

Dossiê “Jovens, Trabalho e Educação”¹

Told to make a choice. From humiliation to a sense of injustice^{2 3}

L'injonction à choisir. De l'humiliation au sentiment d'injustice

A imposição a escolher. Da humilhação ao sentimento de injustiça

Kergoat, Prisca^④

④ Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, Toulouse, France. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6403-4611>, prisca.kergoat@univ-tlse2.fr

Abstract

In France, every year, almost 40% of pupils are advised to take vocational education. These young people, between adolescence and adulthood, are told to « choose » a route and to opt for a low-skilled profession (limited to manual tasks). To shed light on what lies behind the scenes between school and the beginning of vocational education, we aim to uncover the way educational and productive spheres support and reinforce inequality and to show how children experience humiliation and voice their sense of injustice.

Keywords: Career guidance, education, work, working-class youth, injustice

¹ Thematic dossier organized by: Aparecida Neri de Souza (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1730-4495>), Dirce Djanira Pacheco e Zan (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3663-2232>) and José Humberto da Silva (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7437-7017>)

² Responsible Editor: Wivian Weller - <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1450-2004>

³ References correction and bibliographic normalization services: Ana Carolina López e Juliano Lima (Tikinet) – revisao@tikinet.com.br

Résumé

En France, chaque année, près de 40% des élèves sont orientés vers la filière professionnelle. Oscillant entre l'adolescence et l'âge adulte, ces jeunes sont sommés de « choisir » une orientation, de se positionner sur un métier relevant du travail d'exécution. Dans l'optique d'éclairer cette zone frontière, celle des coulisses entre l'école et l'entrée en formation, il s'agit tout à la fois de rendre compte de la façon dont la sphère éducative et la sphère productive maintiennent et renforcent les inégalités que de la manière dont les filles et les garçons vivent l'humiliation et formulent l'injustice.

Mots-clés: *Orientation professionnelle, éducation, travail, jeunesse populaires, injustice*

Resumo

Na França, todos os anos, cerca de 40% dos alunos são orientados para a educação profissionalizante. No limite entre a adolescência e a idade adulta, esses jovens são convocados a “escolher” um rumo, a se colocarem em um ramo relevante do trabalho de produção. Para esclarecer essa zona de fronteira, a do corredor entre a escola e o início de sua formação, é necessário detalhar tanto a forma como as esferas educativa e produtiva mantêm e produzem as desigualdades quanto a maneira como jovens vivem a humilhação e formulam a injustiça.

Palavras-chave: *Orientação vocacional, educação, trabalho, juventude da classe popular, injustiça*

Introduction

In France, despite the extent of its school education, part of its working-class youth is geared toward vocational training to prepare them for manual or low-skilled positions. These youth are neither known nor recognized: « vocational students are analyzed « implicitly, in light of what they are not, as compared to the standard group made up of upper secondary school students in the general cycle »⁴ (Moreau, 2003, p. 9). They are either negatively defined by the lack of their recognition or remain undefined. A quick look at the French literature since the 1970s is enough: they perform more poorly at school, find it difficult to adjust to expectation set on them, approach knowledge in a more detached or utilitarian way, fail to adopt « proper » attitudes at work, and, above all —and this is precisely what I wish to underline —, look acquiescent, without any capacity for resistance or autonomous thinking.

⁴ « Les élèves en formation professionnelle sont analysés en ‘creux’, au regard ‘de ce qu’ils ne sont pas ‘par référence au ‘groupe-étalon’ que constitueraient les lycéens du cycle général ».

As a matter of fact, they are depicted as especially docile: Claude Grignon (1971) compares vocational education as a « process of domestication » in which boys, « an élite of outcasts, » are said to passively internalize school and professional hierarchy; to adopt a position of « acceptance » in which « submitting, seen as necessary to be able to work, becomes internalized as an objective fact of existence »⁵ (Ferry & Mons-Bourdarias, 1980, p. 47). This subjection to the dominant social order is also supposedly observed beforehand during the guidance toward a decision and their choice of a profession. Because « the school system is an alienating system which makes the ‘less privileged’ individuals see their situation as legitimate »⁶ (Lannegrand- Willems, 2004, p. 14) and an acceptance of « ranking logics »⁷ (Cayouette-Remblière, 2016, p. 21), which is obviously the case for boys and, apparently, much more so for girls.

Whereas the former supposedly participate in their own domination via their practices of opposition, as these « lads, » working-class kids who contribute to reproducing their class position by a counter school culture (Willis, 1977), the latter, by contrast, are said to accept their domination: the girls taking vocational education are, so they say, « docile » « dedicated »⁸ (Appay, 1982, pp. 75-76), and « conformist »⁹ (André, 2012, p. 40). Thus, to account for school and professional guidance and for the weight of gender segregation in vocational tracks, Ugo Palheta (2012) suggests that the reason for it lies in « the choice of a profession »¹⁰ (p. 238). As Françoise Vouillot (2007) shows, the dominance of gendered socializations is an indisputable fact. What remains clear is that the importance given to « tastes, » « vocation, » or « aptitudes, » contributes to making girls accountable for their condition. While domination over boys is presumably rooted in social structures and objective constraints, its weight over girls — even for researchers on reproduction who are supposed to adopt a materialist approach — would come from themselves: from stereotypes, beliefs, their subconscious, in short, from subjective

⁵ La « nécessité de se soumettre pour travailler sera intériorisée comme une donnée objective de l’existence »

⁶ « Le système scolaire constitue un système d’emprise dans lequel les individus ‘les moins favorisés’ perçoivent leur situation comme légitime »

⁷ « à la logique du classement »

⁸ « dociles », « dévouées »

⁹ « conformistes »

¹⁰ « dans le choix du métier »

processes. As underlined by Ugo Palheta (2012), the concept of habitus¹¹ is irreducible to mere docile dispositions, and yet, girls' social practices are most often thus analyzed.

Bourdieu's sociology of reproduction provided invaluable tools to assess the world of dominant classes but Grignon and Passeron (1989) have underlined that the lower the social classes analyzed, the less relevant the tool proves itself. Pierre Bourdieu has particularly minimized such social realities as resistance to domination and has shown a propensity to devalue working-class practices of social and cultural autonomy (including that of women). However, Olivier Schwartz (1998) points out that the cultural differences characterizing the working classes cannot be only interpreted as resulting from domination and dispossession:

they also express a capacity of being off the norm, aptitudes to build their own lifestyles, and specific resources to incorporate the conditions of a dominated existence while preserving, despite everything, some sense of life and meaning¹². (Schwartz, 1998, p. 25)

In this study, I will examine what lies behind the scenes between school and the beginning of vocational education¹³ with a twofold objective: to report how school and professional guidance maintain and reinforce inequality on the one hand and, on the other, how boys and girls speak of career guidance, experience humiliation, and voice injustice.

It is difficult to grasp these pupils' experience. Since career guidance rests on the notion of choice, it is successively apprehended via its effects on school careers and the reproduction of social inequality but also regarding how the involved actors and institutions implement it. As a matter of fact, using the notion of choice for school and professional guidance raises critical issues: a political one concerning how school addresses social inequality and a sociological one insofar as it involves our representation individuals and their autonomy in the face of social structures (Blanchard & Cayouette-Remblière, 2011). Researchers may differ in the emphasis they lay either on constraints or on individual freedom according to their theoretical positioning but they all agree on the necessity of connecting social determinants and the subjective relations

¹¹ Habitus is "system of lasting dispositions" created by the spontaneous interplay between external constraints and individual ambitions. Habitus explains that individuals belonging to the same social category (i.e., the same group) in similar conditions have a similar view of the world, ideas, behaviors, and tastes (Bourdieu, 1979).

¹² « elles manifestent aussi des capacités d'écart à la norme, des aptitudes à fabriquer des modes de vie, des ressources spécifiques pour s'approprier les conditions d'une existence dominée et pour y maintenir malgré tout de la vie et du sens »

¹³ To apprehend the whole process of the production of rebelliousness, see the forthcoming study, to be published in 2021 by Editions La Dispute.

to guidance. To do so, I will draw on the sociology of social relations. Far from being a determinist concept, it will enable me to understand both the influence of dominations and subversive practices. Consubstantiality (Kergoat D., 2012) provides a robust conceptual perspective to assess the influence of class, gender, and race¹⁴ relations and how they interact, are reinforced, and coproduced.

Methodology

Data from two surveys, conducted between 2013 and 2017 under my scientific responsibility¹⁵, were used. The ones on which I rely are inherent to the methodological setups of both surveys and this study aims to propose an original approach to the working-class youth's relations to school and professional guidance. Both surveys rely on the same methodology: they associate a study using questionnaires and an ethnographic survey via interviews. The combination of these two methods fails to rest on a division of roles - questionnaires collecting context-related objective data and interviews, subjective dimensions. Both methods attempt to follow the time sequence, the progress of the processes at work, and the detailed exploration of contexts (Passeron & Revel, 2005). The population surveyed by the questionnaire amounted to 2949 individuals, 1684 *lycée professionnel* (LP - vocational high school) students and 910 apprentices in CFA (Apprentice Training Centers) taking either a CAP (Certificate of professional aptitude) or a vocational Baccalaureate (equivalent to a bachelor's degree). The statistical study of the questionnaires (devised along ordinal, categorical scales and less often on open-ended questions), enabled us to characterize interviewees' social and school profiles and their relation to guidance decisions and to address the sense of injustice they felt (assessed in the second part of our questionnaire).

¹⁴ The notion of « race » is used like « class » and « gender, » i.e., as a socially constructed categorization (an ideological production) which can only be used within an approach structured around the concept of social relation (race-related social relations, for example). Regarding this issue: Guillaumin, 1992.

¹⁵ The first survey, funded by the French Ministry of Education, aimed to analyze the living and study conditions of LP students (2013-2015). This multidisciplinary research was conducted with V. Capdevielle, A. Courtinat-Camps, J. Jarty, P. Lemistre, and B. Saccomanno. The second one meant to identify LP students and apprentices' relations to career guidance and the difficulties they met when they sought a company placement (2015-2017). It was funded by the Fonds d'expérimentation pour la Jeunesse (FEJ), under the Ministry for Youth. This multidisciplinary study was conducted with V. Capdevielle, B. Cart, V. Ilardi, B. Saccomanno, E. Sulzer, and M.H. Toutin.

Those surveys were conducted in in four geographical areas in France: Occitania, Île-de-France, Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur (PACA), and Hauts-de-France. In both cases, the questionnaire was administered via LimeSurvey (an online survey tool). LP students and apprentices were required to fill the questionnaires during compulsory schooling in a computer room.

Table 1. Surveyed LP students and apprentices

	Car mechanics	Construction	Commerce Sales	Hairstyling	Care	Other
Numbers	658	319	884	444	556	129
% girls	4	8,5	45	90	85	65

Field: specialized training paths displaying a significant mix of apprenticeship and schooling.

Concerning both surveys, 43 interviews were conducted at schools during compulsory education. The distinctive type of communication characterizing an interview was addressed beforehand and redefined during fieldwork to facilitate communication and reduce the hierarchical relationships bound to affect any survey interview. The interviewer’s position, both as a woman and an academic, is obviously significant: problematization, method, the way to conduct fieldwork and to analyze it are determined by the interviewer’s social status and political position (Clair, 2016). Each interview was recorded and fully transcribed. These one-hour-and-a-half interviews were thematically analyzed and supported by the NVivo qualitative software (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2003).

I will begin by analyzing how educational policies contribute to hierarchizing pupils. I will then show that the unique experiences which develop on the fertile ground thus provided, cannot be reduced to an experience of social domination. This is clearly supported by the several ways in which guidance is experienced but also by the fact that humiliation, which is obviously shared by many, will gradually turn into a strong sense of injustice.

1. Adapting study streams to the social division of labor

In France, the increase in mass unemployment has gradually led to a necessary family involvement in schooling (Terrail, 1990). However, the national norm of longer studies supported by educational policies failed to undermine social reproduction. The extension of compulsory schooling attendance followed increased relegation paths (Euvrard, 1979) together with new hierarchized streaming patterns. Among transformations, the switchover of vocational education into relegation tracks (Beaud, 2009; Moreau, 2004) is a major feature of the structural evolution of the French school system.

Although school in France is compulsory and “one and the same for everyone” until the age of 16, a first stage of school and professional guidance at the end of lower secondary school assigns pupils about to become upper secondary students into three differentiated and hierarchized routes. General education takes in those whose school results are assessed as most satisfactory to prepare them for higher education. Technological education holds an intermediate position and prepares students for the technological bachelor’s degree and for advanced technological studies. At the bottom of the school hierarchy, vocational education is designed to fit students in the labor market. They can take two diplomas, the CAP (certificate of professional aptitude) and the vocational *baccalaureate* to become workers or low-skilled workers. In France, these certificates may be acquired either at school, in which case pupils attend a vocational lycée (LP) and spend training periods in companies, or via apprenticeships, alternating classroom work in an apprentice training center (CFA) with working in a company. In that case, students have the status of young employees entitled to a salary.

These young people, trained at LPs or CFAs, total about one million in 2020 and represent quite a significant proportion (36%) of upper secondary students¹⁶. They are between 14 and 17 years old, i.e., between adolescence and adulthood, and are told to « make a career choice, » to select a training modality (LP or apprenticeship), a low-skilled job limited to menial tasks, and to find, very often by themselves, a placement in a company.

It is in this particular French environment and in the context of a global shift toward neoliberal educational policies that the Education Act of 1989 must be understood. Pupils are expected to « build up their school, university, and professional project according to their

¹⁶ Sources : Repères et références statistiques, ministère de l’Education nationale (MEN), Direction de l’évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP), 2020.u

ambitions and abilities¹⁷.» The rhetoric, born from company management, advocates that logical individuals can deal with abstract organization, express proposals, and make them their own. And if pupils and their families' choices are not validated by the parent-teacher conference, they will have to actually convince the school head by justifying their choice regarding knowledge, aptitudes, and interests. Beyond the fact that socially better-equipped pupils can rely on their parents and are in a better position to find their own way in a differentiated and hierarchized set of tracks, career guidance, if restricted to anticipating one's professional future, implies an early decision, as early as 14 years old.

All the international comparisons attest that pupils' early tracking process, as a tool to manage heterogeneity impacts, most negatively pupils from working-class backgrounds. Thus, guiding pupils into vocational education is ill-fated. A sociography of the pupils thus streamed clearly shows it. In France, given similar school achievements and in the light of their academic results, pupils receive unequal choice opportunities. Working class pupils are much more likely (93%) to be advised into a vocational "seconde" and far more so (169%) into a CAP (Guyon & Huillery, 2014). The statistical analysis of the interviewed population corroborates a significant change: their working-class origin and poor school results are inseparable, as the following results clearly show: almost seven out of 10 pupils belong to the « stable section of the working classes¹⁸» and, among the latter, more than four out of ten come from the « pauperized section. » Just as they have experienced a chaotic school path, a little more than four out of 10 have failed a year. In addition to these two characteristics, pupils from a migrant background are overrepresented, more than three out of 10 come from the second or third generation of nationals and a little more than one out of 10 was born abroad¹⁹. Moreover, girls with better school performance are less numerous in vocational education: three out of ten, as opposed to four boys out of 10. Lastly, note that these pupils are only teenagers; the proportion of pupils entering vocational education at 15 years old or less was 48.7 % in 2016²⁰.

¹⁷ Excerpt from article 1 of the 1989 Act.

¹⁸ To code social origin, we cross-referenced several types of questions: parents' professions, professional status, and their educational attainment. Based on these, we defined an overall indicator which enabled us to construct a social reference which comes in four contrasted fractions: the pauperized fraction of the working classes, its stable fraction, middle-classes, and upper-middle classes.

¹⁹ Concerning migrant background, by cross-referencing teenagers' place of birth, that of their parents and grandparents, and the language spoken at home, we constructed a variable which assigned a geographical area to teenagers' migrant past.

²⁰ Source: MEN, DEPP, RES, 2017.

Since the 1980s, professional education, which used to produce the skilled working-class elite, transmitting a technical culture expected to altogether train « the man, the worker, and the citizen ²¹,» has become a « resource serving compulsory schooling attendance »²² (Chapoulie, 2010, p. 506), some kind of remedial help for school failure, a « dump ,» as an ex-chief education officer, M. Bernard Toulemonde, has bluntly called it²³. Workers and employees' 'skills have come to be thought of and represented by their public and are therefore devoid of meaning. Technical culture and its ambition of social emancipation are now a thing of the past. (Kergoat P., 2012). The conclusion of the organization for economic cooperation and development – OCDE's (2015) is clear and final: the French educational system is « one of the most unequal ones»²⁴ (p. 3). Of course, we must assess selection processes in the light of their implementation by educational policies, which we are unable to do without acknowledging the lived experiences of the first concerned party.

2. Variation in career guidance-related experiences

To report the variations and details of interviewees' experiences, I have devised a typology based on their relationships to school. School here stems from students' experience in lower secondary school or the “seconde” (1st general year of upper secondary school). Therefore, to young interviewees, « school » refers to a thing of the past. This typology is useful as it goes against the sociological illusion in which working classes have homogeneous classes and culture. It shows that gaps and nuances definitely found differentiated experiences. Relying on both surveys, my typology involved a two-step construction. First, it statistically treated the questionnaires (respondents' social characteristics connected with items on their relationship to school, work, and career counselling), enabling, thanks to clustering²⁵, me to propose pupils and apprentices' profiles, among whom I chose the individuals to be interviewed. Secondly, I compared profiles to my analysis of pupils' accounts to further explore, correct, and even alter

²¹ As defined in the 1919 Astier Act regarding the organization of commercial, industrial, and technical education.

²² « ressource pour assurer la scolarité obligatoire »

²³ In France, a « recteur d'académie » manages an administrative educational unit of the *Education nationale*. Quoted by Jean-Marie Dumay, « Les lycées professionnels, parent pauvre ,» *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2018, p. 12.

²⁴ « l'un des plus inégalitaires »

²⁵ We specifically the selected questionnaire dimensions via a multivariate analysis based first on a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) and then on a hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) (Evrard et al., 2003). This methodology, implemented with my colleague Valérie Capdevielle, allows to construct sets of partitions in inner classes with the aim to regroup observations in homogenous and differentiated classes.

the former to achieve, *in fine*, a four-class typology: « leaving school, I had no choice; » « leaving school now to go back to it later; » « leaving school, that's what I wanted; » and « leaving school to follow my own path. »

« Leaving school, I had no choice »

Slightly less than a third of young interviewees have experienced career guidance as an obligation. This group consists of children from working classes' pauperized section, a significant part of which comes from a north African or sub-Saharan background. Boys mostly attend an LP (vocational lycée) training for a job in building; whereas girls are mostly apprentices receiving training in retailing and commerce.

Both boys and girls have a negative judgement of their “college” (lower secondary school) curriculum and explain that they have been unable to choose their profession (which was ultimately decided by teachers or by default). Their use of the passive: « I've been streamed, » « I've been told to choose my life » underlines that both pupils and their families felt they had no choice and that they hardly took part in the decision. Moreover, their families are often disadvantaged by their lack of fluency in French and rather unfamiliar with the differences and hierarchy between the educational paths and offered careers. Thus, they trust teachers, seen as the only ones capable of some competent advice. In their accounts, pupils recede to the advantage of teachers and parent-teacher conferences:

« I have to say, to be honest, I have to admit that I landed here by chance. I didn't know what to do. I was told to do that, I didn't argue. I didn't know anything... I was asked to choose my life, just after lower secondary school, I was only 14, how could I know? (...) They led me in here and as I didn't have a clue, I said I was ok with it. [You had no idea at all?] I said I loved languages, but they told me: 'you wouldn't be able.' (...) So, then I wasn't sure. They told me 'you can be a lorry driver, a trucker': I said 'no.' I was told to be a bricklayer: I said 'no' again. That was the only job, [assistant-architect] the only one that was sort of okay. (Medhi, LP student, building sector, father - construction worker, mother - stay-at-home spouse)

In the end, Medhi finds the teacher-parent conference as all-powerful due to his age – he insists he is only 14 – too young to be able to grasp a coherent project based on specific professional motivations. He can only give default answers, merely by saying “no” to what he

does not want to do. These pupils seem to be heavily dependent on the educational institution, dispossessed of their own voice, and feeling completely powerless. They all describe a trial *in absentia*, a verdict passed in the absence of both the accused and their lawyers, suffering the decision and opting for a profession and a training modality with sheer desperation.

« Leaving school now to go back to it later »

This second minority group shares some of the characteristics of the previous one. They feel that their guidance decision has been thwarted, and quite a number of them attend an LP to train for the construction sector. However, they differ from the first group since they consist of a large majority of boys whose parents, born in France, belong to the middle classes (including the upper middle-class). Another difference is their very positive approach to school; they enjoyed going to lower secondary school. They see vocational education as temporary, and their main objective is to pass the vocational *baccalaureate* (never mind which one) so they can prepare for a competitive exam and enter a professional school, university or even the army. They work out strategies of readjustment which may help those with a better social capital to get back to their social origin. This is Florian's case; he plays the French horn and is encouraged by his father, who plays in an orchestra and teaches in several music academies of the area. When choosing both his school and training, his family meets a twofold objective: ensuring that he receives training for a job in case he is unable to make a living from his music but, above all, pass a *baccalaureate*, which he will need to apply for a Music College. His parents helped him to find a school close to the music academy he goes to every day and rent a small studio close to the places he needs to go to make things easier for him.

« I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. Actually, I did, I know what I want to be, to be a musician, to play in an orchestra [NB: he plays the French horn]. The point is that there aren't really any special paths for musicians. So, then you only need a baccalaureate to take the competitive exam, any "bac" will do. So, I thought, instead of getting all worked up with a general baccalaureate, I'd rather go into vocational, it's better for me, even if it's for a few years. » (Florian, LP student, vocational bac OBAVMS 'specialized building materials,' father - music teacher and mother – secretary)

According to these pupils, the profession to which they receive training is devalued due to the nature of the work itself (rather than due to employment and working conditions). It is « boring, » « repetitive, » one in which you are just the « boss' minion » and « cannot reach your full potential. » This description strongly contrasts with the vocation-like language they use to talk about the profession they desire: a « dream, » a « passion. » Their talk revolves around the gap between their aptitudes, a family legacy, and their current position (seen as temporary). They distinguish themselves from the workers' world, manual labor, and working-class culture.

« Leaving school, that's what I wanted »

This third group is the largest, almost 40% of our corpus. It comprises slightly more boys than girls, mostly from the stable fraction of the working classes. A minority of them (from the pauperized fraction) over-represents self-employed artisans and shopkeepers. They share common characteristics. First of all, they are keen on apprenticeship, mechanics, and hairdressing, as opposed to their experiences at lower secondary school (which they see as negative). Their family socialization, shaped by values laden with self-employed backgrounds, produces a socialization favouring apprenticeship.

Their talks revolve around the recurring phrase « I don't like school. » The constant repetition of this opinion clearly expresses the idea that, rather than (or not only) the school no longer wanting them, they are the ones who wish to leave school. They insist that « it was too bookish » and that they « didn't work, » « skipped school. » They add that, at school, they « couldn't move, » « didn't do their homework »: « *I realized that I wasn't made for lower secondary school. I didn't like school, didn't like revising. I hated that, I didn't like sitting behind a desk doing nothing* » (Coline, Apprentice, CAP Hairdressing, father - bricklayer and mother - worker).

On the one hand, these youths complain that teacher-parent conferences failed to really offer them the possibility of a general course. On the other hand, they indicate that leaving school may also prove necessary at a specific time of their training. Most e apprenticeship applicants strongly assert that this animosity against school is rooted in historically constructed class socialization, including several dimensions: discrediting theory in favor of practice and

valuing activity over inactivity and work over school. This wish, reaffirmed time and again, to leave school expresses as much a feeling of exclusion as one of liberation. Leaving school to start vocational education means altogether being able to pursue one's studies and becoming qualified, self-sufficient, and independent but also « growing up. »

« Leaving school to follow my own path »

The fourth and last group, which includes about two teenagers out of ten, almost exclusively comprises girls training in personal or collective care. Compared to the other groups, they mostly belong to the pauperized fraction of the working classes and to a north African or sub-Saharan background.

Their self-esteem as pupils is quite high. They say they enjoyed going to lower secondary school and have chosen their vocational path as a means « to find the right sort of profession for them, » to « fulfill their passion, » and to « obtain the *baccalaureate*. » The profession they train for is described as a calling; they feel they are made for it and valued it, above all, for its « usefulness. » Working conditions are described as « good, » the atmosphere « pleasant, » and the job « interesting: »

« According to her (my mother), general education could have given me diplomas and all that. But, well, I'd rather have a profession and enjoy it when I get up in the morning, be happy to go to work rather than a better-paid job, but where I wouldn't have a real kick. » (Marie, LP student, vocational *baccalaureate* SPLV, father and mother - police officers)

They confidently claim that theirs is a real project, worthy of consideration, and resist hesitating if their parents openly look down upon “low qualifications,” standing up for their choice at the risk of being laughed at by those family members who made it to general *baccalaureate*.

By rehabilitating vocational education, particularly via the vocational *baccalaureate*, they both declare that they are respectable women (Skeggs, 1997 and the possibility of another model to improve one's social status.

My typology first highlights the diversity of career guidance experiences, uncovering the gap between relations developed at school, the workplace, and across professions. It draws configurations which, each in their own way, informs us how pupils have experienced career guidance, analyzed objective constraints, and attempted to deal with them. However, this typology also enlightens the dynamics at play in its four categories. It shows a significant point, i.e., training as a worker or as an employee is fails to configure an opposition to either work or school. Unlike the ‘lads,’ studied by Paul Willis (1977), the youth we interviewed fail to display any « counter school culture. » Thus, the decision for vocational education is not a way to avoid certification. Considering that working class families have adopted the lengthening of school years and, on account of people’s attachment to the *baccalaureate*, the three-year vocational *baccalaureate* may be seen as an honorable way out of this dilemma. It enables students to avoid general upper secondary school and eventually apply for university and gain a profession. Most of all, gaining a profession euphemizes school domination, offsets diplomas, and cancels out (or even discredits) diploma hierarchy. For these young interviewees, a profession means receiving a qualification, understood as « gaining knowledge and power »²⁶ (Naville, 1956, p. 131). Starting vocational education is a compromise to free them from the opposition between school and work, which they no longer experience as excluding each other. It brings together the necessity of having some work experience, pursuing one’s studies, and obtaining diplomas within the same space-time dimension but also of gaining a profession which is, for the working classes, one of the major tools for emancipation. Hence, precisely because young interviewees are not in a position to draw on « school culture » to oppose school verdicts that they experience their guidance into vocational education as extremely negative. As the typology implicitly attested, they share a common experience of humiliation, made obvious by how pupils, who have received guidance, due to both their social background, characteristics and their learning difficulties, are publicly belittled. They experience humiliation as an expression of class contempt which generates shame and self-denial.

²⁶ « un savoir et un pouvoir »

3. Sharing the experience of humiliation

When describing how, they, as pupils, have experienced, understood, and judged career guidance, our young interviewees all express they felt humiliated. The way they use and organize categories outline a specific issue, that of naming experiences: « because what does not make sense, or has lost it, cannot be named »²⁷ (Demazière, 2003, p. 260). Thus, to be able to word the experience of humiliation and injustice, girls and boys use the notion of normality. Thus, they turn to categorization, which enables them to distinguish what falls within the norm, « that's normal » or what does not « that's not normal. ».” The use of these vague and unstable categories highlights the way words are played with; the « normal » rather paradoxically refers to the feeling of being an « other, »,” of not conforming to the social norm; and the «not normal » or « abnormal, » a feeling of injustice.

Mind that humiliation is commonly experienced at school (Dubet, 1991) and that low performing pupils are its most frequent victims. (Merle, 2005). It is therefore no surprise that the interviewed pupils should talk about humiliation. Guidance decisions are far from being neutral: they draw the boundary between those who will be allowed to stay in and those who will have to leave; it opposes those who are entitled to pursue their studies and those who, discriminated by the low school performance they have been ascribed, are excluded in the long term. As opposed to the forms of humiliation experienced in the classroom, the humiliation due to guidance decisions is all the less questionable as it is handed over as legitimate and regulatory: it is based on grades and the result of some collective judgment discussed and reached within the institutional context of a teacher-parent conference. In a system which only constitutes very few links between different courses, guidance decisions lead to a particularly disparaging final exclusion. It deprives teenagers of their status as pupils and categories them as « different »:

« The thing was that it hurt. It meant that I was like these low performers. For me, to my mind, I didn't feel I had difficulties, I thought I was normal. Then, when I think of it, I feel a bit awkward. The way I see it is that I had difficulties. It's a shame, really. (Patricia, LP student, vocational Baccalaureate in mechanics, father – electrician and mother - administrative officer in kindergartens)

²⁷ « car ce qui n'a pas de sens, ou l'a perdu, est aussi sans nom »

« *But what gives you a headache is that people, they actually undermine you, I don't even know if you can say that. They enjoy saying that vocational baccalaureates are no good, that it's only for people who are useless at school.* » (Salima, LP student, vocational baccalaureate ASSP, father - machine operator and mother - kindergarten worker)

Since good school performance commands respect just like poor results breed contempt, guided pupils are, most often than others, made fun of and bullied. According to Pierre Merle (2005), if teachers' humiliating practices can only be accounted for by resorting to a social theory founding social judgements on society's class division, it is also because they are class judgements based on a representation of the legitimate culture. Even when students train for a profession and have chosen their ambitions, school judgements are experienced and described as derogatory and debasing. These situations encourage dreams of « social revenge. » Here is Valentine's testimony:

In general "seconde" (1st year of upper secondary), there was this French teacher, actually during the first term, I wanted to take an L baccalaureate. So, during the teacher-parent meeting of the first term, she took my guidance form and said: 'but you want to choose L?.' I said yes, she asked me: 'But do you read?,' 'Yes, I do,' and she said: 'And on top of that, she reads!,' so, it means that not only she's hopeless but what's more, she reads, so it's even worse. I know I couldn't have gone into L, I wasn't good enough, still, you can put things differently, I don't know, she could have said 'well, you may need to make a different choice. I think that you wouldn't have top results there,' well, I don't know. My mother was also shocked So, can you imagine if only I could come and show them my baccalaureate with honors, what a kick I would get from that. » (Valentine, LP student, bac PRO SPLV, mother - client advisor and father - sales representative)

Guidance toward vocational education is based on school evaluation and justified by the social division of labor and the divide between manual and intellectual work. These processes have increased due to institutional reforms implemented since the 60s, which have turned inequality of access to education into inequality of performance and study courses. The so-called school democratization reforms (Prost, 1992) declared that merit would prevail over social background, making everyone accountable for one's achievements as well as one's failures, further hindering and discriminating poor-performing or unqualified youth. Career guidance is so humiliating because pupils see it as legitimate (Lannegrand-Willems, 2004). Nevertheless, it would be reductive to conclude that pupils passively internalize school verdicts. Indeed, this experience of humiliation gradually develops into a sense of injustice.

4. Wording social injustice

The analysis of the answers to the MADAA²⁸ survey shows that half of the assessed population considers having suffered from injustice. It is clear that pupils point out lower secondary school as the most favorable context for it. This highlights the reasons for the hostility they express toward school, crystallized via career guidance. It corroborates the national survey, conducted by the DRESS (Forsé & Parodi, 2005), which shows that a third of its interviewees find that guidance decisions constitute a source of injustice. It comes first in 42% of quotes, more often than injustices related to teachers' practices, grades, and establishments. For a researcher, highlighting the sense of injustice is difficult as interviewees hardly master the notion. Analyzing their speech is thus most appropriate as it enables to identify shifts: while, at the beginning, they saw themselves as « not normal, », they gradually shift toward judging, discussing, and questioning their condition. This change how they see their condition as having something to do with the fact that they speak retrospectively: guidance decisions are behind them and since then, they have had new experiences²⁹, they have also grown up³⁰.

Any profession is valuable but those told to head to vocational ones are losers

Guidance is thus the first experience of social injustice. While they remember primary school (up to 11 years old) as a charming time, lower secondary is the place which started and developed inequalities. By analyzing their remarks, the repeated use of the notion of normality shows they are far from being fooled and that they analyze professional and school hierarchies:

²⁸ Mesure des discriminations dans l'accès à l'apprentissage (MADAA).

²⁹ André Lecigne and Nadine Jocal (2006) point out that repeating a year leads children to have more doubts about « world justice,» (p. 31).

³⁰ Jean Piaget (1932) insists that the sense of justice or injustice only starts materializing at 12 years old.

« Some had the right aptitudes. If we had worked hard and failed, maybe. But if you laze around and just do what you like, it doesn't mean that you cannot make it. It's not right, it only puts teenagers off by telling them 'you're good-for-nothing, you won't make it if you go to upper secondary school.' (...) When I started my 4th year in lower secondary, I told my CPE (principal educational adviser) that I wanted to make it to upper secondary. She answered 'no, you can't make it, you don't even have the aptitudes to go to a vocational school.' I have brains just like the others, so I told her 'I don't understand why you're telling me that, why you're sending me straight to a CFA (apprentice training center)?.' She answered: 'given your grades, I don't think you will hold on for long.' 'It's my business if I go there and do nothing, it's my business, none of yours. I don't know if you want to get rid of me straight by sending me to a CFA, it's as if pupils are good-for-nothings' (...) I think that when you are in lower secondary, teachers target, aim at teenagers fucking up, even if they're smart, to send them straight to vocational school or CFA. They're given no chance at all. In your school report, you see they have ticked boxes. Once they've ticked it for someone, it's over, their life is finished.» (Désiré, Apprentice, vocational baccalaureate car mechanics, father - insurance sales representative (teleoperator) and mother - hairdresser in England)

They not only question teachers' judgements but also deconstruct the inherent discourse behind it. Pupils identify the double talk which values vocational education while convincing the best pupils that their obvious choice is general education: *« Throughout the year, teachers keep saying that any work is valuable and yet they keep repeating that if we don't have good grades, you won't stay and, in the end, losers are sent to vocational »* (Olivier, LP student, vocational baccalaureate builder, father - unemployed, mother - tax officer).

Teachers' representations and practices support the commands of getting down to work: *« Get down to work or else you'll be 'streamed'! »* (Prost, 1992) contributing to stigmatizing vocational education and enhancing general education.

« He said I was born for that »

This double talk also concerns gender norms. On the one hand, via campaigns and training seminars, educational institutions seem to promote gender equality³¹. On the other, it contributes, particularly by teachers' practices, to produce and reproduce gender norms (Duru-Bellat, 1990; Mosconi, 1989). Gendered stereotypes are fundamental elements in social gender relations and generate such segregation in vocational education that gender diversity remains

³¹ French Ministry of Education: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid4006/egalite-des-filles-et-des-garcons.html>

the exception rather than the norm. These norms hinder a large number of girls but, far from unquestioningly complying with them, they acknowledge and discuss them. Girls find that gender diversity is far from being effective in vocational education as children prepare for different specialties. They gradually discover the extent of the gendered division of spaces, knowledge, and professions. Girls therefore realize it is almost impossible to breach these norms and experience it as real injustice:

« I think it's really not fair! I wanted to train for mechanics because I love it! [Were you prepared to take mechanics?]. Yes, it was my first choice, I was really in it. But they didn't select me. [Who didn't?] The vocational school, they sent me mail in which they cunningly implied that it was because I was a girl. And yet, I had spent one day at their place, and it was fine. But he was afraid that there could be some problems.... So, the head teacher advised me to choose services to individuals.» (Célia, Apprentice, hairdressing CAP, father - maintenance chief officer and mother - childcarer)

Teachers and guidance counsellors deliver this reminder of the norm as early as the last year of lower secondary. Girls point out how much the advice given convinced them into a gendered training path:

« Because my teacher gave me some documents about aesthetics. And I wasn't interested. But he told me 'do have a look 'there are facial care cosmetics and the rest.' Actually, it was a beauty thing. [Why these training offers?] He said that it definitely suited me. [Which means?] Actually, when he looked at me, he suggested fashion or hairdressing. He said I was born for it. For them, it was obvious because when I was standing in front of them, I put on makeup, I represented that. » (Exaucée, LP student, CAP in hairstyling, father - delivery driver and mother - unemployed)

These practices not only ignore the ambitions of those who wish to overcome gender boundaries but also confine them to a much more restricted training offer than what boys are offered:

« It is very diversified for boys. As for us, it's more reduced, we are all channeled into the same paths. In the last year of lower secondary, when I was asked to fill in my form, I was told to make sure I was really good as so many wanted to get in. You really had to be the best. Girls don't really have any choice. In general, we all do the same thing. Maybe, that's why there are so many problems changing paths. » (Claire, student, Vocational *baccalaureate* in hairstyling, father - in computing and mother - cleaner)

Girls' accounts inform us about the mechanisms of the gendered distribution of professions. First, the interactions between those involved in career guidance and pupils contribute to the fact that girls and boys are only offered professions according to their gender; but guidance goes further than complying with the norm, it closes girls off in a far more restricted training offer (Moreau, 2003).

« We're always bossed around to make a choice right away »

Making a choice implies giving up on one's dreams, abandoning one's first ambitions; ambitions which they knew were partly unreal; and yet, enabled them to postpone making a decision with which they were unable to cope. A large majority of the young people we met mentioned and criticized being told to « make a choice. » They want to be recognized as teenagers. As compared to the pupils attending general education, girls and boys blame school for treating them wrongly since « they » are refused the opportunity to try and find themselves, to hesitate, to make the wrong decision or to change their minds:

*« I think it's too early (career guidance). I was born at the end of the year, so, I was fourteen at the end of lower secondary, I was ten when I entered lower secondary. I think that being told at thirteen: « what do you want to do? » it really went over my head! (...) That's why I think it's wrong not to give us enough time to make a choice. I think we should not be asked until we're older. But it's not possible. That's what it's like » (Clara, LP student, vocational *baccalaureate* SPLV, father - administrative officer and mother - childcarer).*

*« It's better to have time to make a choice, really take time to select your profession because to have to do it at the end of lower secondary, it's a disgrace really... Asking pupils at that age to go vocational, it's a shame » (Yasser, LP student, vocational *baccalaureate* in construction, father – worker and mother – housewife)*

Being told to select a track, a diploma, a profession makes things quite difficult: it generates questioning, doubts, and pain. They insist on the idea that it is difficult, even impossible to make such an important choice when you are a teenager. School has forbidden them to enjoy the « privilege » of extending their youth:

« The problem is career guidance, educational counseling. We've been made to choose far too early. Of course, you cannot take your baccalaureate at 25. So, you do have to make a choice. But the problem for me personally was that it was too early You're in your last year of lower secondary and then, straight away, you must choose your profession. It's much too early because the adult world is definitely not all rainbows and lollipops » (Claire, LP student, vocational baccalaureate hairstyling, father - in computing and mother - cleaner)

The way girls and boys criticize and deconstruct their condition can be seen as a process: rebellious thoughts develop in conjunction with the growing sense of injustice interviewees experienced, seeing educational and career guidance as its most obvious representation.

Conclusion

Both girls and boys indicate career guidance as the deepest injustice they have suffered. First experienced as a humiliating dismissal, these decisions provide fertile ground for a collection of rebellious practices. Teenagers are, often for the first time, confronted with an institution which classifies them as « others » and « different, » categorizing them for what they are not. All collected accounts show how school produces « default individuals » unable to become who they desire to be and who find themselves living in a society which excludes them from within (Castel, 2007). They express, in their own manner, the feeling of being pushed aside. However, if pupils – mere teenagers – are particularly helpless to change these domination relations, they know how to identify and uncover them. The submissiveness social relations require of them neither necessarily implies passivity, ignorance, and the internalization of one's frustration (Kergoat, 2017) nor eliminates one's critical capacities (Boltanski, 2009). Pupils undermine common sense conclusions and condemn them as dishonest. We can make a comparison with the yellow vests protests in France, which became a symbol as far as Iraq. They not only expose exploitation but also a deep sense of social injustice and humiliation. The condemnation of the dominant class's contempt underlines the existing current conflicts between social classes and the working-class capacity of thinking critically. Thus, it shows that emotional experiences, pain, and indignation can be used as normative supports to study how pupils experience domination and confront it.

References

- André, G. (2012). *L'orientation scolaire : héritages sociaux et jugements professoraux*. PUF.
- Appay, B. (1982). *Les jeunes et l'apprentissage*. Casterman.
- Beaud, S. (2009). La jeunesse populaire à l'épreuve du classement scolaire. *Agora : débats/jeunesses*, 3(53), 99-116. <https://doi.org/10.3917/agora.053.0099>
- Blanchard, M., & Cayouette-Remblière, J. (2011). Penser les choix scolaires. *Revue Française de Pédagogie*, 175, 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfp.3025>
- Boltanski, L. (2009). *De la critique : précis de sociologie de l'émancipation*. Gallimard.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). *La distinction : critique sociale du jugement*. Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Castel, R. (2007). *La discrimination négative : citoyens ou indigènes ?* Seuil.
- Cayouette-Remblière, J. (2016). *L'école qui classe : 530 élèves du primaire au bac*. PUF.
- Chapoulié, J. M. (2010). *L'école d'État conquiert la France : deux siècles de politique scolaire*. PUR.
- Clair, I. (2016). Faire du terrain en féministe. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 3(213), 66-83. <https://doi.org/10.3917/arss.213.0066>
- Demazière, D. (2003). *Le chômage : comment peut-on être chômeur ?* Belin.
- Dubet, F. (1991). *Les lycéens*. Seuil.
- Dumora, B. (2004). La formation des intentions d'avenir à l'adolescence. *Psychologie du travail et des organisations*, 10(3), 249-262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pto.2004.07.003>
- Duru-Bellat, M. (1990). *L'école des filles : quelle formation pour quels rôles sociaux ?* L'Harmattan.
- Evrard, Y., Pras, B. & Roux, E. (2003). *Market : études et recherches en marketing*. Dunod.
- Ferry, C., & Mons-Bourdarias, F. (1980). *L'apprentissage sous contrat, le phénomène de sa résurgence après la loi de 1971* [Research report]. Université de Tours ; Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.
- Forsé, M., & Parodi, M. (2005). *Etude de l'enquête barométrique de la DRESS réalisée en 2004* [Research report]. HAL.
- Grignon, C. (1971). *L'ordre des choses : les fonctions sociales de l'enseignement technique*. Les Éditions de Minuit.

- Grignon, G., & Passeron J. C. (1989). *Le savant et le populaire: misérabilisme et le populisme en sociologie et en littérature*. Seuil.
- Guillaumin, C. (1992). *Sexe, race et pratique de pouvoir : l'idée de nature*. Côté- femmes.
- Guyon, N., & Huillery, E. (2014). *Choix d'orientation et origine sociale : mesurer et comprendre l'autocensure scolaire* [Report]. Sciences Po ; Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policies.
- Kergoat, D. (2012). *Se battre, disent-elles...* La Dispute.
- Kergoat, P. (2012). Penser a cultura operária para desconstruir a hierarquização dos saberes. *Educação & Sociedade*, 33(118), 47-59. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-73302012000100004>
- Kergoat, P. (2017). Jeunesses populaires et répertoires culturels. *La nouvelle revue du travail*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.4000/nrt.3038>
- Lannegrand-Willems, L. (2004). Sentiment de justice et orientation : croyance en la justice de l'école chez les lycéens professionnels. *L'orientation scolaire et professionnelle*, 33(2), 249-69. <https://doi.org/10.4000/osp.2153>
- Lecigne, A., & Jocal, N. (2006). La croyance en la justice du monde chez l'enfant: tentative de mesure et approche de quelques déterminants. In D. Castra (Ed.), *Psychologie & société 9 : école et psychologie sociale* (pp. 13-43). Éirès.
- Merle, P. (2005). *L'élève humilié : l'école, un espace de non droit ?* PUF.
- Moreau, G. (2003). *Le monde apprenti*. La Dispute.
- Moreau, G. (2004, avril). L'enseignement professionnel ou la défaite d'un projet émancipateur. *Le Monde diplomatique*, 22-23. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2004/04/MOREAU/11109>
- Mosconi, N. (1989). *La mixité dans l'enseignement secondaire : un faux-semblant ?* PUF.
- Naville, P. (1956). *Essai sur la qualification du travail*. Librairie Marcel Rivière.
- Œuvrard, F. (1979). Démocratisation ou élimination différée ? *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 30, 87-97. <https://doi.org/10.3406/arss.1979.3491>

- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2015). *Vers in système d'éducation plus inclusive en France ?*
- Paillé, P., & Mucchielli, A. (2003). *L'analyse qualitative en sciences humaines et sociales*. Armand Colin.
- Palheta, U. (2012). *La domination scolaire : sociologie de l'enseignement professionnel et de son public*. PUF.
- Passeron, J. C., & Revel, J. (2005). Penser par cas. Raisonner à partir des singularités. In *Penser pas cas* (pp. 9-44). Éditions de l'école des hautes études en sciences sociales.
- Piaget, J. (1932). *Le jugement moral chez l'enfant*. PUF.
- Prost, A. (1985). « Travaillez, sinon vous serez orientés » : essai sur les difficultés actuelles des collèges et lycées français », *The French Review*, LVIII, 6. 793- 804.
- Prost, A. (1992). *Éducation, société et politique*. Seuil.
- Schwartz, O. (1998). La notion de « classes populaires » [Unpublished dissertation]. Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender: becoming respectable*. Sage.
- Terrail, J. P. (1990). *Destins ouvriers : la fin d'une classe ?* PUF.
- Vouillot, F. (2007). L'orientation aux prises avec le genre. *Travail, genre et sociétés*, 2(18), 87-108. <https://doi.org/10.3917/tgs.018.0087>
- Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*. Saxon house.

Submission data:

Submetido à avaliação em 05 de novembro de 2020; revisado em 30 de abril de 2021; aprovado para publicação em 28 de setembro de 2021.

Corresponding author: Prisca Kergoat - Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, 5 Allée, Antonio Machado, Toulouse 31058, France.