans le dénombrement des réponses (rang faible).

Table 0-4: Représentation sociale d'une 6<sup>ème</sup> réussie, à l'exclusion des réponses des participants ayant un lien avec le TSA (N=236)

	<b>Rang élevé &lt;2,9</b>	<b>Rang faible &gt;2,9</b>
<b>Fréquence élevée F&gt;41</b>	Autonomie (79; 2,34) Adaptation (69; 1,86) Intégration (60; 1,78) Bonnes notes (41; 1,98)	Amis (57; 3,05) Grandir (42; 3,16)
<b>Fréquence faible F&lt;41</b>	Organisation (29; 2,59) Bien-être (22; 2,41) Attitude de travail (20; 2,45) Compétences (18; 2,43) Passer en 5 <sup>ème</sup> (18; 2,16) Epanouissement (17; 2,53) Changement (16; 2,63) Rythme (12; 2,83) Réussir (8; 2,5) Comprendre (6; 2,6) Repères (5; 2,8) Motivation (4; 2,5)	Confiance (16; 3,19) Apprendre (15; 3,46) Accompagnement (11; 3,55) Avenir (6; 3,3) Progression (5; 3,8) Demander (4; 3,25) Relation avec des adultes (4; 4) Relation avec d'autres élèves (4; 3) Responsabilité (4; 4) Envie (1; 3) Pédagogie (1; 5)

Table 0-5: Représentation sociale d'une 6<sup>ème</sup> réussie, selon les réponses des participants avec lien au TSA (N=82)

	<b>Rang élevé &lt;2,63</b>	<b>Rang faible &gt;2,63</b>
<b>Fréquence élevée F&gt;8</b>	Intégration (11; 1,75) Adaptation (9; 1,6) Bonnes notes (8; 1,5)	Accompagnement (9; 2,7)
<b>Fréquence faible F&lt;8</b>	Passer en 5 <sup>ème</sup> (5; 1,4) Amis (4; 2,5) Bien-être (4; 2,5) Relation avec d'autres élèves (3; 2,6) Organisation (3; 2) Relation avec des adultes (3; 2,6) Compétences (2; 1,5) Progression (1; 2) Réussir (1; 2)	Autonomie (6; 3) Grandir (4; 2,75) Confiance (2; 3) Apprendre (2; 3,5) Attitude de travail (1; 4) Envie (1; 4) Motivation (1; 4) Rythme (1; 4)

La case en haut à gauche, montrant les réponses catégorisées qui ont été produites souvent et à un rang élevé, présente le noyau central, qui détermine le sens et l'organisation des représentations que les deux groupes ont sur une transition primaire-secondaire réussie. Ainsi, pour le groupe de participants sans lien avec un élève atteint de TSA, les catégories « autonomie », « adaptation », « intégration » et « bonnes notes » apparaissent dans le noyau central. Dans le groupe qui a considéré spécifiquement un élève atteint de TSA, les catégories

sont « intégration », « adaptation » et « bonnes notes ». Cela montre que les résultats entre les deux groupes sont assez similaires, à l'exception de la catégorie « autonomie ».

Les résultats dans la case en haut à droite, correspondent aux catégories qui sont souvent nommées mais à un rang inférieur, montrent des différences entre les deux groupes. Dans le groupe qui considère un élève atteint de TSA, seule la catégorie « soutien » apparaît, qui ne joue pas un rôle majeur dans les résultats de l'autre groupe. Pour eux, « amis » et « grandir » sont présents, ce qui était beaucoup moins pertinent dans le groupe TSA.

### Discussion

L'étude a révélé que ces différentes perceptions peuvent découler des niveaux de connaissance et d'expérience en matière de TSA. D'après les données, nous supposons que le groupe qui a considéré un élève atteint de TSA pendant la tâche de l'association est familier avec les habiletés et les défis que les élèves peuvent avoir. Les représentations sociales peuvent avoir un impact sur le comportement. Dans ce cas, nos résultats pourraient mener à la conclusion qu'une meilleure compréhension des connaissances sur les TSA favorise un ajustement des pratiques concernant la transition primaire-secondaire.

L'augmentation de la scolarisation des élèves ayant des besoins particuliers, et en particulier des élèves présentant d'un TSA, dans les classes ordinaires, est encore une situation relativement nouvelle qui suscite parfois de l'anxiété. Néanmoins, nos résultats ont confirmé que la représentation de la transition au collège est assez similaire pour les élèves avec ou sans TSA. Ce résultat peut être considéré comme un signe encourageant des effets positifs de la législation en faveur de l'éducation inclusive.

### Etude 3 : Perceptions de la transition primaire-secondaire

Mechthild Richter, Eric Flavier, Maria Popa-Roch & Céline Clément (2019): Perceptions on the primary-secondary school transition from French students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their parents, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2019.1643145

Des études internationales (Dann, 2011; Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Fortuna, 2014; Hebron, 2017; Leroux-Boudreault & Poirier, 2017; Makin et al., 2017; Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007; Tso & Strnadová, 2017) font état des perceptions et des expériences des différents acteurs concernés au cours de la transition entre le primaire et le secondaire dans un contexte particulier. Considérant que le système éducatif français a mis en place des mécanismes de

promotion de l'éducation inclusive, en particulier au cours des quinze dernières années, des élèves français atteints de TSA et leur parents ont été interrogés sur leurs perceptions et leurs expériences concernant la transition. Il s'agit de répondre aux questions de recherche suivantes : Comment les élèves français atteints de TSA et leurs parents perçoivent-ils la transition vers l'école secondaire ? Ces perceptions changent-elles avec le temps ? Quels facteurs empêchent ou permettent une transition réussie selon les différentes parties prenantes ?

### Méthodologie

Les critères d'échantillonnage suivants ont été appliqués aux élèves : (1) un diagnostic de TSA, (2) un transfert d'une école primaire française à un collège française en 2017 et (3) une communication verbale. Des informations sur l'étude ont été envoyées à 134 associations françaises liées aux TSA et à des groupes liés aux TSA sur Facebook. Certaines familles pouvaient être contactées directement par l'intermédiaire des autorités académiques.

Au total, huit parents et six élèves ont été interrogés. Des entretiens semi-structurés ont été menés avec tous les participants à trois étapes au cours de l'année scolaire : au début (octobre/novembre 2017 ; T1), au milieu (février/mars 2018 ; T2) et à la fin de l'année scolaire (juin/juillet 2018 ; T3). Au total, 39 entrevues avec 15 participants ont été réalisées.

Les entrevues ont été analysées au moyen de l'analyse qualitative du contenu (AQC) qui utilise des systèmes de catégories afin d'analyser systématiquement les données textuelles (Mayring, 2014). Une affectation déductive par catégorie a été choisie.

L'analyse a suivi des étapes systématiques : (1) se familiariser avec les données, (2) développer des systèmes de catégories basés sur la littérature pour chaque groupe de participants (Table 0-6), (3) coder les données en assignant des parties des données textuelles à une certaine catégorie en utilisant le logiciel MAXQDA et (4) compiler les résultats en utilisant MAXQDA et interpréter en fonction des questions de recherche (Mayring, 2014).

Table 0-6: Système de catégories final pour le groupe de participants « parents », qui montre les catégories a priori de la littérature et comment elles se sont développées au cours des différents processus de codage.

<b>Categories from the literature</b> (Richter, Popa-Roch, et al., 2019)	<b>Categories obtained through QCA</b>
A well-planned, child-centered transition process involving all key stakeholders has been applied, when:	Planification de la transition
L'élève est un membre respecté de la classe.	Etre membre à part entière

Les résultats scolaires se maintiennent au même niveau ou à un niveau légèrement inférieur.	Progrès scolaire
L'élève et ses professeurs entretiennent une relation positive entre eux.	Se débrouiller
L'élève connaît bien le nouveau bâtiment scolaire et ses personnes de référence.	Caractéristique d'élève
La coopération et l'organisation du travail en équipe assurent la continuité du processus d'apprentissage. Les enseignants se sentent autonomes et satisfaits dans leur travail quotidien.	Organisation scolaire
Les parents connaissent bien l'école et son personnel et y voient un bon environnement pour leur enfant.	Situation parentale/familiale
	Evaluation de la transition

### Discussion

Les résultats montrent que les transitions vers le collège pour les élèves de cette étude étaient en général perçues comme étant réussies par tous les participants. Cette évaluation positive est appuyée par des recherches antérieures selon lesquelles la transition n'est pas nécessairement plus compliquée pour les élèves atteints de TSA (Barnard, Prior, Potter, & National Autistic Society, 2000). Comme les résultats l'ont confirmé, la transition est un processus à long terme qui prend du temps et qui est sujet aux changements. Par conséquent, la perception positive de la transition est demeurée la même au cours de l'année scolaire. Cependant, la perception de l'année scolaire elle-même était variable. Souvent, une euphorie initiale a été remplacée par des difficultés sociales, scolaires, administratives ou de communication. Dans certains cas, la situation s'est améliorée vers la fin de l'année scolaire, tandis que dans d'autres, il a fallu modifier l'horaire scolaire ou prendre d'autres mesures.

En comparant les résultats aux critères d'une transition réussie (Richter, Popa-Roch, et al., 2019), il apparaît que le contexte français est cohérent avec la littérature internationale à bien des égards, par exemple, le stress parental accru (Cremin et al., 2017; Tso & Strnadová, 2017) ou les difficultés à évaluer le rendement scolaire (Keen, Webster, & Ridley, 2016; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). D'autres aspects sont différents, voire opposés, par exemple le rôle de la relation élève-enseignant.

Cette étude montre qu'il existe des mesures distinctes qui pourraient simplifier la préparation à la transition, telles que la planification individualisée de la transition, l'attribution en amont des places et des auxiliaires de vie scolaire, des réunions d'orientation précoce et inclusive.

Les obstacles semblent souvent liés à un manque de communication ou à des procédures administratives : délais imprécis, manque d'information, décisions tardives. Le stress et l'insécurité des parties prenantes peuvent avoir un impact majeur sur le processus. Au

secondaire, les caractéristiques et les concomitances des TSA peuvent poser des défis comme la fatigue due aux troubles du sommeil, le manque de souplesse et les difficultés à maintenir des contacts sociaux (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Mannion et al., 2013; Wainscot et al., 2008).

## Discussion – Construction des recommandations

Afin d’élaborer des recommandations pour une transition réussie du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un TSA, nous considérons les résultats des trois études de cette thèse. La transition et ses différentes dimensions sont partagées par de nombreux acteurs différents et sont en même temps perçues différemment par chacun d’entre eux. Les intervenants ont fourni des idées et des stratégies intéressantes pour une transition réussie. En combinaison avec les connaissances issues d’études antérieures, des recommandations générales, qui devront être adaptées à chaque cas individuel et à chaque partie prenante individuelle, ont été élaborées. Ces lignes directrices sont censées être utiles pour les parties prenantes qui n’ont pas encore été confrontées à la transition du primaire au secondaire ou qui souhaiteraient l’améliorer.

Le tableau suivant (Table 0-7) donne un aperçu des recommandations qui s’adressent à quel(s) acteur(s) et à quels obstacles potentiels ils peuvent être confrontés. Il s’agit d’une combinaison des mesures existantes et des recommandations proposées, qui ont été élaborées dans le cadre de ce projet de recherche afin de couvrir l’ensemble du processus de transition.

Table 0-7: Recommandations pour une transition réussie et obstacles potentiels

<i>Général</i>	
<i>Recommandations</i>	<i>Obstacles potentiels</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• planification de la transition commence au début de la CM2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• choix du collège tardif</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• former une équipe de transition composée d'élèves, de parents, d'enseignants du primaire et du secondaire, du directeur de l'école secondaire, d'autres membres du personnel de l'école secondaire concernés et de professionnels externes</li> <li>• considérer la transition comme un processus à long terme : accepter la communication, la collaboration et les ajustements continus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• choix du collège tardif</li> <li>• manque de volonté de coopérer</li> <li>• attitude négative à l'égard de l'éducation inclusive</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>réunion préparatoire (fin du CM2) avec l'équipe de transition</li> <li>réunion de suivi (milieu et fin de l'année scolaire)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>aspects éthiques</li> <li>contraintes de temps et d'organisation</li> <li>difficultés de communication</li> <li>sentiment d'injustice</li> </ul>
<b>Parents</b>	
<b>Recommandations</b>	<b>Obstacles potentiels</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inclure les élèves dans le processus de décision</li> <li>préparatifs pratiques</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>peur de l'inconnu</li> <li>insécurité par manque d'information</li> </ul>
<b>Enseignants</b>	
<b>Recommandations</b>	<b>Obstacles potentiels</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>échange d'informations</li> <li>projets communs entre l'école primaire et l'école secondaire</li> </ul> <p>A l'école primaire :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>une conférence parents-enseignants à expliquer aux parents pour leur fournir de l'information</li> <li>mettre en pratique les compétences des élèves du secondaire (p. ex. gérer l'agenda)</li> </ul> <p>Au collège:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>être présent pendant les activités de transition</li> <li>élaboration d'une stratégie de collaboration avec un-e AVS/AESH</li> <li>organisation de la salle de classe</li> <li>adaptation des contenus et des méthodes d'enseignement</li> <li>observation et communication constantes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>manque de coopération</li> <li>manque de sensibilisation des enseignants</li> <li>contraintes d'organisation et de temps</li> <li>absence d'un-e AVS/AESH</li> <li>manqué d'adaptation</li> <li>charge de travail élevée</li> </ul>
<b>Collèges</b>	
<b>Recommandations</b>	<b>Obstacles potentiels</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>offrir de l'information et du dialogue à l'occasion des activités de transition</li> <li>intégrer les activités de transition et les réunions préparatoires dans la planification annuelle de l'école</li> <li>permettre des voies de communication courtes et faciles entre les parents et les enseignants ou d'autres membres du personnel concernés par le biais d'un portail en ligne</li> <li>informer les camarades de classe et le personnel du collège au sujet de TSA</li> <li>dialogue sur les besoins éducatifs particuliers, les différences et l'exclusion</li> <li>donner aux enseignants l'accès à l'information, à la formation, à l'équipement, aux échanges et à la collaboration avec les autres enseignants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>manque de capacité/initiative/réseaux pour obtenir de l'information</li> <li>contraintes de temps et d'organisation</li> <li>contraintes de temps et d'organisation</li> <li>nombre écrasant de personnes de référence</li> <li>communication déséquilibrée</li> <li>aspects éthiques</li> <li>manque de ressources, d'information et de temps</li> </ul>

<i>Niveau administratif et politique</i>	
<i>Recommandations</i>	<i>Obstacles potentiels</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guidance des parents afin qu'ils puissent trouver une option scolaire adéquate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perception que les écoles ordinaires ne sont pas préparées pour les élèves atteints de TSA</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• durée plus courte de l'attribution des AVS/AESH</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complexité des processus administratifs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• l'évaluation et modification de « Devoir faits »</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intégration de contenus sur l'enseignement en groupes hétérogènes et d'informations de base sur les besoins spécifiques dans la formation initiale et continue des enseignants</li> </ul>	

## Conclusion

Ce projet de recherche visait à déterminer comment établir une transition réussie du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves atteints de TSA. Dans un premier temps, nous avons proposé les critères pour déterminer si une transition est réussie ou non (étude 1). Ces critères permettent l'élaboration de programmes de transition ou l'évaluation d'outils de transition existants, conçus spécialement pour les élèves atteints de TSA.

L'étude 2 a confirmé les résultats de l'étude 1 et identifié dans quelle mesure les représentations sociales de la transition sont différentes, lorsque les gens considèrent ou non un élève atteint de TSA dans ce contexte. Elle a montré que l'adaptation, l'intégration et de bons résultats scolaires sont d'une importance capitale pour les deux groupes. Cependant, la pertinence du soutien, n'est une variable qui ressort que pour les participants ayant considéré des personnes avec TSA.

L'étude 3 a confirmé dans une large mesure les résultats des études 1 et 2. Elle a donné un aperçu important sur la façon dont la transition de l'école primaire au collège des élèves atteints de TSA est planifiée, organisée, menée et perçue en France. Les facilitateurs et les obstacles dans le contexte de la transition ont été identifiés par les participants et discutés avec la littérature existante. Cela a permis d'élaborer des recommandations pour une transition réussie vers l'enseignement secondaire pour les élèves atteints de TSA en France. Les recommandations intègrent les mesures existantes en les modifiant, si nécessaire, en fonction des résultats des trois études.

L'accent mis par les politiques françaises sur les personnes atteintes de TSA a été bénéfique pour ce projet. Les plans autisme (Ministère de la Santé, de la Jeunesse, des Sports et de la Vie Associative; Ministère du Travail, des Relations, 2008; Ministère de la Santé et de la Protection Sociale, 2004; République Française, 2013; Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier

ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018) ont permis de faire connaître les TSA dans différents domaines politiques, ce qui n'existait pas auparavant et n'existe pas pour d'autres types de besoins éducatifs particuliers ou de marginalisations. Un certain nombre de projets de recherche ou d'autres projets concernant l'autisme ont été lancés, plusieurs mesures visant à promouvoir une éducation inclusive et une meilleure transition ont été introduites ou annoncées pendant la durée du projet de recherche. La poursuite d'un échange entre la recherche et la pratique serait très utile dans ce contexte, afin d'évaluer et d'améliorer les processus.

D'Alessio (2013) affirme que l'éducation inclusive exige un changement radical de l'école. Bien que la France vise à réaliser une école inclusive d'ici 2022 (Ministère de l'Education Nationale & Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre chargé des Personnes handicapées, 2018), ce changement radical est plutôt évité. Cela a des répercussions sur la transition entre le primaire et le secondaire. Des situations difficiles telles que le choix de l'établissement scolaire ou le manque d'adaptation pourraient être évitées, mais ne sont pas envisagées afin de privilégier les différentes options scolaires. Elles sont considérées comme un pas vers l'éducation pour l'inclusion, mais contredisent les définitions internationales de l'éducation pour l'inclusion, qui indiquent, « *que tous les élèves d'une communauté doivent apprendre ensemble, dans la mesure du possible, quels que soient leurs handicaps et leurs difficultés.* » (World Conference on Special Needs Education, 1994). D'Alessio (2013) affirme que l'exclusion dans l'éducation et de l'éducation doit être réduite, ce qui exige un changement radical de l'école.

Néanmoins, de nombreuses mesures utiles concernant la transition primaire-secondaire sont déjà en place et des idées plus prometteuses ont été annoncées. D'autres stratégies ne sont pas formalisées et laissent leurs bénéfices limités, ce qui permet à certains élèves, parents et enseignants d'effectuer d'excellentes transitions et en laisse d'autres déçus.

Le projet de recherche a démontré qu'une transition primaire-secondaire réussie pour les élèves atteints de TSA n'est pas un miracle ou une question de chance, comme l'ont parfois perçu les participants à l'étude, mais un défi complexe qui exige de véritables efforts conjoints et de la persévérance d'un grand nombre d'acteurs.

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**ÉCOLE DOCTORALE** *Sciences humaines et sociales - Perspectives européennes (519)*

**THÈSE** présentée par :

**Mechthild RICHTER**

soutenue le : **18 décembre 2019**

pour obtenir le grade de : **Docteur de l'Université de Strasbourg**

Discipline/ Spécialité : Sciences de l'Education

**« Maintenant c'est un collégien » - Réussir la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme**

**"Now he's a secondary school student" - Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Volume 2 - Annex

**THÈSE dirigée par :**

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# Annex

- A. Information Letters
- B. Interview Guides
- C. Letters of Consent
- D. Category Systems
- E. Examples of Transcribed and Coded Interviews
- F. Ethics Committee

## A. Information Letters

In order to attract participants for study 3, information letters were sent out to autism-related parent associations, the CRAs, teachers' associations and unions. The letters contained information about the objective of the study and the invitation to participate. In 2018 a flyer was designed as additional tool to enlarge the recruitment.

Once, the families were interested and willing to participate, they received an e-mail with more detailed information and clarifications about the interview. Furthermore, the class teacher or ULIS-coordinator was contacted after the parents, the authorities and the school's principal had given the permission to do so.

## First invitation letter for parents

Strasbourg, XX/XX/XXXX

### **Objet : Transition CM2-6° pour les élèves avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme**

Madame, Monsieur,  
Chers parents,

Professeure en psychologie et sciences de l'Education à l'Université de Strasbourg, je coordonne actuellement un projet de recherche portant sur les *facteurs qui favorisent ou freinent la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme*. Ce projet est soutenu par l'Université de Strasbourg et l'Ecole Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Education de l'Académie de Strasbourg. Il vise principalement à mieux connaître les difficultés rencontrées par les familles (parents et enfant) lors du passage du CM2 à la 6° (en classe ordinaire ou en ULIS collège) et à identifier les dispositifs qui favorisent cette transition.

Nous sollicitons actuellement les familles qui souhaiteraient participer à ce projet :

- nous souhaitons au cours des mois de juin et juillet 2017 rencontrer des parents et des enfants actuellement au collège et qui nous permettraient lors de rencontres d'affiner les questionnaires et outils que nous avons élaborés pour répondre à nos objectifs
- nous débutons également le recrutement des familles dont l'enfant avec un Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme débiterait le collège en septembre 2017.

Si votre enfant est actuellement en 6° ou si il entre en 6° à la rentrée et que vous êtes intéressé-es pour participer à cette étude ou si vous souhaitez tout simplement en savoir plus, n'hésitez pas à nous contacter :

Céline Clément (coordonnatrice du projet) : [celine.clement@unistra.fr](mailto:celine.clement@unistra.fr) ou 03 88 43 83 03

Mechthild Richter (doctorante sur le projet) : [richterm@unistra.fr](mailto:richterm@unistra.fr)

Mon équipe et moi-même vous remercions de l'attention que vous porterez à ce courrier. Avec mes plus cordiales salutations,

Pr. Céline Clément,



## First invitation letter for teachers

Strasbourg, XX/XX/XXXX

Chers Enseignants, Chères Enseignantes,

Doctorante en Sciences de l'Éducation à l'Université de Strasbourg, sous la supervision de Mme Céline Clément, Professeure en psychologie et sciences de l'Éducation à l'Université de Strasbourg, je mène actuellement un projet de recherche portant sur les **facteurs qui favorisent ou freinent la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme (TSA)**. Ce projet est soutenu par l'Université de Strasbourg et l'École Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Éducation de l'Académie de Strasbourg. Il vise principalement à mieux connaître les difficultés rencontrées par les familles (parents et enfant) et les enseignant-e-s lors du passage du CM2 à la 6<sup>e</sup> (en classe ordinaire ou en ULIS collège) et à identifier les dispositifs qui favorisent cette transition.

Pour l'étude nous cherchons des enseignant-e-s qui ont accueilli un enfant atteint de TSA en 6<sup>e</sup> (ULIS ou classe ordinaire) au cours des trois dernières années. Notre objectif est que ces enseignants répondent à un questionnaire en ligne qui porte sur la vie quotidienne à l'école et les changements de l'école élémentaire au collège (si vous le souhaitez nous pouvons vous en adresser un en format papier).

Le questionnaire précédera des entretiens avec quelques enseignants afin d'approfondir certains thèmes. Notre étude devrait permettre à terme de formuler des recommandations pour la transition des élèves avec autisme.

Si vous avez accueilli un enfant atteint de l'autisme dans votre classe 6<sup>e</sup> pendant les trois dernières années, vous pouvez répondre à ce questionnaire : [Passage de l'école primaire au collège \(enseignant-e-s, élève atteint de TSA\)](#).

Si vous êtes enseignant-e en 6<sup>e</sup>, mais que vous ne suivez pas d'enfant avec TSA dans votre classe, vous pouvez répondre à ce questionnaire : [Passage de l'école primaire au collège \(enseignant-e-s, élèves sans TSA\)](#).

Si vous souhaitez en savoir plus, n'hésitez pas à nous contacter :

Céline Clément (coordonnatrice du projet) : [celine.clement@unistra.fr](mailto:celine.clement@unistra.fr) ou 03 88 43 83 03

Mechthild Richter (doctorante sur le projet) : [richterm@unistra.fr](mailto:richterm@unistra.fr)

Mon équipe et moi-même vous remercions de l'attention que vous porterez à ce courrier. Avec mes plus cordiales salutations,



Mechthild Richter

## Invitation letter for teachers of participating students

Strasbourg, XX/XX/XXXX

Chers Enseignants, Chères Enseignantes,

Doctorante en Sciences de l'Éducation à l'Université de Strasbourg, sous la supervision de Mme Céline Clément, Professeure en psychologie et sciences de l'Éducation à l'Université de Strasbourg, je mène actuellement un projet de recherche portant sur les **facteurs qui favorisent ou freinent la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme (TSA)**. Ce projet est soutenu par l'Université de Strasbourg et l'École Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Éducation de l'Académie de Strasbourg. Il vise principalement à mieux connaître les difficultés rencontrées par les familles (parents et enfant) et les enseignant-e-s lors du passage du CM2 à la 6<sup>e</sup> (en classe ordinaire ou en ULIS collège) et à identifier les dispositifs qui favorisent cette transition.

Pour l'étude, nous avons pu recruter des familles d'enfants atteints de TSA dont l'enfant réalise la transition au collège cette année. Ces familles remplissent des questionnaires et certaines ont accepté d'être interviewées. Avec l'accord des parents, nous essayons parallèlement de solliciter les enseignants de ces enfants avec lesquels nous avons échangé. Ainsi, nous pouvons comparer comment les différents acteurs (élèves, parents, enseignants) vivent la transition de l'école primaire au collège.

Un enfant dont la famille participe à l'étude fréquente votre classe. Si vous êtes d'accord, nous aimerions vous contacter et vous demander de participer à notre étude. Il s'agirait de remplir un questionnaire 3 fois au cours de l'année à venir et éventuellement de réaliser une entrevue.

Si vous souhaitez en savoir plus sur notre étude, n'hésitez pas à nous contacter :

Céline Clément (coordonnatrice du projet) : [celine.clement@unistra.fr](mailto:celine.clement@unistra.fr) ou 03 88 43 83 03

Mechthild Richter (doctorante sur le projet) : [richterm@unistra.fr](mailto:richterm@unistra.fr)

Mon équipe et moi-même vous remercions de l'attention que vous porterez à ce courrier. Avec mes plus cordiales salutations,



Mechthild Richter

## Information letter for recruited parents

Chères parents,

J'espère que vous avez bien commencé la nouvelle année scolaire. Je vous recontacte dans le cadre de l'étude que je mène sur les facteurs qui favorisent ou freinent la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme (TSA). Ce projet est soutenu par l'Université de Strasbourg et l'École Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Éducation de l'Académie de Strasbourg. Il vise principalement à mieux connaître les difficultés rencontrées par les familles (parents et enfant) lors du passage du CM2 à la 6<sup>e</sup> (en classe ordinaire ou en ULIS collège) et à identifier les dispositifs qui favorisent cette transition.

Vous avez montré votre intérêt pour participer dans cette étude et nous vous en remercions. Les premières semaines de classe étant passées, nous pouvons débiter les rencontres avec les familles et les enfants afin d'échanger sur la transition au collège.

Nous souhaiterions fixer un rendez-vous un entretien avec vous et un avec votre enfant entre mi-octobre et mi-novembre. Je suis disponible pendant des vacances de la Toussaint aussi. L'échange avec votre enfant ne se fera qu'en présence des parents, et si il est d'accord pour cette entrevue.

Si vous habitez en Alsace-Lorraine et votre domicile est accessible par les transports en commun, nous pouvons faire l'entretien chez vous. Sinon, vous pouvez venir à Strasbourg et faire l'entretien à Université, sinon nous arrangerons un entretien par Skype.

Si vous êtes toujours disposé à participer à l'étude, merci de m'envoyer un e-mail avec les informations suivantes : Quand seriez-vous disponible pour une entrevue? (N'hésitez pas à proposer des dates). Quel sont les nom-prénom de votre enfant ? Quel est le nom et l'adresse du collège de votre enfant? Qui est son professeur-e principal-e ou son coordinateur-trice d'ULIS ? (ces deux dernières questions nous permettrons de contacter éventuellement les enseignants si ils ont donné leur accord à Mme la chargée de mission autisme de l'ASH du Bas-Rhin, Mme Debionne.

Avec mes plus cordiales salutations,  
Mechthild Richter

## Flyer used for recruitment

**Université**  
de Strasbourg  
Initiative d'excellence

**Etude sur le passage de l'école primaire au collège**

**lisec** éducation  
EA 2310

**Tu es un-e future collégien-ne?**  
**Votre enfant entrera le collège en 2018?**  
**Vous êtes enseignant-e et avez accueilli/accueillerez une 6<sup>ème</sup>?**

Pour mon projet de recherche portant sur les facteurs qui favorisent ou freinent la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec un Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme (TSA), je cherche des élèves (avec ou sans TSA), des parents et des enseignant-es, qui aimeraient faire part de leur expérience. Il s'agit de répondre à un questionnaire et si vous le souhaitez de vous entretenir avec nous.

Si cela vous intéresse ou si vous voulez simplement en savoir plus, n'hésitez pas à me contacter: [richterm@unistra.fr](mailto:richterm@unistra.fr) ou ma directrice de thèse Céline Clément [celine.clement@unistra.fr](mailto:celine.clement@unistra.fr)

Merci à vous! Mechthild Richter

## B. Interview Guides

In the following, the interview guides for the different time periods (beginning of the school year, middle of the school year and end of the school year) and for the different stakeholders (parents, students, teachers) are presented. Each interview guide was adapted to a minor extent to the individual participant, based on information obtained beforehand or on the first interview(s).

## First interviews (October/November 2017, 2018)

### Interview guide used for first parent interview

#### Introduction :

- Objectif de la recherche
- Rôle des parents
- Consentement pour l'entretien

#### Pour participer à l'entretien, il y a plusieurs consignes :

- Vous n'êtes pas obligé de répondre à une question si vous ne le souhaitez pas. Dans ce cas, je continue avec une autre question.
- Si vous ne me comprenez pas, vous pouvez me demander de répéter la question.
- Si vous voulez arrêter l'entretien ou faire une pause dites-le moi et nous arrêterons.
- Ce qui sera dit lors de l'entretien restera confidentiel et anonyme.
- La conversation sera enregistrée pour que je puisse la réécouter et ne rien oublier.
- Cet entretien est volontaire, vous n'êtes pas obligé d'y participer.

Avez-vous des questions ? Souhaitez-vous participer et commencer cet entretien maintenant ?

#### INTRODUCTION

- Pouvez-vous me raconter un peu de votre famille ?
- Pouvez-vous me présenter X? Comment le décririez-vous ?
  - Quels sont ses intérêts ?
  - Comment passe-t-il son temps libre ?
  - Comment se passe votre vie de famille ?
- Quand et comment X a-t-il été diagnostiqué ? Comment était-ce pour vous ?
- Comment votre vie de famille a-t-elle changée après le diagnostic ? Quel type de soutien X a-t-il reçu ? Quel type de soutien votre famille a-t-elle reçu ?

#### AVANT LA TRANSITION

- Dans quel type d'école primaire était X ? Quelles sont vos expériences ?
- Comment avez-vous choisi le collègue de X ? Qui a choisi ? Pourquoi ordinaire ? Pourquoi ULIS ?
- Avez-vous eu l'occasion de discuter des besoins spécifiques de X avec son nouveau collègue ?

#### PROCESSUS DE TRANSITION

- Comment vous êtes-vous senti à propos du passage de X au collègue ? Quelles étaient vos attentes ?
- Avez-vous eu des inquiétudes concernant la transition ? Lesquelles ?
- Quel type de soutien votre famille a-t-elle reçu pour la transition ?
- Comment avez-vous préparé X ?
- Vous souvenez-vous de son premier jour de collègue ? Avez-vous une anecdote à partager ?
- Comment avez-vous perçu les premières semaines de X au collègue ?

#### HABILITÉS ET FREINS DE TRANSITION

- Rétrospectivement : qu'est-ce qui a été utile pour vous et votre famille durant le processus de passage ?
- Quels obstacles avez-vous rencontré lors du processus de passage ?
- Avez-vous des conseils pour les parents d'enfants avec TSA qui vivront bientôt cette transition ?

- Pensez-vous que le passage vers l'enseignement secondaire est plus difficile pour les élèves atteints de TSA et pour leurs familles que pour les enfants sans difficultés particulières ?

#### SITUATION APRES TRANSITION

- Comment cela se passe-t-il au collège pour X maintenant ? Scolairement ? Socialement ? En ULIS ? En classe référence ?
- Remarquez-vous des différences avec l'école primaire ?
- Que pensez-vous du collège de X maintenant ? Répond-il à vos attentes ? Êtes-vous satisfaits ?
- Comment est votre contact avec le collège ?
- Dans quelle mesure participez-vous à la vie de X au collège ?
- Votre enfant a-t-il un lieu de travail spécifique ou des règles spéciales en raison de son TSA ?
  - A-t-il un AVS ?
  - Votre enfant a-t-il besoin d'aménagements spécifiques ?
  - Quels types d'aménagements ?
- (Combien de temps votre enfant passe-t-il en ULIS, combien en classe référente ?)
- D'après votre expérience, les enseignants sont-ils souvent absents ou remplacés ?
- X rencontre-t-il des problèmes dans son nouveau collège ? Quels problèmes ?
- Y a-t-il quelque chose que l'école puisse améliorer pour X ?
- Y a-t-il quelque chose que l'école puisse améliorer pour vous comme parent ?

## Interview guide used for first student interview

### Introduction :

- Objectif de la recherche
- Rôle des élèves
- Consentement pour l'entretien

### Pour participer à l'entretien, il y a plusieurs consignes :

- Tu n'es pas obligé de répondre à une question si tu ne le souhaites pas. (carte jaune)
- Si tu ne me comprends pas, tu peux me demander de répéter la question.
- Si tu veux arrêter l'entretien ou si tu veux faire une pause, tu peux me le dire et on arrête. (carte rouge)
- Tout ce qu'on dit maintenant reste entre nous.
- Il n'y a pas de mauvaises réponses.
- La conversation sera enregistrée pour que je puisse la réécouter et ne rien oublier.

Est-ce que tu as des questions ? Est-ce qu'on peut commencer ?

### INTRODUCTION

- Que penses-tu de ton collègue ?
- Tu es dans quelle classe ?
- Qu'est-ce que tu penses de [nom d'enseignant principal] ?
- Qu'est-ce que tu penses de tes camarades de classe ? En classe ULIS ? Dans ta classe de référence ?
  - Combien d'amis as-tu ?
  - Que faites-vous ensemble ?
- Qu'est-ce que tu fais en générale pendant la récréation normalement ?
- Qu'est-ce que tu préfères dans ton collège ?
- Y a-t-il quelque chose que tu n'aimes pas ? Qu'est-ce ? Pourquoi ?

### PROCESSUS DE TRANSITION

- A l'école primaire, avez-vous parlé du collègue ?
- Est-ce que l'école primaire a fait quelque chose pour te préparer au collège ?
- Est-ce que tes parents ont fait quelque chose pour te préparer au collège ? Qu'ont-ils fait ?
- As-tu visité ton nouveau collègue ? Combien de fois ? Avec qui ? Qu'as-tu appris ?
- As-tu rencontré des professeurs ? des collégiens ?

### AVANT LA TRANSITION

- Te souviens-tu de ton premier jour au collège ?
  - Comment te sentais-tu ?
  - Qu'est-ce que tu attendais avec impatience ? Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose que tu attendais particulièrement ?
  - De quoi avais-tu peur ?
  - As-tu parlé de cela avec tes parents? Avec des autres personnes ?

### HABILITÉS ET FREINS DE TRANSITION

- Lorsque tu repenses à tes premières semaines au collège, comment te sentais-tu ?
  - Qu'est-ce qui t'as aidé à tout gérer au début ?
  - Qu'est-ce qui était difficile au début ?
  - Qu'est-ce qui aurait été nécessaire pour t'aider au début ?

- Le collège était-il comme tu l'attendais ?
- As-tu des conseils pour les élèves qui vont entrer au collège l'année prochaine ?

#### SITUATION APRÈS LA TRANSITION

- Comment tu sens-tu dans ton collège maintenant ?
- Pour toi, quelles sont les différences entre l'école primaire et le collège ?
- Est-ce que tu te sens mieux au collège qu'à l'école primaire ?
- (Quelles matières as-tu en classe ULIS ? Et dans ta classe d'inclusion ?)
- (Dans ta classe d'inclusion, as-tu un lieu de travail spécifique ?)
- Est-ce qu'on t'autorise à faire des choses qu'on autorise pas à tes camarades ? Est-ce qu'il y a des règles spéciales pour toi ?
- As-tu un-e AVS qui t'aide ? Toujours ou parfois ?
- Rencontres-tu des problèmes dans ton nouveau collège ? Avec les professeurs ? Les autres élèves ? Avec l'apprentissage ? Quels problèmes ?
- Si tu pouvais changer quelque chose dans ton collège, qu'est-ce que ça serait ?

## Interview guide used for first teacher interview

### Introduction :

- Objectif de la recherche
- Rôle des enseignant-es
- Consentement pour l'entretien

### Pour participer à l'entretien, il y a plusieurs consignes :

- Vous n'êtes pas obligé de répondre à une question si vous ne le souhaitez pas. Dans ce cas, je continue avec une autre question.
- Si vous ne me comprenez pas, vous pouvez me demander de répéter la question.
- Si vous voulez arrêter l'entretien ou faire une pause dites-le moi et nous arrêterons.
- Ce qui sera dit lors de l'entretien restera confidentiel et anonyme.
- La conversation sera enregistrée pour que je puisse la réécouter et ne rien oublier.
- Cet entretien est volontaire, vous n'êtes pas obligé d'y participer.

Avez-vous des questions ? Souhaitez-vous participer et commencer cet entretien maintenant ?

### INTRODUCTION

- Pouvez-vous vous présenter brièvement ?
- Pouvez-vous me donner un bref aperçu de votre classe ?
- Pouvez-vous me parler un peu de l'enfant atteint de TSA de votre classe ?

### AVANT TRANSITION

- Vous souvenez-vous de la première fois où vous avez rencontré l'enfant X ? Quand était-ce ? Pouvez-vous décrire la situation et vos ressentis ?
- Aviez-vous déjà rencontré auparavant des enfants atteints de TSA ?
- Qu'avez-vous pensé lorsque vous avez été informé que vous accueillerez un élève avec TSA dans votre classe ?
- Aviez-vous des attentes ou des suppositions sur la manière dont votre vie professionnelle changerait en enseignant à un enfant avec TSA ?
- Quelle était votre opinion en général sur l'éducation inclusive avant de recevoir l'enfant X dans votre classe ?

### PROCESSUS DE TRANSITION

- Vous souvenez-vous du premier jour de l'enfant X dans votre classe ? Avez-vous une anecdote dont vous vous souvenez ?
- Comment avez-vous perçu l'enfant X durant les premières semaines de classe ?
- Comment avez-vous vécu les premières semaines avec l'enfant X dans votre classe ?

### HABILITÉS ET FREINS DE TRANSITION

- Rétrospectivement: Qu'est-ce qui vous a été utile pendant cette période de transition ?
- Quels obstacles avez-vous rencontré lors du processus de transition ?
- Avez-vous des conseils pour vos collègues qui pourraient se retrouver dans cette situation l'année prochaine ?
- Pensez-vous que le passage vers le collège est plus difficile pour les élèves avec TSA et leurs familles que pour les enfants sans difficultés particulières ?

### SITUATION APRES TRANSITION

- Que pensez-vous de votre classe maintenant ? Répond-elle à vos attentes ? Êtes-vous satisfait de votre travail quotidien ?

- (Pour les élèves ULIS: combien de temps l'enfant X passe-t-il réellement dans l'éducation inclusive ?)
- Que pensez-vous maintenant de l'éducation inclusive ?
- Comment votre vie quotidienne a-t-elle changé ?
- Avec un enfant TSA dans votre classe, comment faites-vous en terme de préparation ? de méthodes d'enseignement ?
- Comment se passe le contact avec les parents de l'enfant X ?
- Que pourrait faire l'école pour améliorer votre situation comme enseignant d'un enfant avec TSA ? Que faut-il faire pour améliorer votre situation et celle de X ?

## Second interviews (February/March 2018, 2019)

### Interview guide for second parent interview

#### INTRODUCTION

- Qu'est-ce qui a changé avec X au cours des derniers mois ?
- Comment avez-vous perçu les premiers mois d'X au collège ?

#### VIE SCOLAIRE

- Comment ça se passe au niveau scolaire ?
- Avez-vous été satisfait des résultats des premiers mois ?
- Que pensez-vous du professeur principal d'X ?
- Comment est la relation entre X et son prof principal ?
- Comment X fait ses devoirs ? Comment êtes-vous impliqué là-dedans ?
- Est-ce que X bénéficie-t-il du dispositif « devoirs faits » ?

#### VIE SOCIALE

- Est-ce que X a des amis ? Comment cela se passe-t-il avec ses amis du collège ?
- Est-il accepté dans sa classe ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a des problèmes de harcèlement ?
- Est-ce que votre enfant vous parle des problèmes qu'il rencontre au collège ou des difficultés scolaires ? avec d'autres élèves ? des professeurs ?

#### COMMUNICATION/ORGANISATION

- Comment estimez-vous votre communication avec le collège ?
- Si vous communiquez avec le collège, vous communiquez avec qui ?
- Que fait l'AVS ?
- Que pensez-vous de l'organisation de l'équipe éducative ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a des aménagements spécifiques pour X ?
- D'après votre expérience, est-ce que les professeurs ont bien accepté la présence d'un enfant avec TSA ? Et les aménagements ?
- D'après votre expérience, les enseignants sont-ils souvent absents ou remplacés ?

#### TRANSITION

- Que pensez-vous maintenant du passage vers le collège ?
- Lorsque vous repensez à avant qu'est-ce qui a été utile pour X et pour vous durant le processus de transition ?
- Avez-vous rencontré de nouveaux obstacles depuis la rentrée ?
- Avez-vous des conseils pour les parents d'enfants avec TSA qui vivront ce passage cet été ?
- Comment pensez-vous que nous devrions concevoir le passage vers le collège ?
- Que pensez-vous du collège de X maintenant ? Répond-il à vos attentes ?
- Quelles sont vos attentes pour la fin de la 6<sup>ème</sup> et pour la suite du collège ?

## Interview guide for second student interview

### INTRODUCTION

- Peux-tu me raconter ta journée d'aujourd'hui/ d'un mardi ordinaire ? Qu'as-tu fait ?
- (Temps des vacances : Est-ce que tu penses parfois au collège pendant les vacances ?)
- Est-ce que tu t'habitues aux changements de classe/les professeurs ?
- Pour toi, quelles sont les différences entre l'école primaire et le collège ?
- Est-ce que tu te sens mieux au collège qu'à l'école primaire ?
- As-tu des conseils pour les élèves qui vont entrer au collège cet été ?

### VIE SCOLAIRE

- Est-ce que tu as une matière préférée ? Pourquoi est-ce ta matière préférée ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a une matière que tu n'aimes pas ? Pourquoi ?
- Est-ce que qu'il y a des cours que tu trouves très difficile/ très facile /trop facile ?
- Est-ce que tu as des bonnes notes ? Dans quelles matières ?
- Est-ce que tu as un professeur préféré ? Pourquoi ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a un prof, que tu aimes moins/pas du tout ? Pourquoi ?
- Tu as beaucoup de devoirs? Comment fais-tu tes devoirs ?
- Pour toi, quelle est la meilleure chose à propos de ton collège ? / Qu'est-ce que tu préfères au collège ? Pourquoi ?
- Y a-t-il quelque chose que tu n'aimes pas dans ton collège ?
- As-tu un/e AVS qui t'aide ? Qu'est-ce qu'il/elle fait ?
- As-tu des règles spéciales, que tes camarades de classe n'ont pas ?

### VIE SOCIALE

- Combien d'amis as-tu dans ta classe ?
- Que faites-vous ensemble ?
- Joues-tu uniquement avec tes amis à l'école ou aussi le mercredi après-midi /quand tu n'as pas cours ?
- Pendant la récré préfères-tu être seul ? ou être avec tes amis ?
- Que fais-tu pendant la récré ?
- Te sens-tu parfois embêté par tes camarades de classe ? Comment ça se passe ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres élèves qui sont embêtés ? Qu'est-ce qu'ils font ? Qu'est-ce que les professeurs/CPE/surveillant font ?
- Aimerais-tu changer quelque chose dans ton collège ? Quoi ?

## Interview guide for second teacher interview

### INTRODUCTION

- Quels ont été les changements depuis notre dernière réunion? Qu'est-ce qui a changé pour vous, qu'est-ce qui a changé pour X ?
- Comment avez-vous perçu les premiers mois de X dans votre classe ?

### VIE SCOLAIRE

- Comment ça se passe pour X au niveau scolaire ?
- Avez-vous été satisfait des résultats scolaires des premiers mois de X ?
- Est-il à l'aise avec le travail en classe ?
- Quelles difficultés rencontre X dans son travail scolaire ? Est-ce que vous avez adopté une stratégie pour les résoudre ?
- Est-ce que vous avez une relation particulière avec X ?

### VIE SOCIALE

- Pensez-vous que X est bien intégré dans sa classe ?
- Est-ce que X a des amis dans sa classe ?
- Savez-vous si X est victime de harcèlement ? De quelle manière ? Que faites-vous dans cette situation ?
- Quand X rencontre des problèmes, avec qui peut-il/va-t-il en discuter au collège ?
- Les autres élèves sont-ils informés de son TSA ?

### COMMUNICATION/ORGANISATION

- Comment vous organisez-vous avec l'AVS ? l'équipe pédagogique ?
- Que fait l'AVS pour X ?
- Vous avez toujours l'impression que X se repose sur l'AVS ?
- Y a-t-il des aménagements spécifiques pour X ?
- D'après vous, les autres professeurs ont-ils bien accepté la présence d'un enfant avec TSA ? Et les aménagements ?
- Quelle influence le fait que X soit dans la classe a-t-il sur votre préparation à l'enseignement ? Vous préparez-vous différemment que d'habitude ?
- Est-ce que vous avez une relation particulière avec X ?
- Comment estimez-vous votre communication avec les parents ?

### TRANSITION

- Que pensez-vous maintenant du passage de X vers le collège ?
- Pensez-vous que l'ULIS TED était le bon choix pour lui ?
- Lorsque vous repensez à avant qu'est-ce qui a été utile pour vous durant le processus de transition/passage ?
- Avez-vous rencontré des obstacles depuis la rentrée ?
- Avez-vous des conseils pour vos collègues qui pourraient accueillir un élève avec TSA l'été prochain ?
- De quelle façon pourrait-on améliorer votre situation en tant que professeur ?
- Quels sont vos attentes pour la suite de 6<sup>ème</sup>/du collège ?

## Third interviews (June/July 2018, 2019)

### Interview guide for third parent interview

#### INTRODUCTION

- Qu'est-ce qui a changé pour vous ou X depuis notre dernier rencontre?
- L'année scolaire est presque fini. Comment c'était cette année scolaire pour vous ?
- Comment était la première année en collège pour X ?

#### VIE SCOLAIRE

- Comment ça se passe au niveau scolaire ?
- (Pour les élèves en ULIS: combien de temps votre enfant passe-t-il en classe inclusive ?)
- Peut X suivre bien les cours ? Dans quelles matières est-ce qu'il est bien ? Où est-ce qu'il a des difficultés ?
- Etes-vous satisfait des résultats scolaires ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a des aménagements spécifiques pour X par rapport à l'apprentissage ?
- Que pensez-vous du professeur principal de X ?
- Comment est la relation entre X et son prof principal ?/la coordinatrice ULIS ?
- D'après votre expérience, est-ce que les professeurs ont bien accepté la présence d'un enfant avec TSA ?
- Comment X fait ses devoirs ? Comment êtes-vous impliqué là-dedans ?

#### VIE SOCIALE

- Est-ce que X a des amis ? Comment cela se passe-t-il avec ses amis du collège ?
- Est-il accepté dans sa classe ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a (toujours) des problèmes de harcèlement ? Dans quelle manière ?
- Est-ce que votre enfant vous parle des problèmes qu'il rencontre au collège ou des difficultés scolaires ? avec d'autres élèves ? des professeurs ?

#### COMMUNICATION

- Comment estimez-vous votre communication avec le collège ?
- Si vous communiquez avec le collège, vous communiquez avec qui ?
- Participez-vous à la vie de votre enfant au collège ? De quelle manière ?
- Que pensez-vous de l'organisation de l'équipe éducative ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a des aménagements spécifiques pour X ?
- Que fait l'AVS ?
- Est-ce que vous communiquez avec l'AVS concernant les problèmes que rencontre X ou des progrès qu'il fait au collège ?
- D'après votre expérience, les enseignants sont-ils souvent absents ou remplacés ?

#### TRANSITION

- Que pensez-vous du collège de X maintenant ? Répond-il à vos attentes ?
- Que pensez-vous maintenant du passage vers le collège ?
- Pour vous est-ce que le passage était réussi ?
- Comment pensez-vous que nous devrions concevoir le passage vers le collège ?
- Lorsque vous repensez à avant qu'est-ce qui a été utile pour X et pour vous durant le processus de transition ?

- Avez-vous rencontré de nouveaux obstacles depuis la rentrée ?
- Avez-vous des conseils pour les parents d'enfants avec TSA qui vivront ce passage cet été ?
- Quelles sont vos attentes pour la fin de la 6<sup>ème</sup> et pour la suite du collège ?
- Comment pensez-vous que nous devrions concevoir le passage vers le collège ?

## Interview guide for third student interview

### INTRODUCTION

- Tu es content que l'année scolaire soit finie ?
- Que penses-tu de ta 6ème ?
- Pour toi, quelles sont les différences entre l'école primaire et le collège ?
- Est-ce que tu te sens mieux au collège qu'à l'école primaire ?
- As-tu des conseils pour les nouveaux 6èmes ?

### VIE SCOLAIRE

- Est-ce que tu as une matière préférée ? Pourquoi est-ce ta matière préférée ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a une matière que tu n'aimes pas ? Pourquoi ?
- Est-ce que qu'il y a des cours que tu trouves très difficile/ très facile /trop facile?
- Est-ce que tu as des bonnes notes/bons résultats ? Dans quelles matières ?
- Est-ce que tu as un professeur préféré ? Pourquoi ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a un prof, que tu aimes moins/pas du tout ? Pourquoi ?
- Tu as beaucoup de devoirs? Comment fais-tu tes devoirs ?
- Pour toi, quelle est la meilleure chose à propos de ton collège ? / Qu'est-ce que tu préfères au collège ? Pourquoi ?
- Y a-t-il quelque chose que tu n'aimes pas dans ton collège ?
- As-tu un/e AVS qui t'aide ? Qu'est-ce qu'il/elle fait ?
- As-tu des règles spéciales ou des droits spéciaux, que tes camarades de classe n'ont pas ?

### VIE SOCIALE

- Combien d'amis as-tu dans ta classe ?
- Que faites-vous ensemble ?
- Joues-tu uniquement avec tes amis à l'école ou aussi le mercredi après-midi ou le samedi /quand tu n'as pas cours ?
- Que fais-tu pendant la récré ?
- Te sens-tu parfois embêté par tes camarades de classe ? Comment ça se passe ?
- Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres élèves qui sont embêtés ? Qu'est-ce qu'ils font ? Qu'est-ce que les professeurs/CPE/surveillant font ?
- Aimerais-tu changer quelque chose dans ton collège ? Quoi ?

## Interview guide for third teacher interview

### INTRODUCTION

- Comment avez-vous vécu cette année scolaire ?
- Comment s'est passée l'année scolaire pour X ?

### VIE SCOLAIRE

- Comment ça se passe pour X au niveau scolaire ?
- Avez-vous été satisfait des résultats de X ?
- Est-il à l'aise avec le travail en classe ? avec ses camarades de classe ?
- Qu'est-ce qui est un point fort pour X dans son travail scolaire ? Quelles difficultés rencontre X dans son travail scolaire ? Est-ce que vous avez adopté une stratégie pour les résoudre ?
- Y a-t-il des aménagements spécifiques pour X ?
- Est-ce que vous avez une relation particulière avec X ?

### VIE SOCIALE

- Pensez-vous que X est bien intégré dans sa classe ?
- Est-ce que X a des amis dans sa classe ?
- Savez-vous si X est victime de harcèlement ? De quelle manière ? Que faites-vous dans cette situation ?
- Quand X a des problèmes, avec qui peut-il en discuter au collège ?
- Les autres élèves sont-ils informés de son TSA ?

### COMMUNICATION/ORGANISATION

- D'après vous, les autres professeurs ont-ils bien accepté la présence d'un enfant avec TSA ? Et les aménagements ?
- Avez-vous des conseils pour vos collègues qui pourraient accueillir un élève avec TSA l'année prochaine ?
- Comment estimez-vous votre communication avec les parents ?

### TRANSITION

- Que pensez-vous maintenant du passage de X vers le collège ?
- Pour vous est-ce que le passage était réussi ?
- Pour vous, est-ce que le passage est terminé ?
- Lorsque vous repensez à avant qu'est-ce qui a été utile pour vous durant le processus de transition ?
- Avez-vous rencontré de nouveaux obstacles depuis la rentrée ?
- Comment pensez-vous que la transition devrait être structurée ?
- De quelle façon pourrait-on améliorer votre situation en tant que professeur d'un enfant avec autisme ?

## C. Letters of Consent

The letters of consent were presented and filled out before the interviews started. There are two versions: one for adult participants and one for the interviews with children.

Letters of consent for the participation in an interview (adults)

Je reconnais que je prends part volontairement à l'étude de Mme Mechthild Richter (doctorante à l'Université de Strasbourg), sous la supervision de Mme Céline Clément, professeure à l'École Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Éducation de l'Université de Strasbourg. La recherche porte sur la transition de l'école primaire vers le collège des élèves présentant des troubles du spectre autistique (TSA).

Je comprends que ma participation n'est pas obligatoire et que je n'encours aucun risque en participant à cette recherche. Je peux stopper ma participation à tout moment sans avoir à me justifier ni encourir aucune responsabilité.

J'accepte que des données soient recueillies au cours de l'entretien, qui sera enregistré. Je comprends que les informations recueillies sont strictement confidentielles et resteront anonymes.

Je, soussigné, .....  
déclare consentir à participer à l'étude de Mme Mechthild Richter.

Fait à .....

Le ...../...../.....

Signatures:

Le participant

L'investigateur principal

Letters of consent for the participation in an interview (children)

Je reconnais que mon enfant prend part volontairement à l'étude de Mme Mechthild Richter (doctorante à l'Université de Strasbourg), sous la supervision de Mme Céline Clément, professeure à l'École Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Éducation de l'Université de Strasbourg. Cette recherche porte sur la transition de l'école primaire vers le collège des élèves présentant des troubles du spectre autistique (TSA).

Je comprends que la participation de mon enfant n'est pas obligatoire et que mon enfant n'encourt aucun risque en participant à cette recherche. Mon enfant, ou moi, peut stopper la participation à tout moment sans avoir à vous justifier ni encourir aucune responsabilité.

J'accepte que des données soient recueillies au cours de l'entretien, qui sera enregistré. Je comprends que les informations recueillies sont strictement confidentielles et resteront anonymes.

Je, soussigné, .....

Père  Mère de l'enfant

Domicilié(e) au .....

Déclare consentir à ce que notre enfant .....

né(e) le ...../...../.....

Participe à l'étude de Mme Mechthild Richter.

Fait à .....

Le ...../...../.....

Signatures:

Le parent ou représentant légal

L'enfant

L'investigateur principal

## D. Category Systems

The category systems follow the guidelines of (Mayring, 2014) and contain the name of the category, its definition, an anchor sample from the coded texts and coding rules. These category systems have been developed in several coding stages. The category system for parents was finalized using the interviews of the first cohort. The interviews with the second cohort did not deliver new categories, which is why we can assume, that data saturation has been achieved. The category systems for the students has undergone minor modifications during the second cohort.

However, the category systems for teachers demanded major modifications until the second interviews with the second cohort. Since the first cohort only consisted of two teachers, this was not surprising, but may indicate that data saturation has not yet been achieved.

The category systems make the coding process transparent and enables inter-coder agreement, which has been applied to parts of the interviews. The category systems for each stakeholder are presented in the following.

Category system used to analyze interviews with parents

No.	Name of Category	Definition	Anchor Sample	Rules for Coding
<i>MC 1</i>	<i>Transition Planning</i>			
SC 1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process for against a specific school</li> </ul>	The reasons that lead to the decision for a specific school or the reasons speaking against a specific school that has been considered	« Donc on a dit, qu'il faut un petit collège, où il n'y a pas beaucoup de monde, où il peut se retrouver facilement, » (Parent 1, T1)	Also includes expressions on the school climate.
SC 1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasons for/against inclusive education</li> </ul>	Reasons, thoughts on whether the student is going to be taught in mainstream class exclusively or with support of an ULIS.	« parce qu'il est très très performant au niveau scolaire » (Parent 3, T1)	This includes also the attendance at "l'hôpital de jour" in addition to the school. It means all other reasons that are mentioned apart from social and legal reasons, that are specified in SC 1.2.1 and SC 1.2.2
SC 1.2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Legal reasons</li> </ul>	Mentioning of the law 2005 or other legal aspects (Salamanca, CRPD, Human Rights)	« Non, pour nous c'est l'école ordinaire. Il a sa place il y a droit. Point. » (Parent 5, T1)	
SC 1.2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Social reasons</li> </ul>	Reasons like: learning with other kids, learning like other children	« Toujours, j'ai toujours voulu, qu'il soit dans une classe ordinaire. Comme les autres enfants. » (Parent 1, T1)	
SC 1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition activities</li> </ul>			
SC 1.3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Meetings</li> </ul>	Opportunity where the family and school staff meet in a formal scheduled situation.	« Bon y'a eu une soirée parents-professeurs où on pouvait rencontrer tous les professeurs de manière individuelle » (Parent 3, T1)	
SC 1.3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Official activities</li> </ul>	All activities offered by the schools, that prepare the student	« donc après c'est vrai qu'ils ont fait: <b>deux</b> visites du collège. Ils ont fait deux	This can mean both preparatory activities, as well as "welcome

		and his/her family for the secondary school such as school visits and open door.	après-midi en immersion donc ils étaient toute la classe avec une classe de sixième et ils ont suivi la classe de sixième. » (Parent 5, T1)	activities” right after the transition.
SC 1.3.3	○External preparations activities	All preparation activities that are not undertaken by the school, but e.g. the family or professionals.	« Alors donc pour préparer [Student 6] on a fait le chemin plusieurs fois. » (Parent 6, T1)	
SC 1.3.4	● Primary-secondary-cooperation	All actions by the primary and secondary school concerning the transition of a student: sharing of information, documentation, meetings etc. before, during and after the transition.	« Eux vont aller faire des projets en commun avec le collège. Ils sont allés visiter plusieurs fois le collège et donc ils ont eu comme ça des actions collège-primaire, déjà ça a commencé au CM1. » (Parent 1, T1)	This does not concern meetings with the parents or other external staff. It is only about the 2 schools.
<i>MC 2</i>	<i>Membership in the class</i>			
SC 2.1	● Making friends	All experiences, wishes, perceptions around the topic of friendship.	« Non, honnêtement, des copains comme nous on l'entend, il n'en a pas. » (Parent 7, T1)	
SC 2.2	● Fitting in/Being normal	All experiences and perceptions that concern the student’s personality in contrast to the other students.	« Finalement au milieu de tous il a l'air tout à fait normal » (Parent 7, T1)	Does not concern friendship (SC 2.1)
SC 2.3	● Social difficulties	All experiences and perceptions parents express concerning the topics misunderstandings, isolation, being excluded, being bullied.	« il s’est fait taper <b>dessus</b> , il s’est fait <b>insulter</b> par pas par un seul groupe par plusieurs groupes » (Parent 3, T1)	
<i>MC 3</i>	<i>Academic Achievement</i>			
SC 3.1	● Schoolwork in class	Work attitude, learning strengths and weaknesses, communication, behavior in class.	« C'est que c'est quelqu'un quand il se met au travail, il est au travail. Il est vraiment dans un comportement d'apprentissage. » (Parent 7, T2)	Refers to the student, not the teacher or classmates.
SC	○Motivation	Aspects why students are	« Puis l’anglais je pense qu’il est content	

3.1.1		motivated or demotivated to study a specific subject.	aussi vu que son papa voilà: il est américain ((rit)) il est content de: de participer un peu: » (Parent 8, T1)	
SC 3.1.2	○Low academic performance	Evaluation of the student's performance as weak or low.	« malgré qu'il n'a pas du tout un niveau pour rentrer au collège. » (Parent 7, T1)	Impression of the participants, not directly related to grades (Sc 3.2)
SC 3.1.3	○High academic performance	Evaluation of the student's performance as strong or high.	« Il fait toujours parti des meilleurs élèves. » (Parent 1, T1)	Impression of the participants, not directly related to grades (Sc 3.2)
SC 3.2	• Evaluation/ Grading	This concerns the process of doing exams and their outcomes in terms of grades.	« j'ai aucune idée, mais je pense pas qu'il y a aura un système de notation comme les autres enfants. » (Parent 8, T1)	
SC 3.3	• Specific arrangements	Rules or rights that have been implemented for the specific student	« Il a au fond de la classe une zone à lui, tapis, coussins, avec des bandes dessinées où il peut aller s'isoler, souffler. » (Parent 7, T2)	
<i>MC 4</i>	<i>Getting along</i>			
SC 4.1	• Knowing the building	This concerns the navigation in the new school building, knowing the classrooms and how to get there.	« Mais l'école maintenant il s'y est habitué, il a plus besoin de l'AVS, il va d'une classe à l'autre. » (Parent 8, T1)	
SC 4.2	• Knowing reference people	It concerns all staff apart from teachers who is involved in the student's school life.	« il a quand même des adultes référents un peu comme ça serait en ULIS, il a choisi une surveillante qui l'adore [...] et puis il hésite pas <b>du tout</b> à parler aux adultes, même au principal. [...] et puis il a aussi son AVS qui est là aussi au cas où. » (Parent 3, T1)	
SC 4.2.1	○AVS	All expressions that assess the relationship between AVS and the child.	« Il a encore un petit peu peut-être du mal à: eh: il est plus formel avec la nouvelle eh: AVS. » (Parent 1, T1)	Not about the tasks of the AVS (SC 6.4)
SC 4.2.2	○Student-teacher-relationship	All experiences or perceptions that are expressed concerning students establishing relationships to the	« Ils s'entendent, il y a une bonne entente ouais. [...] Je pense qu'elle a su bien le	Not limited to the class teachers

		different teachers at secondary school or the other way round. It concerns the quality of the relationship (mutual understanding, fear, dislike).	prendre et bien, bien créer du lien tout simplement avec lui, et puis, il y a un bon échange. » (Parent 2, T2)	
SC 4.3	• Unstructured times	Refers to unstructured situations, in which the student has to organize him/herself: changing classrooms, going to the bathroom, using a locker, gathering of belongings, breaks, way to school etc.	« En temps de pause, le temps du midi, il y a [Student 2] dans sa classe pour euh un moment entre midi et 2. Qu'il puisse s'isoler tranquillement, qu'il dessine, qu'il fasse ses devoirs ou de l'écriture » (Parent 2, T2)	
<i>MC 5</i>	<i>Child Characteristics</i>			
SC 5.1	• Autonomy	Expressions about autonomy of the student in its school everyday life.	« l'organisation des leçons, c'est toujours un peu, ça l'embête, mais il est capable de le faire tout seul.» (Parent 3, T3)	Is often expressed in terms of self- or work-organization.
SC 5.2	• Emotional situation			
SC 5.2.1	○ positive	Situations in which parents evaluate their child's well-being as positive.	« [...] là il est heureux comme tout d'aller au collège quoi. Il est content quoi bon. » (Parent 5, T1)	no direct connection to academic achievement, friendships or relationships to staff members, reference to comorbidities possible
SC 5.2.2	○ negative	Situations in which parents evaluate their child's well-being as challenged.	« Et il y a des moments où: il y a beaucoup, beaucoup d'échanges. Et le niveau sonore monte. Avec son hyperacousie il souffre. Ça le fatigue beaucoup. » (Parent 7, T2)	no direct connection to academic achievement, friendships or relationships to staff members, reference to comorbidities possible
<i>MC 6</i>	<i>School organization</i>			
SC 6.1	• Educational	This concerns the organization of	« je sens une équipe: derrière: aussi bien	It includes also staff that is not

	team	the “équipe éducative” in the classroom or at the school level. This means, how do teachers and AVS share the work, communicate with each other etc.	les enseignants que <b>tout</b> tout le reste, tout le monde, les surveillants tout le monde est <b>très très</b> à l’écoute de [Student 3]. Les adultes sont <b>vraiment</b> là [...] » (Parent 3, T1)	exactly part of the “équipe éducative”, but otherwise involved in the student’s school life such as the school nurse or the CPE.
SC 6.2	• Role of the teachers	Evaluation of teachers’ work in general: tasks, methods, teaching style, communication/collaboration, classroom management. Takes into account teacher’s personality, also with regard to ASD.	« qu’il est très ouvert, qu’il connaît le: TSA, parce qu’il ont eu plein enfants TSA [...] Mais il y en a eu pas mal qui sont passés au collège donc ils ont déjà une expérience. » (Parent 1, T1)	
SC 6.2.1	○Positive experiences	Situations where parents describe satisfaction with the general work of the teacher.	« Et je trouve que cette professeur principale elle s’est investie et aujourd’hui elle est bienveillante. » (Parent 2, T2)	Is not limited to teaching. Does not refer directly to the ASD.
SC 6.2.2	○Negative experiences	Situations where parents describe disappointment with the general work of the teacher.	« Il est, il a très peur des parents, donc j’essaie de pas trop lui en dire eh il est très peu là, il vient pas aux réunions, » (Parent 7, T2)	Is not limited to teaching.
SC 6.2.3	○Adapting	The way teachers adapt their lessons for students with special needs, with particular regard to the student with ASD.	« tous adaptent plus ou moins quand même le travail à [Student 5]. » (Parent 5, T2)	Is not limited to the child under examination.
SC 6.2.4	○dealing with ASD	Concerns teachers’ experience with students with ASD, their attitude and the daily handling.	« parce qu’il y a beaucoup de profs qui ont peur de faire une différence avec les autres enfants. » (Parent 1, T1)	According to the parents
SC 6.3	• Role of the school director	Refers to role in the transition process and decision making	« la proviseure elle est aussi dans-beaucoup dans la tolérance, dans l’acceptation de l’autre » (Parent 4, T1)	
SC 6.4	• Role of the AVS	Refers to the tasks and attitudes of the AVS for the very student.	« Elle reformule les: questions, elle va lui montrer des exemples. » (Parent 6, T1)	Not about the relationship between student and AVS (SC

				4.2.1).
SC 6.5	• Role of the administration	Refers to organizational aspects that are not dealt with by the school, but other institutions such as the MDPH.	« On avait eu le droit., mais personne n'avait été affecté à [Student 6] le jour de la rentrée quoi. » (Parent 6, T1)	
SC 6.6	• Home-school-communication	The communication between parents and the school. This refers to how accessible the schools are for parents, what kind of communication is used, the quality of this communication.	« Oui j'pense que pour l'instant oui j'irais enfin on peut échanger en premier contact par mail ils sont assez= joignable quand j'ai voulu les voir ça a été assez rapide. » (Parent 4, T2)	When no specific contact partner is mentioned.
SC 6.6.1	○Parents-teachers	Communication between parents and teachers.	« Euh écoutez ça: la plupart des professeurs sont très à l'écoute et comprennent très bien. » (Parent 4, T2)	Not limited to the class teacher.
SC 6.6.2	○Parents-teaching assistants	Communication between parents and AVS	« Donc on communique énormément avec son AVS. » (Parent 6, T1)	
SC 6.6.3	○Parents-other Staff	Communication between parents and other school staff such as CPE or school nurse.	« Euh y'a eu l'infirmière, le professeur principal on communique quand même de temps en temps aussi. Et la CPE quand y'avait des problèmes. » (Parent 3, T2)	
SC 6.6.4	○Online portal	Contact through the school's online portal	« On a aussi un truc qu'est super génial, on a l'accès à ses professeurs via un site internet, donc on a tous les devoirs, tout ce qu'ils ont fait en classe, les évaluations, [...]ça permet une relation aussi plus facile avec le college » (Parent 5, T1)	
SC 6.6.5	○Meeting	Meetings that are organized for parents and/or school staff during the school year.	« il y a une réunion parent-professeur, donc on voit tous les professeurs et tous adaptent plus ou moins quand même le travail à [Student 5] » (Parent 5, T2)	Not part of the transition preparation
SC	○Parents	Mentioning of parents being	« moi je fais partie du conseil	

6.6.6	involved in school	involved as representatives or in other form at the school level.	d'administration du collège. Tout de suite je me suis intégrée dedans, dans la branche « Maladie-Handicap » tout de suite. » (Parent 5, T1)	
<i>MC 7</i>	<i>Parenting/Family Situation</i>			
SC 7.1	• Parental/family stress	General stress that is expressed in regards to the parents or the entire family concerning the transition.	« Maintenant il y a eu énormément, il y a eu de pleurs, de l'inquiétude, de l'angoisse, il y a tout eu. Il faut être très présent, faut donner de son temps » (Parent 1, T1)	Focus on transition, not the past.
SC 7.2	• Parents' uncertainty/doubts	Insecurities or doubts that are expressed by parents in regard to the transition.	« je ne connais pas le collège, la qualité de l'enseignement des professeurs, je ne connais rien. » (Parent 1, T1)	
SC 7.3	• Parents' worries			
SC 7.3.1	○organizational	Worries that concern organizational aspects such as navigation, work organization etc.	« est-ce qu'il arriverait à être autonome sur le chemin, puisque devoir aller à l'école tout seul, revenir. Est-ce qu'il ferait attention quoi. » (Parent 6, T1)	
SC 7.3.2	○academic	Worries in regard to academic content or performance.	« après moi mon inquiétude c'est après le pas qu'il décroche quoi, » (Parent 2, T1)	
SC 7.3.3	○social	Worries that concern the relationship to other students or school staff.	« J'avais peur. Peur, c'est logique, du harcèlement ce genre de chose, parce que les enfants sont très méchants entre eux. » (Parent 5, T1)	
SC 7.3.4	○well-being	Worries in regard to the general well-being of the child.	« Donc j'avais vraiment cette inquiétude là, où il allait avoir du mal. » (Parent 1, T1)	
SC 7.4	• Parents' expectations	Expectations and hopes which parents had for the transition or express for the near future of their children at and after secondary school.	« L'intégration de [Student 5], qu'il soit accepté par les autres élèves et qu'il fasse partie eh de la classe quoi.» (Parent 5, T2)	

SC 7.5	• Homework	Descriptions and evaluations of the homework situation.	« Parce qu'il a pas beaucoup de devoirs non plus. Il a, il c'est surtout à relire, revoir, il y a pas trop trop d'exercices à faire. » (Parent 8, T2)	
SC 7.6	• External activities/ support	Refers to support from outside that the family and /or the student receive in their everyday life.	« il a un soutien scolaire une dame qui vient tous les quinze jours l'aider parce qu'il a beaucoup beaucoup de décalage. » #00:17:45# (Parent 8, T1)	
MC 8	<i>Evaluation after Transition</i>	General evaluations of the transition	« Moi je pense que ça c'est très bien passé, ça aurait pu, ça aurait pu être pire. Bon c'est pas catastrophique, mais non c'est très bien. » (Parent 2, T2)	
SC 8.1	• Wishes	Wishes that parents express concerning the future of their children.	« peut-être trouver un système pour que ils puissent: pour communiquer. Je veux dire: moi j'aimerais même plus d'inclusion. » (Parent 8, T1)	Not limited to the child itself, can be more general expressions in terms of society.
SC 8.2	• Changes	Parents descriptions of how their children or the situation have changed since secondary school started.	« ce qu'il a changé c'est sa capacité d'adaptation. Il est devenu beaucoup plus calme, plus heureux. » (Parent 7, T1)	
SC 8.3	• Useful measures	What parents perceived as helpful for themselves during the transition.	« Donc, moi je savait déjà la classe dans laquelle il allait être, avec qui il allait être. Donc, forcément on est déjà soulagé pour la fin de l'année, on est tranquille, on angoisse pas trop. » (Parent 1, T1)	
SC 8.4	• Advice	Advice parents would give to other parents in a transition situation.	« de ne pas hésiter à être un peu lourds et aller voir:- à parler avec les autres adultes hein. Aussi bien les enseignants que les surveillants, que la dame de l'accueil que tout le monde quoi.» (Parent 3, T1)	
SC 8.5	• Obstacles	What the participants themselves describe as obstacles in the	« Les obstacles, [...] ça venait pas de eux, ça venait de la MDPH. On sait jamais à la	

		transition process.	rentrée est-ce qu'on attribué une AVS ou non » (Parent 1, T1)	
SC 8.6	• Concerns	Concerns parents express in regard to the future of their child.	« j'ai un peu peur de l'avenir. Honnêtement ça me fais un peu peur, parce que je sais pas vers quoi il va s'orienter. [...] j'ai juste un peu peur, qu'il que qu'il aura du mal avec l'indépendance un jour. » (Parent 8, T2)	Negative connotation

Category system used to analyze interviews with students

No.	Name of Category	Definition	Anchor Sample	Rules for Coding
<i>MC 1</i>	<i>Transition Planning</i>	What the students describe as preparation for their transition	« Après: on a fait un petit carnet où on notait bah tout ce qu'on avait besoin. » (Student 3, T1)	
<i>MC 2</i>	<i>Membership in the class</i>			
SC 2.1	• Making friends	All experiences, wishes, perceptions around the topic of friendship.	« Nan j'ai des amis aussi euh. J'ai pas mal d'amis enfin je trouve que je m'en sors bien quand même pour un nouveau. » (Student 3, T2)	
SC 2.2	• Fitting in/Being normal	All experiences and perceptions that concern the student's personality in contrast to the other students. This concerns both the understanding of being a child with ASD, but also understanding oneself as secondary school student.	« C'est d'être accepté. Pas être traité comme un malade mental. » (Student 5, T1)	Not about friendship (SC 2.1)
SC 2.3	• Social difficulties	All experiences and perceptions students express concerning the topics misunderstandings, isolation, being excluded, being bullied.	« Après y en a des qui m'embêtent dans la classe » (Student 5, T3)	
<i>MC 3</i>	<i>Academic Achievement</i>			
SC 3.1	• Schoolwork in class	How students describe and perceive their own schoolwork in class.	« Parce que, non seulement c'est compliqué et tout euh: j'suis dans une groupe hum de compétences qui: où il y a, fin où ça travaille vite quoi, plus soutenu » (Student 2, T3)	
SC 3.2	• Evaluation/Grading	This concerns the process of doing exams and their outcomes.	« Oui, j'ai des bonnes notes » (Student 5, T2)	

SC 3.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific arrangements</li> </ul>	Rules or rights that were implemented for the students	« Euh oui c'est de faire des pauses avec un MP3 qui a été accepté heureusement par le directeur, donc c'est des bruitages de remontée mécanique, en fait ma passion se sont les remontées mécaniques » (Student 2, T2)	
<i>MC 4</i>	<i>Getting along</i>			
SC 4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing the building</li> </ul>	This concerns the navigation in the new school building, knowing the classrooms and how to get there.	« J'ai l'impression que je connais pas bien le reste du collège » (Student 3, T2)	
SC 4.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing reference people</li> </ul>			
SC 4.2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Teachers</li> </ul>	Role of teachers in the everyday school life of the student	« ma prof de SVT j'aimais bien parce qu'elle était assez sympa, assez douce, donc moi c'est ce que j'apprécie beaucoup chez les personnes, voilà. Et puis après elle avait une façon de travailler que j'aimais bien » (Student 2, T2)	Takes into account teachers' personalities
SC 4.2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Teaching assistant</li> </ul>	Role of the teaching assistant in the everyday life of the student	« c'est une AVS que j'apprécie beaucoup qui est aussi douce, donc elle s'appelle [nom]. Voilà franchement elle m'aide bien, par contre elle peut pas tout faire à ma place mais elle fait déjà une grande partie. » (Student 2, T2)	Refers to tasks of the AVS as well as to the relationship between student and teaching assistant
SC 4.2.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Other</li> </ul>	It concerns all staff apart from teachers that is involved in the student's school life.	« Je un problème avec un autre élève ou je dis eh- si c'est dans la cours ou je dis au professeur- au surveillant ou je le dis à la CPE » (Student 4, T2)	
<i>MC 5</i>	<i>Unstructured times</i>			
SC 5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaks</li> </ul>	Expressions about autonomy of the child in its school everyday life	« Alors moi, ce que je préfère, alors euh: c'est la cantine parce qu'il y a (?) voilà, il y'a des produits frais. » (Student 2, T2)	breaks, canteen, way to school
SC 5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom changes</li> </ul>	Classroom changes between two lessons	“Enfin quand je dois aller dans une autre salle et je ne vois pas où est-ce que c'est je suis perdu ben je demande à un copain de me dire de: eh	

			c'que je le suive. » (Student 4, T1)	
SC 5.3	• Emotional situation	Expressions, perceptions about the student's general well-being at school		
SC 5.2.1	◦ positive	Situations in which students describe well-being	« Chaque fois que j'y vais bah je me sens bien quoi. » (Student 2, T3)	
SC 5.2.2	◦ negative	Situations in which students see their well-being challenged	« je paniquais j'étais en panique totale au début » (Student 5, T1)	Often concerns the ASD or the comorbidities.
<i>MC 6</i>	<i>Outside School</i>			
SC 6.1	• Homework	Descriptions and evaluations of the homework situation.	« Oui je les fais à la maison souvent au dernier moment mais : sauf si j'ai des devoirs et que et que j'ai une heure de permanence. » (Student 3, T2)	
SC 6.2	• External activities/support	Refers to support from outside that the family and /or the student receive in their everyday life.	« Et le fait que mon éducatrice spécialisée du SESSAD: vient » (Student 2, T1)	
<i>MC 7</i>	<i>Evaluation after Transition</i>			
SC 7.1	• Wishes	Wishes that students express concerning their near or far future	« Moi ce que je voudrais changer des fois, c'est le fait que: que:, que les profs ils nous donnent moins de devoirs, parce que: les devoirs, je supporte plus le soir.» (Student 5, T3)	Not limited to the child itself, can be more general expressions in terms of society.
SC 7.2	• Useful measures	What students perceived as helpful for themselves during the transition.	« ce que j'ai fait déjà eh j'me= suis bien préparé » (Student 4, T2)	
SC 7.3	• Advice	Advice students would give to other students in a transition situation.	« en conseil je- je donnerais tout d'abord alors le numéro un (2) heu: rester: enfin- ne pas être stressé et rester apaisé et calme. Enfin- rester essayer de rester dans cette phase-là le plus longtemps possible. Et dès la rentrée au collège: essayer d'être gentil voilà, enfin gentil sympa » (Student 2, T1)	

Category system used to analyze interviews with teachers

No.	Name of Category	Definition	Anchor Sample	Rules for Coding
<i>MC 1</i>	<i>Transition Planning</i>			
SC 1.1	• Transition activities	What teachers report about the planning of the transition	« au tout début bon j'ai remarqué, on avait fait eh la- une journée un petit peu d'intégration au collège et on avait fait une sortie » (Teacher 6, T2)	Their own preparation or the preparation of parents and students
SC 1.2	• Welcoming a student with ASD	How teachers describe the situation of having a student with ASD in their class	« Bah j'ai un petit peu pas angoissée, mais je me suis posé beaucoup de questions. Parce que c'est la première fois que j'ai un élève autiste. » (Teacher 6, T2)	
<i>MC 2</i>	<i>Social relations among the students</i>			
SC 2.1	• Making friends	All experiences, perceptions around the topic of friendship.	« Alors il a une très bonne copine avec laquelle il était déjà à l'école primaire et qui d'ailleurs le suivait en tout début d'année aussi, qui était=qui assise à côté de lui avant que l'AVS n'arrive. » (Teacher 6, T2)	
SC 2.2	• Fitting in/Being normal	All experiences and perceptions that concern the student's personality in contrast to the other students.	« Bah tous le monde s'interroge, il est assez étrange pour les autres. Les autres se posent énormément de questions autour de son silence » (Teacher 8, T2)	Not about friendship (SC 2.1)
SC 2.3	• Social difficulties	All experiences and perceptions teachers express concerning difficulties in social relationships	« C'est le contact avec certains élèves eh: reste encore un petit peu compliqué. » (Teacher 6, T2)	misunderstandings, isolation, being excluded, being bullied.
<i>MC 3</i>	<i>Academic Achievement</i>			
SC 3.1	• Schoolwork in class	Work attitude, learning strengths and weaknesses, communication, behavior in class.	« Mais histoire-géo, c'est difficile. Les concepts, c'est difficile. SVT aussi et par exemple [...] français et maths il aurait pas du tout le niveau » (Teacher 8, T1)	
SC 3.2	• Evaluation/	This concerns the process of	« comme nous on fait aussi de l'oral pour lui c'était	

	Grading	doing exams and their outcomes	difficile aussi de le noter à l'oral, parce que il y avait pas toujours la participation à l'oral » (Teacher 6, T2)	
SC 3.3	• Specific arrangements	Rules or rights which were implemented for students with special needs and the student with ASD, in particular	« Après je demande aux professeurs de lui lire quand même eh oralement les consignes, de lui lire des questions eh pour pas qu'il soit pénalisé peut-être par une difficulté. » (Teacher 8, T2)	
MC 4	<i>Student-teacher-relationship</i>	All experiences or perceptions that are expressed concerning students establishing relationships to the different teachers at secondary school or the other way round.	« Je pense, que après c'était j'ai une relation particulière avec tous mes élèves, parce que j'ai une relation qui s'adapte à leur mode de fonctionnement » (Teacher 8, T2)	It concerns the quality of the relationship (mutual understanding, fear, dislike).
MC 5	<i>Student Characteristics</i>			
SC 5.1	• Autonomy	Concerns the student's autonomy in all areas of school life	« il se débrouille bien, il est très débrouillard [Student 9] une grande=grande capacité d'autonomie dans les déplacements, dans le fait de savoir à qui s'adresser s'il y a un problème, là il est extrêmement autonome » (Teacher 9, T3)	
SC 5.2	• Behavior			
SC 5.2.1	◦ helpful	Positive student characteristics pointed out by the teachers	« il est extrêmement volontaire, il est très travailleur, il est très endurant. » (Teacher 8, T2)	
SC 5.2.2	◦ challenge	Situations or characteristics that are perceived as challenging	« Bah il communique toujours par écrit, mais à condition qu'on l'oblige quoi, de sa propre initiative il ne communique pas. » (Teacher 8, T2)	
SC 5.3	• Particularities	Particularities of the student with ASD, which have influence on the everyday school life of student and teacher	« il se compose un personnage d'auxiliaire (?) auxiliaire c'est à-dire de qui incarne la loi de ce qui se fait de ce qui se fait pas et qu'il veut dire aux autres et surtout alors là il va pointer il est extrêmement observateur » (Teacher 9, T2)	Might be positive or negative
SC 5.4	• Well-being	Expressions concerning the	« Il a l'air euh épanoui, heureux, content. Il= a	

		overall well-being of the student with ASD at secondary school	l'air vraiment bien. Et d'ailleurs il le dit. » (Teacher 17, T3)	
SC 5.5	• Unstructured time	Refers to unstructured situations, in which the student has to organize him/herself: changing classrooms, going to the bathroom, using a locker, gathering of belongings, breaks, way to school etc.	« le temps qu'il range ses affaires, qu'il aille en récréé quelques fois, il lui reste une ou deux minutes dehors » (Teacher 17, T1)	
SC 6	<i>Teacher's personal attitude</i>	Teacher's position in regard to inclusive education, teaching heterogeneous group.	« c'est vraiment nos directives et puis moi, c'est mon éthique professionnelle, il faut à la fois être dans les évaluations bienveillantes et: montrer tous, tous les points positifs, tout ce qui est pas bien et puis la marge de progrès, parce que ils progressent vraiment tous. » (Teacher 8, T3)	
MC 7	<i>Organization</i>			
SC 7.1	• Cooperation with other school staff	Cooperation between teachers and different school staff	« Je pense qu'on bénéficie de personnalités particulièrement bienveillantes. Alors elle est bien structurée pour l'accueil de l'ULIS. » (Teacher 8, T3)	
SC 7.1.1	○ Other teachers	Cooperation between the teachers and his/her colleagues	« c'est vrai que c'est intéressant aussi de travailler avec les profs d'inclusion parce qu'ils ont chacun un regard autre et semblable, [...] comme ça qu'on construit la connaissance qu'on a de [Student 8] quoi. » (Teacher 8, T3)	
SC 7.1.2	○ Teaching assistant	Relationship and work organization between teacher and teaching assistant	« c'est elle qui me sollicite lorsqu'il y a un problème lorsqu'elle voit, qu'il y a un problème pour un exercice c'est elle qui me dit si je pourrais bien lui reexpliquer à [Student 6] qu'est-ce que j'attends. » (Teacher 6, T2)	Includes tasks of the teaching assistant
SC 7.2	• ULIS vs. mainstream	Valued differences between mainstream schooling and ULIS	« Et: l'autre jour il m'a dit, est-ce que l'année prochaine je serai dans une vraie classe? Donc j'ai	

	class		dit qu'est-ce tu appelles une vraie classe? » (Teacher 8, T1)	
SC 7.3	• Administration	Refers to organizational aspects that are not dealt with by the school, but other institutions such as the MDPH.	« Mais je trouve que l'éducation nationale donne quand même beaucoup beaucoup de moyens. » (Teacher 8, T1)	
SC 7.4	• Daily work life/Teaching			
SC 7.4.1	○Preparation/classroom management	Management tasks	« souvent j'ai encore d'autres élèves, on faut mieux pas associer, je vois, ce qu'ils font. Je ne peux pas uniquement me concentrer sur [Student 6] quoi » (Teacher 6, T2)	
SC 7.4.2	○Teaching	Methods, experiences when teaching a lesson	« on a eu ce gros projet gouter de Noël. Donc là, c'était vraiment des apprentissages concrets, lire un recette, faire des mesures, réaliser des choses, aller au bout de quelque chose, être tous ensemble » (Teacher 8, T1)	May concern lesson preparation
<i>MC 8</i>	<i>Role of the parents</i>			
SC 8.1	• Homework	What teachers express concerning homework	« je crois, qu'il est un petit peu opposant aussi pour faire ses devoirs.» (Teacher 8, T2)	
SC 8.2	• Home-school-communication	The communication between parents and the school. Refers to accessibility, mode of communication and the quality of communication.	« Oui il y a un échange régulier, on s'envoie beaucoup de mails. Et puis, des fois je l'appelle régulièrement. » (Teacher 8, T1)	
<i>MC 9</i>	<i>Evaluation after Transition</i>			
SC 9.1	• Changes	Changes teachers observe in their daily work life or in the student's everyday school life since the start of secondary school	« Il répond plus rapide, il veut apprendre, il est attentif, il est investi » (Teacher 8, T1)	
SC 9.2	• Wishes	Wishes that teachers express	« aménager plus de temps avec eh l'élève en soi	Not limited to the

		regarding the close or far future	qui est autiste. Eh: avoir plus de temps pour lui, qu'on a pas forcément. » (Teacher 6, T2)	student, can be more general in terms of professional or societal development
SC 9.3	• Useful measures	What teachers perceived as helpful for themselves or the students during the transition.	« Bah de me rassurer” (Teacher 6, T2)	
SC 9.4	• Advice	Advice teachers would give to other teachers in a transition situation.	« Prenez le temps de l'observation, de la rencontre et faites vous confiance, parce que, il vous guidera, l'élève avec TSA, il guide toujours pour donner des bonnes idées. » (Teacher 8, T2)	
SC 9.5	• Concerns	Potential obstacles or difficulties teachers identify for the near or far future	« là ça va être travailler son projet professionnel. [...] Ça va très très vite les orientations » (Teacher 8, T3)	
SC 9.6	• Obstacles	What the participants themselves describe as obstacles in the transition process.	« Vraiment de, ce qui m'a manqué c'est ça, c'est vraiment cette transition que la personne qui=qui est travaillé avec lui l'année précédente » (Teacher 9, T2)	

## E. Examples of Transcribed and Coded Interviews

All interviews were analyzed using the MAXQDA-software. In the following, one interview of each stakeholder group is presented exemplarily, in order to show how the transcriptions were coded using the software. The analysis was based on the category systems (cf. Annex 7.4).

*- Taken out for confidentiality reasons -*

## F. Ethics Committee

The research project has been validated by the ethics committee of the University of Strasbourg in 2018. The research protocol, which was submitted for the validation process, is presented in the following.



## Formulaire de soumission au Comité d'Éthique de Recherche – Unistra (CER Unistra)

Le CER-Unistra examine les protocoles de recherche réalisés sous la responsabilité d'un chercheur ou d'un enseignant-chercheur titulaire rattaché au site Alsacien. La possibilité pour un EC/C non rattaché au site alsacien de faire examiner son protocole de recherche doit être sollicitée auprès du président du comité.

### **Avertissement relatif aux déclaration(s) réglementaire(s)**

Les recherches sur la personne humaine constituent la plupart du temps des traitements de données personnelles qui nécessitent l'accomplissement de formalités « informatiques et libertés », soit auprès du délégué à la protection des données de l'université, soit auprès de la CNIL. Le CER-UNISTRA sera attentif au respect des obligations concernant la protection des données à caractère personnel. Pour connaître les obligations liées à votre recherche du point de vue de la loi informatique et libertés et engager les formalités préalables, nous vous invitons à prendre contact avec le délégué à la protection des données : [cil@unistra.fr](mailto:cil@unistra.fr)

Avant de le contacter, rendez-vous sur la page délégué à la protection des données pour avoir quelques éléments d'appréciation.

*L'accord du comité éthique d'établissement n'équivaut pas à un accord de la CNIL.*

### **Avertissement relatif aux recherches dont une partie se déroule hors des frontières françaises**

Le CER-UNISTRA ne se prononce pas sur la partie d'un protocole de recherche qui est mise en oeuvre hors de France et qui doit être soumise à un comité d'éthique local ou si il n'en n'existe pas, doit respecter la législation en vigueur.

Le présent projet de recherche est partiellement réalisé à l'étranger  oui  non

RESUME DU PROJET (en une page)

<b>Titre du projet :</b>	La transition de l'école primaire au collège pour les élèves avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme
<b>Acronyme du projet (si existant) :</b>	
<b>Domaine scientifique /discipline :</b>	Sciences de l'Education
<b>Organisme responsable de la recherche</b> <i>(promoteur ; p.ex. CNRS, Université, ...<sup>11</sup>) :</i>	Université de Strasbourg
<b>Chercheur responsable scientifique du projet</b> <i>: Veuillez à nous fournir l'ensemble des informations suivantes : nom et prénom, mail et téléphone, fonction, affiliation et adresse postale</i>	Prof. Céline CLEMENT ESPE Meinau Strasbourg 141 Avenue de Colmar 67000 Strasbourg <a href="mailto:celine.clement@unistra.fr">celine.clement@unistra.fr</a>
<b>Autres chercheurs participant au projet :</b> <i>Mentionner, nom, prénom, mail, fonction, affiliation, adresse</i> <i>Les doctorants et post-doc participant au projet doivent être mentionnés.</i>	Mechthild RICHTER (doctorante) Université de Strasbourg (ESPE) 7 Rue de l'Université 67000 Strasbourg richterm@unistra.fr  Maria POPA-ROCH ESPE Meinau Strasbourg 141 Avenue de Colmar 67000 Strasbourg <a href="mailto:poparoch@unistra.fr">poparoch@unistra.fr</a>
<b>Lieu(x) de recherche (endroit(s)) où l'étude va être conduite :</b> <i>Si l'étude est conduite au sein de l'université ou d'une UMR, dans ce cas préciser le lieu précis – UFR- laboratoire – avec son adresse. Si l'étude nécessite des rencontres hors des murs de l'université (p.ex. établissements scolaires, services hospitaliers, enceintes sportives) mentionner ces lieux le plus précisément possible.</i>	Des questionnaires et des entrevues sont utilisés dans le cadre de l'étude. Les questionnaires peuvent être remplis en ligne. Les entretiens ont lieu soit à l'université (7 Rue de l'Université, salle 210), soit en Skype, soit téléphonique, mais dans la plupart des cas chez les participants (entretiens avec enfants et parents) ou à l'école où ils travaillent (entretiens avec l'enseignants). Je suggère ces variantes aux participants, puis je les laisse choisir celles qu'ils préfèrent.

<sup>11</sup> Pour vous aider à remplir le dossier des phrases ou expressions en italique ont été ajoutées. Elles peuvent être supprimées et remplacées par votre propre texte.

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**Objectif principal (5 lignes max.):**

**L'objectif principal de notre travail de recherche vise à identifier les freins et les leviers à une transition réussie entre le primaire et le secondaire pour les élèves avec autisme.**

**Les objectifs secondaires sont ainsi :**

- définir ce qu'est un processus de « transition réussie » entre le premier et le second degré
- déterminer quelles variables favorisent ou non un processus de transition réussi
- élaborer des recommandations sur la façon de réussir la transition pour les enfants autistes avec TSA.

**Conflits d'intérêts**

Il n'y a pas de conflit d'intérêts.

Je prends connaissance du fait que l'avis rendu par le Comité ne concerne que le projet de recherche présenté dans ce document.

Date : 25 juin 2018

Signature numérisée du responsable scientifique :



## **1. DESCRIPTION SOMMAIRE DU PROJET**

### **Contexte et intérêt scientifiques**

Le Trouble du Spectre de l'Autisme (TSA), dont on estime la prévalence à 1/150 (Haute Autorité de Santé, 2012), est défini comme « un groupe de troubles caractérisés par des altérations qualitatives des interactions sociales réciproques et des modalités de communication, ainsi que par un répertoire d'intérêts et d'activités restreints, stéréotypés et répétitifs. Ces anomalies qualitatives constituent une caractéristique envahissante du fonctionnement du sujet, en toute situation » (OMS, 1994). Elles peuvent engendrer une anxiété importante qui empêche l'élève d'évoluer de façon harmonieuse avec son entourage. Par exemple en situation scolaire sont observées chez les élèves atteints d'autisme des difficultés de planification du travail scolaire, de compréhension des situations sociales, des conversations (compréhension littérale du langage), des énoncés d'exercices.

Cependant la loi du 11 février 2005 pour "l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées" qui fait de l'inclusion en milieu scolaire ordinaire un droit, conduit à une augmentation du nombre d'enfants présentant un TSA en milieu scolaire ordinaire.

Or, si les modalités et obstacles de l'inclusion au primaire sont bien documentés (Paquet, Clément, & Magerotte, 2012), les recherches concernant la problématique de l'inclusion au secondaire sont plus récentes.

Sur le versant professionnel certains travaux se sont intéressés à l'identification des besoins de formation des enseignants (Flavier & Clément, 2014 ; Guimond & Forget, 2010). D'autres travaux ont visé quant à eux la période de transition entre le primaire et le secondaire en étudiant les besoins des élèves, identifiés par les professionnels (Adreon & Durocher, 2007), par les parents (Dillon & Underwood, 2012), ou encore par les enfants et adolescents eux-mêmes (Dillon, Underwood, & Freemantle, 2014). Ces travaux ont permis d'identifier via les élèves eux-mêmes des facilitateurs de l'inclusion : espaces dédiés aux élèves sans stimulations sensorielles, identification de personnes ressources, organisation de temps permettant le tutorat par les pairs (prévention du harcèlement et du décrochage scolaire), formation des enseignants aux stratégies adaptées (Saggers, 2015).

Considérant que les travaux de recherche sont rares et que le contexte socio-culturel et institutionnel diffère entre la France et les pays anglo-saxons, tant dans la formation des enseignants, dans l'organisation de la scolarité que des services offerts aux élèves, il importe de s'interroger spécifiquement sur la transition du 1<sup>o</sup> au second degré des élèves avec autisme et ce pour proposer des dispositifs adaptés en fonction des besoins des élèves, des parents et des professionnels. Ceci répond par ailleurs aux attentes institutionnelles, la liaison interdégrés (premier et second degré) devenant un élément déterminant pour assurer la continuité des apprentissages et la fluidité des parcours.

En cohérence avec les plus récentes études internationales nous avons identifié les élèves, les parents et les enseignants comme étant les principaux acteurs de la transition. A la différence d'autres études il nous semble pertinent de les interroger en parallèle afin de préciser ce qui fait de la transition une expérience partagée. Comme la littérature suggère que la transition des élèves avec TSA prend plus de temps que pour les élèves ordinaires. Une autre originalité de notre étude nous conduit à suivre les élèves, mais aussi leurs parents et enseignants pendant l'année scolaire et les interviewer au début, au milieu et à la fin de la première année scolaire au collège de l'élève TSA.

Une approche méthodologique mixte nous fournira des données quantitatives et qualitatives pour mieux comprendre la situation de transition du point de vue des élèves, des parents et des enseignants. Sur la base de ces nouvelles connaissances, des recommandations pour la transition doivent être élaborées.

## Objectifs

### Méthodologie générale envisagée

Méthodologie mixte (questionnaires et entretiens semi-directifs)

### Hypothèses générales

La transition de l'école primaire au collège dure plus longtemps pour les enfants autistes.

Les élèves autistes ont des besoins spéciaux qui devraient être pris en compte lors de la planification de la transition de l'école primaire au collège afin que celle-ci soit considérée comme réussie du point de vue des différents acteurs.

## 2. MATERIEL ET METHODES

### A. Participants

#### Nombre de participants :

Cohorte	Questionnaires	Entretiens semi-directifs
2017/2018	59	8 parents dont l'enfant a TSA 8 enfants avec TSA 8 enseignants dont l'élève a TSA
2018/2019	Envisagé : au moins 30 participants par questionnaire	Envisagé : 10 parents dont l'enfant avec TSA 10 enfants avec TSA 10 enseignants dont l'élève a TSA 5 parents témoins 5 enfants témoins 5 enseignants témoins

#### Recrutement des participants :

##### Mode de recrutement :

- Des courriels contenant des informations sur l'étude et la demande de participation sont envoyés aux associations de parents et d'enseignants avec la demande de transmission aux membres.
- Des dépliants seront distribués lors d'événements scientifiques liés au sujet et auxquels des participants potentiels peuvent être présents.
- Échantillonnage en boule de neige.
- Lien de la Direction Académique du Bas-Rhin pour établir des contacts avec les familles (pas de contact direct).

Lieu de recrutement : Toute la France, y compris les territoires d'outre-mer.

Critères de sélection :

Questionnaires			Entretiens		
Parents	Enfants	Enseignants	Parents	Enfants	Enseignants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoir un enfant diagnostiqué avec TSA en 6<sup>ème</sup> qui fréquente une ULIS<sup>12</sup> ou une classe ordinaire</li> <li>• Comprendre et écrire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• avoir une diagnostique TSA</li> <li>• fréquente une 6<sup>ème</sup> en France</li> <li>• fréquente une ULIS ou classe ordinaire</li> <li>• comprendre et écrire français</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enseigner un enfant avec TSA en 6<sup>ème</sup> en ULIS ou classe ordinaire</li> <li>• comprendre et écrire français</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoir un enfant diagnostiqué avec TSA en 6<sup>ème</sup> qui fréquente une ULIS ou une classe ordinaire</li> <li>• comprendre et parler soit français, soit anglais, soit allemand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• avoir une diagnostique TSA</li> <li>• fréquente une 6<sup>ème</sup> en France</li> <li>• fréquente une ULIS ou classe ordinaire</li> <li>• comprendre et parler soit français, soit anglais, soit allemand</li> <li>• verbale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enseigner un enfant avec TSA en 6<sup>ème</sup> en ULIS ou classe ordinaire</li> <li>• comprendre et parler soit français, soit anglais, soit allemand</li> </ul>

Critères de non inclusion :

- personnes non-verbales (entretiens)

**Indemnisation éventuelle des participants :**

Il n'y a pas d'indemnisation des personnes impliquées dans la recherche.

**B. Méthode : collecte, gestion et analyse des données**

**Description du protocole :**

- Questionnaires et guides d'entretien (« maison ») en annexe

Il n'existe pas un questionnaire, qui rend compte des spécificités de la transition du primaire au secondaire pour les élèves avec TSA. Notre but est de valider un tel questionnaire, questionnaire que nous avons développé pour ce projet. Cela va permettre plus de recherches spécifiques autour des élèves avec TSA.

Notre article (Richter, Popa-Roch, Clément, 2018, en révision) peut servir de référence. L'article modifie et complète les critères d'Evangelou et al. (2008) pour définir ce qu'est une transition réussie de l'école primaire à collège afin de refléter la situation des élèves atteints d'un TSA. Ces critères sont énumérés dans le tableau suivant, qui est également inclus dans l'article.

Sur la base de ces critères, les questionnaires et les guides d'entrevue de l'étude ont été élaborés.

Table 3: New criteria for a successful transition from primary to secondary school for children with ASD

A well-planned, child-centered transition process involving all key stakeholders has been applied, when:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student is a respected member of the class.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic achievement continues at the same level or slightly lower.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student and its teachers have a positive relationship with each other.</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> Unité Localisée pour l'Inclusion Scolaire

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student knows the new school building and its reference persons well.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation and teamwork organization ensure continuity in the learning process.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers feel self-efficient and satisfied in their daily work.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents are familiar with the school and its staff and see it as a good place for their child.</li> </ul>

Pour valider le questionnaire, nous recherchons autant de participants que possible, mais au moins 30 par questionnaire. Outre la validation, cela nous donne une vue d'ensemble de la situation de passage des élèves avec TSA en France. Afin de mieux comprendre et d'approfondir les réponses au questionnaire, des entretiens supplémentaires seront menés avec des familles et des enseignants. La profondeur de ces données qualitatives complète l'étendue des données quantitatives.

**Matériel utilisé :**

- Papier /Stylo
- Dictaphone
- Téléphone
- Ordinateur

**Lieu(x) ou l'étude va être conduite :**

Les questionnaires peuvent être remplis en ligne. Les entretiens ont lieu soit à l'université (7 Rue de l'Université, salle 210), soit en Skype, soit au téléphone, mais dans la plupart des cas chez les participants (entretiens avec enfants et parents) ou à l'école où ils travaillent (entretiens avec l'enseignant). Les variantes sont suggérées aux participants qui choisissent.

**Qui va conduire l'étude :**

Les entretiens sont conduits par Mechthild Richter (doctorante).

**Calendrier des évaluations, observations ou entretiens :**

<b>Cohorte 2017/2018</b>	<b>Questionnaires</b>	<b>Entretiens</b>
	mi-octobre 2017-décembre 2017	mi-octobre2017- mi-décembre 2017
	mi-février 2018 – mi-mars 2018	mi-février 2018 – mi-mars 2018
	mi-juin 2018-mi-juillet 2018	mi-juin 2018-mi-juillet 2018
<b>Cohorte 2018/2019</b>	Début-octobre 2018 – mi-novembre 2018	Début-octobre 2018 – mi-novembre 2018
	mi-février 2019 – mi-mars 2019	mi-février 2019 – mi-mars 2019
	mi-juin 2019-mi-juillet 2019	mi-juin 2019-mi-juillet 2019

**Durée de l'étude :** *ce point correspond à la durée du recueil des données.*

Etude entière : décembre 2016 – décembre 2019

Recueil de données : octobre 2017 – juillet 2019

**Analyse des données :**

Questionnaires :

- validation de questionnaire
- statistique descriptive pour mieux comprendre les corrélations entre les variables différentes
- comparaison entre groupe participant et groupe témoins

Entretiens :

- analyse qualitative de contenu (Mayring, 2014)

### C. Bénéfices et risques prévisibles et connus pour la santé physique et mentale (estime de soi, etc.) et la vie sociale (p.ex. sa réputation)

1- Présentez les bénéfices de votre étude.

- Mieux comprendre la situation de transition pour les élèves avec TSA
- combler une lacune en matière de recherche
- Améliorer de processus de transition
- Amélioration de la qualité de vie des élèves avec TSA, et leurs parents et le sentiment d'auto-efficacité des enseignants

2- Présentez les risques de votre étude. Vous devez répondre par oui ou non dans le tableau ci-dessous et lister les risques que vous pouvez rencontrer lors de votre étude

Oui ou non	
NON	Votre protocole utilise-t-il une mise en scène expérimentale destinée à dissimuler une partie de l'objectif ou de la méthodologie aux sujets ou de faire croire à d'autres objectifs ou d'autres méthodologies ? (ce peut être le cas de l'observation participante, sans exclusive de ce type de protocole). Si oui, ce dossier doit présenter une description de la mise en scène utilisée et une explication de la façon de la dévoiler aux sujets à la fin de l'étude et de leur préciser les véritables objectifs de l'étude. En outre, on doit amener des arguments montrant que la dissimulation de certains aspects du protocole est indispensable au regard des objectifs et des enjeux, et qu'aucun des aspects dissimulés aux sujets n'est susceptible de menacer leur sécurité ou leur dignité.
OUI	Questions pouvant mettre les participant.e.s mal à l'aise ?
OUI	Situations pouvant mettre les participant.e.s mal à l'aise ?
NON	Contenus, matériaux, pouvant être considérés par le ou la participant.e. comme menaçants, choquants, répugnants ?
OUI	Est-ce que les renseignements collectés concernent la vie privée du ou de la participante, de sa famille ?
NON	Utilisation de stimuli physiques (auditifs, visuels, haptiques, etc.) ou matériel autre que des stimuli associés à des activités normales ?
NON	Privation de besoins physiologiques (boire, manger, dormir, etc.)
NON	Manipulation de paramètres psychologiques ou sociaux comme la privation sensorielle, l'isolement social ou le stress psychologique ?
NON	Efforts physiques au-delà du niveau considéré comme modéré pour le ou la participante ?
NON	Exposition à des drogues, produits chimiques ou agents potentiellement toxiques ?

Mesures identifiées pour réduire les risques :

- S'il est clair qu'un sujet sensible a été soulevé, ne pas poser d'autres questions.
- Les enfants ont une carte jaune et rouge qu'ils peuvent montrer pour éviter de répondre aux questions ou pour interrompre/arrêter l'entretien.
- Les parents sont présents lors des entretiens avec les enfants et peuvent intervenir.
- Les participants sont informés qu'ils ne sont pas obligés de répondre à toutes les questions et qu'ils peuvent faire une pause ou arrêter à tout moment.

### D. Vigilance/ Arrêt prématuré de l'étude

Critères d'arrêt de l'étude pour un sujet qui y participe

- Participant retire son consentement de participation à l'étude pendant ou après le recueil des données.

### 3. TRAITEMENT DES DONNEES – Confidentialité et sécurité

Le porteur de projet doit préciser les conditions dans lesquelles les informations récoltées seront traitées, rendues anonymes, conservées, ainsi que les mesures garantissant le respect de la vie privée dans la mise en oeuvre du protocole et dans la diffusion des résultats de l'étude. Il doit fournir l'intégralité ou les références (en cas d'outil standardisé) des questionnaires éventuels supports de l'étude, et expliciter leur mode d'administration (papier, en ligne, entretien, etc.).

#### Confidentialité

*Le principe de sécurité et de confidentialité des données : le professionnel de santé ou tout responsable de fichier a une obligation de sécurité et doit :*

*Garantir la confidentialité des informations et l'accès aux seules personnes habilitées.*

*Éviter la divulgation des informations à des tiers non autorisés*

#### Procédé d'anonymisation / confidentialité

Il existe une table de correspondance entre chaque personne et les numéros aléatoires identifiant la série de données correspondant à un participant. Ceci est nécessaire pour organiser des entretiens avec les participants. L'adresse électronique doit également être fournie aux autres participants pour l'envoi des questionnaires de suivi.

Les interviews sont anonymées lors de la transcription. Chaque participant reçoit un code composé de lettres et de chiffres. Tous les autres noms mentionnés, ainsi que les noms de villes, de rues et d'écoles, sont rendus anonymes afin d'éviter toute conclusion quant aux participants.

L'analyse des données s'effectue avec des données anonymes. De même, seules des données anonymes sont utilisées dans les publications.

#### Archivage

Type de données archivées (préciser si les données permettent l'identification, directement ou par recoupement) :

- Contacts des participants pour le cas d'une étude de suivi
- Réponses aux questionnaires
- Transcriptions
- Formulaires de consentement

Durée de l'archivage :

Le CER-UNISTRA conseille une durée de 10 ans d'archivage des données après le recueil. En tout état de cause, une durée de 5 ans est un minimum incompressible.

En ce qui concerne l'archivage des formulaires de consentement (nécessairement identifiables), le CER-UNISTRA conseille de les conserver 10 ans à compter de la publication et 20 ans en cas de non publication, dans une enveloppe scellée portant la mention : « J'atteste que cette enveloppe contient x consentement(s) et x formulaire(s) d'information conformes, recueillis dans le cadre de l'étude *trucmuche* », suivie du nom du responsable.

10 ans d'archivage sont prévus.

Lieu de l'archivage :

- Contacts des participants : disque dur externe + Seafile
- Réponses aux questionnaires : données de Limesurvey sur un serveur de l'Université, disque dur externe + Seafile
- Transcriptions : disque dur externe + Seafile
- Formulaire du consentement : bureau fermé à clé (au sein de l'ESPE)

Personne responsable de l'archivage :

Mechthild Richter (doctorante)

Céline Clément (directrice de thèse)

Possibilité de destruction à la demande du participant (voir cas de figure section 5) :

Personnes ayant accès aux données :

- Mechthild Richter (doctorante)
- Céline Clément, PU, ESPE Unistra (directrice de thèse)
- Odile Rohmer, PU, Psychologie Unistra (associée au projet)
- Maria Popa-Roch, MCF, ESPE Unistra (associée au projet)
- étudiants master en stage qui aident à la transcription des entretiens

## 5. FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT ECLAIRE INCLUANT L'INFORMATION A DONNER AUX PARTICIPANTS

- Voir les formulaires du consentement en annexe
- Possibilité de rectification ou de destruction des données concernant les participant.es. Nous nous inscrivons dans le Cas 2 :

Cas 2 – Informer les participants que conformément aux dispositions de la loi Informatique et Libertés, ils pourront exercer leurs droits d'accès, et de rectification ou suppression auprès du responsable scientifique du projet.

- Après s'être assuré de la bonne compréhension des informations fournies, la doctorante sollicitera du participant son consentement pour participer à l'étude. Si il ou elle accepte, le participant signera le formulaire de consentement en deux exemplaires préalablement à la réalisation de l'étude (Annexe).
- Un exemplaire du formulaire de consentement signé sera transmis à la responsable scientifique et l'autre sera remis au participant.

Précisez ici la façon dont sera recueilli le consentement éclairé :

Le consentement éclairé des jeunes avec autisme sera recueilli après échange avec leur parent. Il leur sera à nouveau précisé en préalable aux entretiens qu'ils ou elles peuvent retirer leur consentement à tout moment.

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## **ANNEXES AU DOSSIER DE RÉPONSE**

Les annexes doivent comprendre tous les documents utiles à la compréhension du protocole :

- la note d'information
- le consentement
- le cas échéant, les messages publiés sur les réseaux sociaux ou les affiches utilisées etc. pour recruter les participants
- les questionnaires utilisés
- les guides d'entretien

Pour l'annexe voir document séparé.

**« Maintenant c'est un collégien » -  
Réussir la transition du primaire au  
secondaire pour les élèves avec un  
trouble du spectre de l'autisme**

## Résumé

Cette thèse portait sur la transition du primaire au secondaire des élèves atteints de troubles du spectre de l'autisme (TSA) en France, dans le contexte du développement de l'inclusion scolaire.

L'étude 1 a permis de déterminer les critères d'une transition réussie. Elle a montré que la transition est complexe et touche plusieurs acteurs. L'étude 2 a permis de saisir les représentations sociales d'une transition réussie. Celles-ci sont largement cohérentes entre les gens, qu'ils considèrent ou non un élève atteint de TSA. Néanmoins, des différences subsistent et ont été étudiées plus en détail dans l'étude 3. Cette étude a produit des résultats concernant les expériences et les perceptions des acteurs clés. De plus, elle a permis d'identifier des stratégies pour une transition réussie ainsi que des obstacles.

Les résultats des études ont été combinés pour élaborer des recommandations pour une transition primaire-secondaire réussie pour les élèves atteints de TSA. En raison de la complexité de la transition, chaque recommandation doit être adaptée à chaque cas et chaque intervenant. Les mesures existantes ainsi que les nouvelles recommandations sont discutées dans le contexte de l'ambition de parvenir à un système scolaire inclusif.

Mots-clés : Trouble du spectre de l'autisme, transition, second degré, inclusion, France

## Résumé en anglais

This thesis investigated the transition from primary to secondary school of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in France.

Study 1 provided criteria for a successful transition. It showed that the transition is complex and affects several stakeholders. Study 2 captured the social representations of lay people on a successful transition. These are largely congruent between lay people considering or not a student with ASD. Nevertheless, differences remain and were further investigated in study 3. This study delivered results concerning the experiences and perceptions of concerned stakeholders. Moreover, it identified strategies for a successful transition, as well as barriers.

The results of these studies were combined to develop recommendations for a successful primary-secondary transition for students with ASD. Due to the complexity of the transition, every recommendation has to be adapted to each case and stakeholder. Existing measures as well as the new recommendations are discussed in the context of the ambition to achieve an inclusive school system.

Mots-clés : Autism Spectrum Disorder, transition, secondary school, inclusion, France