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## A Reflection on Inequalities at the Crossroads of Education and Work: The Case of French Apprenticeship

Prisca Kergoat\*

### 1 Introduction

With an increase of close to 70% in the last 20 years<sup>1</sup> the decline in French apprenticeship<sup>2</sup> has been successfully curbed. The 1987 reform brought in measures intended to give apprenticeship a “facelift” by the creation of a training program, on a parity with general education, stretching from the CAP diploma (level V) to the engineer’s diploma (level I)<sup>3</sup>. The reform was intended to encourage access to jobs while at the same time reducing social inequalities through the opportunity to aim for a higher level of diploma and achieve social promotion.

It is this series of statements that I will be questioning in this article. This approach is particularly necessary in my eyes as focusing further education on performance in terms of access to jobs has contributed to masking the issue of social inequalities. It is on this last point that I will end with an evocation of the two dimensions represented by educational policies and the policies applied by the major enterprises.

The overhaul of apprenticeship is at the core of the changes being introduced in educational policies. Lucie Tanguy (1998) shows that the use of the term “training” rather than “education” and its corollary, the almost systematic matching of the training to the job, is now guiding educational policies and producing various

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1 Directorate of Evaluation, Prospects and Performance, “Apprentice training centers and schools”, 2007.

2 In France, occupational training is composed of two elements: continuous occupational training, targeting adults who dropped out of the school system, and initial occupational training. The latter is, on the one hand, for pupils (on a school basis) trained in professional or technological “lycées” (for secondary school education) or even in a University College, a Technological University Institute or a University (for further education) and, on the other hand, for the segment of the population I am studying, namely apprentices (who have an employment contract) who combine training with an employer with education dispensed in an apprentice training center (French initials CFA).

3 The nomenclatures of training levels going from level VI (not holding a diploma) to level I (diplomas from post-graduate teaching) are intended to link the training (level measured by the number of years of education) to the qualification required to hold a job.

effects including a devaluation of the unskilled worker qualification and an increase in educational inequalities. It is this theory that I will be confronting with the subject of my study, apprenticeship, but I will also address the effects of its overhaul on the practices of the major enterprises in their management and recruitment of apprentices.

Gilles Moreau (2003) explained how the overhaul of apprenticeship has led to a stratification and segmentation of the apprentice population. The rare works on these questions basically try to measure the repercussions of the “modernization” of apprenticeship on the apprentice representations and practices<sup>4</sup> and have often failed to mention the role of corporate policies in the changes which apprenticeship is undergoing today. However as Jean-Jacques Arrighi and Daniel Brochier point out (2005)<sup>5</sup>, the core feature of this training program is the fact that the students who follow it have employee status, making them answerable first to an employer. This is an advantage as apprenticeship can only exist if an enterprise decides to recruit an apprentice and pay him a salary and because to my mind the analysis cannot be confined to just an examination of the apprentices’ practices and representations or just the evocation of theories specific to educational sociology<sup>6</sup>.

This contribution stands at the crossroads between two areas of investigation (education and work) and of two subsidiary disciplines (educational sociology and occupational sociology)<sup>7</sup>. To avoid the breakdown specific to the institutional separation between general teaching and technical teaching on the one hand and the definition of sociological objectives on the other, my intention is to show, following in the footsteps of Lucie Tanguy and her work (1994 and 2007), the chains of interdependence between education and production, to highlight the outlines of the changes that occurred as a result of the overhaul of this method of training.

I will try to demonstrate that the reforms started some twenty years ago, furthered by the policies of the major enterprises, lead to displacing, accentuating and combining two forms of inequalities which are on the one hand the inequalities caused by the education system and on the other those which are a product of the job market. Thereby accentuating the social inequalities in access to training.

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4 Addressed from the standpoint of the career paths (Ramé L, and Ramé S., 1995 – Durier S. and Saing P., 2007) or otherwise of the choices or appreciations of the apprentices and their families (Lemaire S., 1996; Froissart C. et alii, 1996).

5 “Apprenticeship in the French education system: an inventory”. Higher Council for School Assessment.

6 The sociology of education constructed in France around the “theory of reproduction” developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, and the “model of rational choices” imported by Raymond Boudon.

7 The sociology of education constructed in France during the sixties paradoxically failed to take into account a whole area of education – occupational and technological education (Moreau G., 2003). In the same way, the sociology work only very scarcely addressed this issue, despite the considerable contributions of authors such as Pierre Naville (1945, 1956), who highlighted the relationship between the training processes and the processes of a ranked organization of labor.

I will first analyze the principal measures taken to overhaul French apprenticeship while attempting to show their scope and the stakes involved. Starting from the changes brought about by the 1987 reform and its effects on the recruitment policies of the major enterprises, I will try to determine the configuration of the apprentice population. This will allow me, in the second stage of my demonstration, to pinpoint the displacements which have occurred in the ranking of both knowledge and the segment of the population involved. Finally, although the new form of the apprenticeship system produces new forms of ranking, there are some which it does not affect. This is what I will examine in a third stage with a review of the selection process based on the sex and ethnic origin of the applicants for apprenticeship.

## 2 Groundwork and methods

The proposals made in this article derive from various works on the introduction of apprenticeship in the major enterprises and from current research into its extension to higher education.

I will rely principally for my review of the major enterprises' recruitment policies and practices on the survey made of four major enterprises which introduced an apprenticeship policy organized by their general management at the beginning of the nineties and for the first time in their history.

Table 1: Enterprises and trainings studied <sup>8</sup>

Enterprises/ Groups	Sector	Education	Activity	Feminization rate in %
Enterprise A Public, tertiary sector	Bank, mail sorting and forwarding sector	Sorting-forwarding-distribution (SRD) CAP	Postman/Sorter	57
		Sales Force BTS	Finance adviser	70
Enterprise B Public, Industrial sector	Energy production and transportation sector	Electrotechnical BEP	Electrician	1
		Services professional BAC	Sales agent	70
Group C Private, tertiary sector	Supermarket distribution sector	Bakery CAP	Baker	0
Group D Private, Industrial sector	Agri-food sector	Industrial maintenance professional BAC and BTS	Maintenance	0.5

Over 120 semi-directive interviews were conducted with the various players of the system (CFA managers, training managers or HR, recruiters, working teams, tutors,

<sup>8</sup> I took interest in the trainings gathering the biggest number of apprentices and referring to the core business of the studied enterprises. However, I did not observe all of them. Thus, the table is not an exhaustive presentation of the training prepared by apprenticeship as a whole.

teachers, etc.); 55 of them were in-depth interviews and some of them were repeated with the apprentices. These various interviews were compared with CFA and corporate documents to quantify the facts that had emerged (social assessments, statistics of apprenticeship flows, etc.) and to determine how apprenticeship was implemented technically speaking: recruitment and tutoring guides; training, employment and abilities (and diploma) reference systems and ability assessment tables.

I also made many observations in situ of various apprenticeship situations and very particularly of enterprise recruitment situations (where I was able to determine, by turns, the selection and the ranking of the applicants from examining the applications, interviews and the decisions of the enterprises' selection panels).

Finally, to quantify some of the phenomena observed, I made use of the "Génération 2001" survey of the CEREQ (Employment and Qualifications Studies and Research Center)<sup>9</sup>. I was therefore able to obtain data about the social characteristics of the apprentices questioned in 2004 (some 1401); these included some not widely known aspects (such as the social, and ethnic origin, and to a lesser degree the sex) which I was able to compare with those of students who received a professional and technological education.

### 3 A Silent Revolution<sup>10</sup>

The intention of the legislators in charge of the 1987 law was to curb the decline in apprenticeship by enhancing this method of training, quite often considered to lead nowhere: in the early eighties, it was felt that the training dispensed was out of date since it was linked to traditional business trade sectors where no great technological changes had taken place. Added to this first qualitative consideration was the failure rate of the diploma and the numbers who dropped out during the course of the training (45% for the first, between 10% and 15% for the second<sup>11</sup>). Yet these data must be put into perspective in view of the segment of the population concerned: apprenticeship was an outlet for students having educational difficulties (55% came from severely undervalued pre-professional training programs) and who were from the underprivileged classes: three quarters of the apprentices belonged to families where the father was an unskilled worker, employee, salaried farm worker or in service<sup>12</sup>. Although apprenticeship occupies the last position, the fact still remains that it allowed students to acquire a CAP and ultimately a trade and a qualification which they would no doubt not have been able to obtain otherwise. It is a fact

9 I would most particularly like to extend my thanks to Jean-Jacques Arrighi, a lecturer with the CEREQ, for his advice and assistance in dealing with the data which were collected.

10 Title borrowed from an expression of Arrighi J.J and Brochier D., *op. cit.*, note 5.

11 Cf. Combes M.C, 1988.

12 Cf. Appay B., 1982.

that former apprentices far more frequently obtained a qualified job than students leaving school without a diploma<sup>13</sup>.

### 3.1 The choice of the overhaul

Confronted with this situation, the 1987 reform made a choice. The objective pursued was not so much to “restore” this method of training (by enhancing the unskilled worker qualification, the manual trades and the conditions in which they were performed by consolidating the sectors where it already exists but is only very little developed<sup>14</sup>) but to “modernize” it, by creating upward outlets. This meant encouraging its extension to the major enterprises and extending the training to new business sectors and to higher levels (to the training of technicians, then of engineers). The 1987 reform was the outcome of a compromise among various players: the enterprises, which were looking for new employees whose training was better suited to the enterprises’ new needs in terms of the levels and content of the training, and the education system, which was pursuing an objective of enhancing occupational training and raising the level of training. The 1987 law was then closely followed by the framework law of July 1989 which set the target of 80% of a given age group to obtain the “baccalauréat” (the “bac”) in 2000. Similarly, it was structured around the various projects to overhaul occupational teaching which advocates a closer collaboration between school and enterprise, like the creation of the professional “bac” in 1985 and the generalization of “combined training and work” as an educational principle and a principle of integration into the job market.

By responding to the demands made by the major enterprises<sup>15</sup> and by integrating this method of training actually into the school milieu (in the professional “lycées” then in the universities), apprenticeship was able to contribute, much more than any other type of education or training, to turning the corner which was reached in the eighties: that of placing job concerns at the very core of the educational system. In a context distinguished by a high level of unemployment among young people and by doubts about the quality of education, these measures seemed particularly appropriate. This is the reason why gradually the idea came to be accepted that the overhauled apprenticeship system was part of a social and economic “modernization” project. This critic of education associated with the promotion of training is outmoded. Guy Bruzy (2007) shows that since the fifties the idea developed that

13 Cf. Appay B., 1982.

14 In contrast to a widely held belief, only a minority of craftsmen enterprises (about 12%) train apprentices (Combes M.C, 1988).

15 Apart from the creation of a training channel in its own right and the exemption from employer’s social charges for enterprises with more than 10 employees, the law offers much more: the possibility to supervise and adjust the actual content of the training. For example, the law authorizes an enterprise which has its own CFA to dispense a portion of the training (Article 4, 1<sup>st</sup> para.) or otherwise to “subcontract” it to a private or public teaching establishment (Article 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph) while retaining the administrative and educational responsibility for the teaching that is dispensed.

school education “because it wants to distance itself from the world of working and production, is unable to comprehend the true needs of enterprises just as it cannot guarantee equal opportunities” (p. 24). It is therefore not so much the principles on which the new form of apprenticeship relies which are new but rather the idea of making apprenticeship the spearhead of a reform of school education.

This, more than the traditional education system, would be able to fight against unemployment more efficiently, as demonstrated by the dual German system. What is more surprising, as Marie-Christine Combes notes (1988), is that this argument was not “disputed by anyone, not even those who were opposed to the draft law”. However, although unemployment among young people is admittedly lower in Germany, “in France what apprenticeship has achieved is far less clear” (p. 85)<sup>16</sup>. This bland acceptance of the leading argument for the reform reveals how far individual representations and the practices guiding public policies have broadly integrated the matching of the combined training and work system and professional integration.

Finally, the creation of a channel in its own right would result in “*the social promotion of apprentices*”<sup>17</sup> by allowing them to achieve progress actually in the course of a training program: “*Apprenticeship is the idea of the social ladder, someone who has a CAP can do a “bac pro”, someone who has a BTS can do a degree or a Master’s. This is a significant revolution because the population concerned, the apprentices (...) are young people who want to pursue their education and who do not have the means to do so but are willing to take it on*”<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, the presentation of the reasons for the draft law on equal opportunities (2006) suggests that apprenticeship is an alternative method of training which “*gives a second chance*” because it “*attracts students who do not fit in the general curriculum*”.

The enhancement of apprenticeship in the eighties results from a political consensus between left and right politicians (under President F. Mitterrand first term and Prime Minister J. Chirac). Whereas apprenticeship is advocated elsewhere in Europe for its pedagogical virtues, it was considered in France, following B. Schwartz<sup>19</sup> thoughts, as a means to struggle against social inequalities. The overhauled apprenticeship system could not only develop relationships with the economic world, reduce the failure rate and curb unemployment, but also offer a social promotion to the most underprivileged young people (employment contract giving access to a salary, possibility of signing up to three successive apprenticeship contracts).

16 For a comparison between France and Germany, refer to Eric Verdier work (1988).

17 Citation taken from the opinion of the Economic and Social Council, 1987 law.

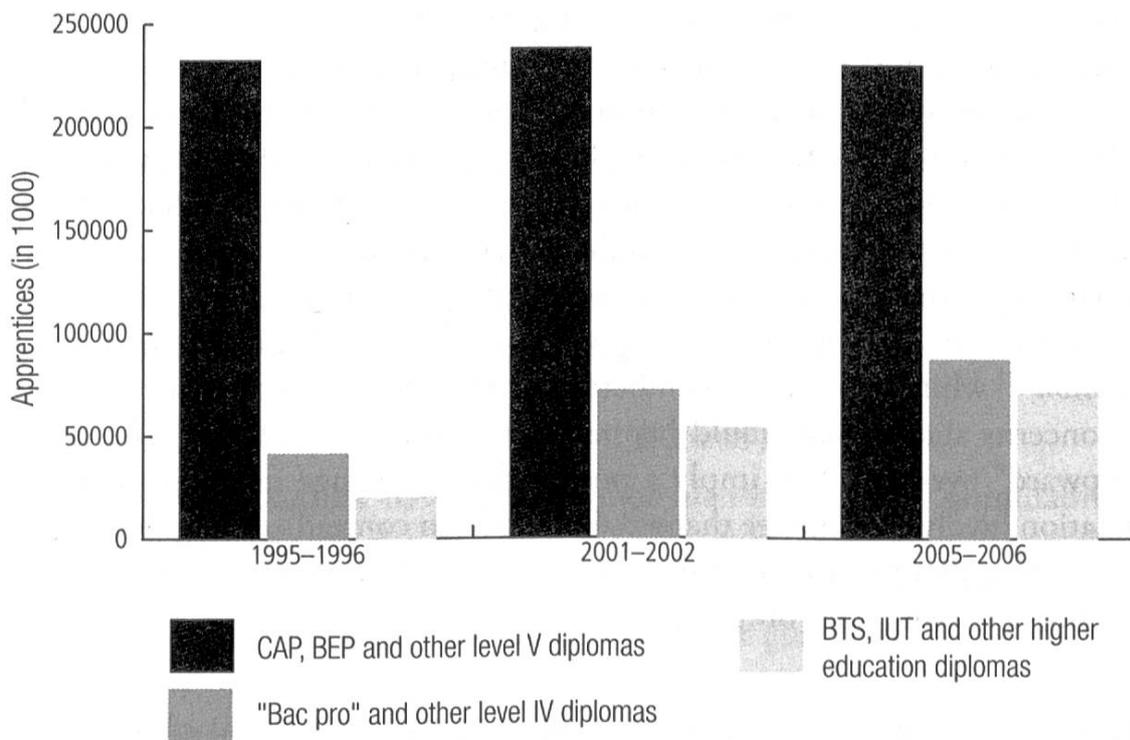
18 Interview conducted in February 2008 with a senior management representative of the national education authority.

19 B. Schwartz. 1981. «*L’insertion professionnelle et sociale en France*», report to the Prime Minister.

### 3.2 Apprenticeship, unquestionably a success?

Undeniably the objectives consisting of the social enhancement of apprenticeship and the growth in the numbers of apprentices have been achieved. There were 225,000 apprentices in 1987 and this figure had increased to 378,000 in 2006<sup>20</sup>, up by 68 % in numbers<sup>21</sup>. Not only has the overall number of apprentices increased significantly but apprenticeship is gaining ground in the major enterprises and at levels of training equivalent to or above the “baccalauréat”.

Diagram 1: Development of numbers of apprentices (in thousands) according to the diploma prepared



Ministry of Education, Statistical guidelines and references “Apprentices”, 2007.

Admittedly contemporary apprenticeship continues to be affected by the influence of level V training schemes and the small size enterprises. However, the progress achieved is not negligible: until 1987 basically limited to the CAP and to craftsmen enterprises, today apprenticeship offers the opportunity of being recruited by enterprises (including those of the public sector) of various sizes and in various business sectors. Apprentices can now prepare for a whole range of diplomas; those traditionally prepared by apprenticeship such as the food, commerce, esthetics, automobile mechanics, building and other specialties have been joined by new diploma

20 Ministry of Education, Directorate of Assessment, Prospects and Performance, “Apprentice training centers and schools”, 2007.

21 This progression is even more noteworthy as between 1995 and 2003 academic years, the number of pupils registered at school (aged between 11 and 16) decreased due to the low birth rate between 1984 and 1992 (Ministry of Education, « Education et formation, n°74, 2007 »).

Table 2: Employers making use of apprenticeship<sup>a)</sup>

	1992	2000	2006
Enterprises with 0 to 49 employees	93	87	80
Enterprises with 50 to 249 employees	4	7	9
Enterprises with 250 and more employees	3	6	11

Excluding employers in the non-industrial and commercial public sector  
DARES, "Preliminary information", No. 13.1–2004 and No. 15.1–2008.

a) Note that the law on equal opportunities (2006) establishes the minimum employment conditions of apprentices for enterprises with more than 250 employees, namely 3% of the average workforce at January 1, 2009.

specialties, principally in the tertiary sector and at higher training levels, such as finance, banking, insurance, management, human resources, etc.

What effects will the changes brought about by the 1978 reform have? When the 1987 law was being examined, various voices were raised to express concerns about the two leading measures of the reform. The Economic and Social Council, for example, warned against the risks that extending apprenticeship could have on its financing. The report also points out that apprenticeship should have "*as its primary vocation the training of young people with a level V qualification and their promotion*"<sup>22</sup> while opposition members and trade unions in the education system had concerns about what would happen to the weakest students. The choice of an "upward" overhaul does imply a non negligible change in the segment of the population involved, a change that would then be in contradiction with the primary function of apprenticeship, that of enabling students to obtain a qualification they could not otherwise have obtained.

Table 3: Breakdown of apprentices by diploma in four groups of enterprises

	CAP and BEP	Professional "bacs"	Diplomas from higher education	TOTAL
Enterprise A (1993–2000)	2242 49.7%	0	2268 50.2%	4510 100%
Enterprise B (1991–2000)	488 20%	1307 53.7%	642 26.3%	2437 100%
Group C (2002–2003)	106 27.3%	0	282 72.7%	388 100%
Group D (1998–2000)	56 15%	116 30.5%	206 54.5%	378 100%

Data taken from the social assessments of the enterprises concerned.

22 On this issue, refer to the article of Mr. C Combes, 1988.

#### 4 Ranking of knowledge and of the segments of the population involved

With the BEP, the professional “bac” and to a lesser degree the BTS hard on its heels, the CAP now represents no more than 46%<sup>23</sup> of all enterprises taken together. Gradually excluded from the professional “lycées”, the CAP – the historical diploma of the unskilled worker qualification – seemed to owe its survival just to the existence of training by apprenticeship. However its grace period will be short-lived: the creation of “bac” and post “bac” training schemes and the ensuing ranking drove it further into a corner the following year (Moreau G., 2003).

If we examine the apprentice recruitment process in four major enterprises, we can see the consequences of the policies described above, in terms of both the devaluation of the unskilled worker qualification or the gradual replacement of those composing the apprentice population.

The place and role of the CAP and the BEP vary greatly depending on the enterprises studied, but their examination reveals that they do not derive from any matching of the diploma to the training, or the diploma to the future job, far from it. Their places and roles are defined by a system of “give and take” in the enterprise (Naville P., 1956) and principally through the representations that employers have of the qualities required to occupy a position.

##### 4.1 The unskilled worker certificate: a must to become an apprentice

All the enterprises studied have the common denominator of assimilating the CAP and to a lesser degree the BEP to a poorly perceived training system since it is aimed traditionally at an underprivileged segment of the population, destined to become unskilled workers. The CAP would not guarantee, to quote human resources managements, “*a proper oral and written expression*” (enterprise B) since “*although we do need legs and hands, we also need brains*” (enterprise D). However, despite this common representation, the first three enterprises studied (A, B, C), for which apprenticeship is part of a pre-recruitment policy of their future employees, continue to train apprentices to obtain a CAP or BEP while privileging the selection of applicants who already have one of these two diplomas.

This is the case of enterprise A, a public enterprise, whose request for the creation of a “sorting-forwarding-distribution” (SRD) CAP has already been integrated into a policy seeking to raise the level of training. The result is a substitution of manpower: having recruited unskilled agents with the status of government employee, the public enterprise after the reform could train apprentices who already had a diploma so as to recruit them after the training on a contractual basis. This preference for apprentices who already have a diploma (this is the case of 76% of them) means the enterprises can adapt the training time to the initial level of the apprentices, thereby reducing the training time to one year (instead of two) while

23 Ministry of Education, Statistical guidelines and references “Apprentices”, 2007.

ensuring that the applicants they have selected will easily obtain the SRD CAP. The kind of diploma obtained by the selected apprentices is very varied (electromechanical sector, secretariat, florist, etc.) and reveals that it is a level of general training which is sought more than an unskilled worker's know-how.

Enterprise B, also a public enterprise, had "given up on" training for the BEP and turned towards the professional "bac" and the BTS to train its future workmen and technicians as electricity and gas technicians. This position, a choice of the enterprise's Management, is a source of conflict with the trade unions which denounce "*the ennoblement of apprenticeship by casting aside the level V training schemes*<sup>24</sup>". This conflict led to negotiations then to the signature of an "*Agreement for employment and a new social dynamism*" establishing the percentages of recruitment via the apprenticeship channel for the operative jobs. Negotiations which were partially circumvented by the recruitment of apprentices holding the CAP or BEP diploma in the same specialty (i. e., 32% of the recruited apprentices), practices which once again guarantee a minimum level of education but which, unlike the previous enterprise, also make use of type-cast recruitment practices (to which I will return in the last section) .

For enterprise C, a private enterprise belonging to a supermarket distribution group, its recruitment of apprentices preparing for a CAP in the food trades (butchers and bakers) resulted in the introduction of a new labor profile based on the figure of the "traditional shopkeeper" and the restructuring of their stores around production "islands" (introduction, for example, of bread baking laboratories). Unlike the previous enterprise, supermarket distribution is unable to privilege a higher level of diploma since there is no BEP or professional "bac" for butchers or bakers (the CAP combines 90% of the training courses). A situation which once more leads to

Table 4: Comparison of the social origins of apprentices with those of students in professional and technological education

	One of the parents is an unskilled worker		One of the parents is unemployed		Mother who has never worked	
	Apprentices	Students	Apprentices	Students	Apprentices	Students
No diploma	44	48	4.5	9	12	18
CAP/ BEP Industry diplomas	40	41.5	5.5	7.5	8	13.5
Tertiary sector diplomas	34.5	40	8.5	6.5	3.5	11
No diploma	25	39	8.5	7	5	10
BAC Industry diplomas	41.5	40.5	3.5	6	6.5	9
PRO Tertiary sector diplomas	23	37.5	1	5.5	5.5	10

Data taken from the "Génération 2001" survey of the CEREQ, 2004.

24 CGT file "*Confederal positions during the apprenticeship negotiations of 1989 and 1991*", 1991.

privileging those apprentices who already have a diploma or have done a first year of the CAP (i. e., 49% of the apprentices recruited) and if possible in bread making or pastry making. These practices according to a Human Resources Director guarantee a “*minimum educational level*”, a “*taste for the trade*” but also productivity, the apprentice’s quick adjustment to his future work situation.

The preference of enterprise D, a private enterprise belonging to a major agri-food group, for training schemes preparing for a BTS in industrial maintenance is apparently due to changes in technologies, increasingly requiring a technician’s profile. Not only must an apprentice hoping to be recruited prepare for a diploma of a level above that required to fill his potential future position, but he also has to have a diploma in the same specialty as the training prepared by apprenticeship (for example, recruiting an apprentice who has obtained a professional “bac” in maintenance to prepare him for a BTS in maintenance, knowing that during the course of the training he will occupy a skilled worker’s position). Selecting and ranking applicants like this, as in the case of the previous group, guarantees the “employability” and “adaptability” of the apprentices (cf. recruitment guide).

These various processes are hugely underestimated by the official publications. They rely on various indicators, which with the avowed objective of making the training correspond to the job, conceals a whole series of indicators such as the time spent in training, the diplomas acquired before apprenticeship, but also the inequalities of access to training.

#### 4.2 Stratification and segmentation of the apprentice population

The same reasoning can be applied for indicators such as the “rate of access to a given educational level” or “training levels” to describe the development of the education system and its “democratization”. Yet they pull a veil over many factors such as how to obtain a certificate, the hierarchy between the teaching channels and the training channels (Garcia S. and Poupeau F., 2003) and are tending to be replaced gradually by other explanatory factors such as the apprentice’s social origin.

The existing data make any term by term comparison difficult (differences in territorial units, in the indicators used to measure social origins) but they do give an outline of the effects of the overhauled apprenticeship system. The 1987 law reproduces the social hierarchy seen in schools: the higher the level of training, the fewer the numbers of unskilled workers’ children and the greater the proportion of children of senior managers and the intermediate categories (Moreau G., 2002), just as most of the apprentices from higher education have followed general or technological curricula (Durier S. and de Saing P., 2007).

To this initial ranking must then be added in addition the ranking resulting from the employers’ own selection and ranking processes: not only are the “upper level” apprentices not the “lower level” apprentices, but the “lower level” apprentices of today are no longer quite the same as they were yesterday. Surveys conducted

prior to the 1987 law confirm it; an examination of the profiles of apprentices compared to students shows that the latter less often come from working class families: in 1978, 59% of apprentices had a father who was an unskilled worker or salaried farm worker; this was the case of 46.5% of students preparing for a BEP in the CET (which became the LP) and of 39% of “lycée” students in technological high school<sup>25</sup>. At the beginning of the nineties, these first two segments of the population had a tendency to draw closer together: the proportion of inactive mothers is comparable<sup>26</sup>, the unskilled workers and small craftsmen were slightly more represented among apprentices but employees and farm workers not quite so much<sup>27</sup>. The data taken from “Génération 2001” show that the hierarchy between the training channels is tending to reverse: apprentices today are recruited from a more privileged social background than students. The movement is still moderate, but the trend is clear.

The overhaul of apprenticeship, combined with the changes in the job market, contributed to many middle or even upper class families falling back on apprenticeship (Froissart C., et alii, 1995). Yet this phenomenon is not devoid of repercussions on the user enterprises: the increase in the number and profile of the applicants means selectivity can be practiced which, at least at the quantitative level, is close to that of the university colleges.

Table 5: Selection of the applicants for apprenticeship

In physical units and as a %	Number of applications presented	Number of applicants selected for the tests	Number of applicants selected for the interviews	Number of applicants selected
Total out of all the training channels	655	223 i.e., 34%	117 i.e., 18%	26 i.e., 4%

Data reconstructed by us from statistics released by enterprise B for one of the four zones of the Paris region, 1999.

For these enterprises, although the diploma is still a reference, it is no longer enough to make the difference and decide between applicants. To assist with the third stage of recruitment (consisting in an interview of the applicant before a panel of members of the enterprise) the human resources managements have introduced tools (Dubernet A.C., 1996) to measure the “interpersonal skills” of the applicants for

25 Social data from the INSEE, cf. Appay B., 1982.

26 Educational sociologists have shown that in France, children whose mother has a job and/or has been educated (even to a moderate level) are more successful scholastically (Duru-Bellat M., and Henriot-van Zanten A., 1992).

27 Survey conducted by Sylvie Lemaire (1996) based on a panel of pupils and apprentices who went into their last year in school in 1989.

apprenticeship<sup>28</sup>. For enterprises A and B, the selection is then based on concepts of “personality”, “motivation” and “experience”<sup>29</sup>.

For the training schemes preparing for jobs as operatives, the recruiters privilege applicants who have experienced a situation of precariousness (unemployment or jobs occupied on a non-indefinite term basis). It is based on this first examination that the recruiters assess the relationship of applicants to a moral code (punctuality, honesty) and to an established social order (ability to hold a position in the hierarchy for example). For applicants applying for training for management jobs, the testing factors and challenges are taken into account to assess their resistance to stress and competition. Here practicing an individual sport (such as tennis for young men, dancing for young women) is highly rated. The body language of the applicant towards himself and others is also observed. Self-control, appearance, speech, sociability, the ability to convince and not to let oneself be overwhelmed are all highly prized qualities for applicants seeking service sector jobs. The objective is then to exclude those applicants who might not be culturally adjusted to the representation practices and ways of the lower middle classes<sup>30</sup>.

Therefore, by focusing the selection on social qualities, applicants who have sound general training and/or a family socialization allowing them to adjust to the questions asked by the recruiters have a clear advantage over young people who do not have these qualities (Eymard-Duvernay F., Marchal E., 1997). All these concepts (experience, motivation, personality) have common characteristics, on the one hand, of basing the professional selection on individual characteristics and thus of masking a whole panoply of factors including economic constraints and social belonging (Naville P., 1945); on the other, of reverting to what Pierre Bourdieu (1979) called the “*habitus*”: a system of acquired and permanent dispositions generating behavior patterns.

The modernization of apprenticeship redeals the cards, redefines the social characteristics of the segment of the population concerned, but what about the sex of the apprentices or their ethnic origin? If we just look at the quantitative data, the overhauled apprenticeship system does nothing to disrupt the traditional cleavages, far from it.

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28 The applicants – applying for training – did not yet have any professional abilities. The “interpersonal skills” on which the selection was based were therefore apparently the only testable factor for recruitment.

29 “Personality” is defined as “*personal qualities [...], characteristics which can be a plus for the applicant’s integration into the job he is seeking*”.

“Motivation” allows the “*identification of the driving forces or the resistances which risk holding back the applicant’s adaptation to the enterprise and the trade*”.

“Experience” should permit “*the exploration of the various situations the applicant has experienced (...) to detect the usual behavior patterns and attitudes, his social and intellectual open-mindedness*”. (Apprentice recruitment guide, enterprise A).

30 The “lower middle classes” expression does not refer here to any sociological notion but to an indigenous category, to the recruiter picturing of an adapted behaviour.

## 5 Cleavages which Persist and Are Increasing

### 5.1 The paradox of female apprenticeship

While the professional “lycées” can claim a certain degree of co-education, the same cannot be said of apprenticeship. Apprenticeship is still with 30.4%<sup>31</sup> of young women (“a male preserve” where “young women and young men do not occupy the same places or spaces and do not have the same destinies” Moreau G., 2003, p. 127). To explain this discrepancy, sociologists emphasize that young women are more successful at school, meaning that the alternative of apprenticeship is less often available for them (Lemaire S., 1996; Moreau G., 2000). Similarly, the more numerous presence of young women in the professional “lycées” could be explained by a preference for tertiary sector training which is found much less in apprenticeship. However these hypotheses are not sufficient to explain this situation<sup>32</sup>. If that were the case, the enhancement of apprenticeship, the raising of the level of training, the access to training in the tertiary sector, should have changed the sex ratio. They also cannot explain the discrepancy noted in the industrial channels. While industrial training in the apprenticeship system and in the “lycées” is more favorable to young men than to young women in terms of access to training and access to jobs, this discrepancy is more pronounced in the case of apprenticeship.

Table 6: Discrepancies observed between young women and young men in access to the industrial channels

Diplomas obtained	Apprenticeships			Professional and technological “lycées”		
	Young men	Young women	Difference in % points	Young men	Young women	Difference in % points
Industrial CAP and BEP	93.5 %	6.5 %	87	85 %	15 %	70
Industrial “bac”	94.5 %	5.5 %	89	90.5 %	9.5 %	81

Data taken from the “Génération 2001” survey, 2004.

To show that young women’s access to apprenticeship is made more difficult whatever the corresponding training specialty, I will rely here on an examination of the practices and representations of the recruiters of enterprise B. The main interest is to compare the recruitment process used in a highly male-oriented training system (BEP and electrotechnical professional “bac” preparing for a job as an electrician

31 Statistical guidelines and references “Apprentices”, 2007.

32 Gilles Moreau (2003) makes a contribution to the discussion by showing that young female apprentices enhance training and access to the trade, whereas young male apprentices enhance the work and access to the job. This result could then explain the differences of appreciation which young men and young women have alternately of apprenticeship and the professional “lycée”.

including, for the promotion observed, 2 young women for 59 young men) and a highly female-oriented training system (services professional “bac” preparing for a job as a customer relations advisor including 125 young women for 60 young men).

From observations in situ I was able to see that a distinction is made right from the moment of recruitment between applicants for jobs said to be technical or tertiary related. In the first case, the interview lasts longer; the recruiters attempt to probe the applicant’s knowledge: “*can you tell me what is 97 times 3?*”, “technical potential” from the applicants’ “experiences”: “*do you help your father with odd jobs on Sundays?*”; “*do you have a motor scooter?*” For applicants for the services “bac pro”, the interview is shorter, the recruiters are looking for qualities of friendliness, “knowledge of how to be of service to others”; “*Which of your qualities do you feel could be placed at the customers’ service?*” The only questions concerning “professional” or “educational” knowledge refer to being able to use the computer program Excel.

The discrepancy in handling recruitment interviews covers the distinction made, on the one side, between the feminine qualities (which are supposed to be innate and not acquired) and on the other, the masculine qualities (which are deemed to have been built up and acquired) (D. Kergoat, 1982). This distinction, which is the basis for the division of work by sex, used by our enterprises is reinforced by the notion of “interpersonal skills” legitimating the insistence on strongly naturalized qualities; particularly since the latter are gradually being integrated into the reference systems of the education system’s diplomas<sup>33</sup>.

*“We are more demanding when we recruit a technician since we are looking for intellectual qualities, a potential for the BEP or even acquired theoretical and practical knowledge for the technical “bac pro” whereas for the services we rely only on the applicant’s personality and interpersonal skills (...) I do not believe that training can teach psychology and contact skills. A person can improve but unless he or she has basic natural abilities, the person cannot be efficient” (executive, Human Resources).*

However, an examination of the 88 applications of the selected apprentices shows that it is the sex (and not the potential job) which determines the qualifications to be acquired by the applicants for apprenticeship. In fact, all the young women selected for one or other of the training programs (technical or services) had obtained a diploma in this same specialty. On the contrary, all the young men selected did not have a diploma or had obtained a diploma in another training specialty.

Whereas the young women have to prove their ability with a previously acquired diploma, the young men have to prove their “potential” by speaking about their

<sup>33</sup> See in this respect the reference system of the services professional “bac” diploma whose specific feature is that it develops “relational skills”, defined by default as not forming part of “know-how” (Collin C., “*Assessment of the services professional “bac”*”, CPC Documents, 2000).

“experience” or their versatility, which in this latter case leads to a much quicker promotion in the enterprise<sup>34</sup>.

Hence the following paradox: although it is the so-called feminine know-how which is *de facto* deemed natural and therefore not recognized as acquired knowledge, it is the young women who must prove they have the required qualification by having obtained a diploma in the same specialty. Not only must they prove their qualification but they must do so upstream, before even embarking on the training. Conversely the young men have to show their ability to obtain the qualification required by the enterprise, but downstream as a result of the training.

This paradox then explains not only how young women are confined in channels in the tertiary sector but also their “super selection” process for access to apprenticeship. These two principles also affect young people coming from immigrant populations.

## 5.2 Discrimination and segregation: the case of young people coming from immigrant populations

Here again, the available statistical data are unambiguous: the Sylvie Lemaire survey (1966) shows that foreign children are twice less numerous in apprenticeship than in professional “lycées”. While the hypothesis of self-elimination cannot be ruled out, the analysis cannot gloss over discriminatory practices, whether they are legal (enacted in French law)<sup>35</sup> or illegal (applied by the employers)<sup>36</sup>. The data in our possession show not only that the situation is persisting but that it also affects young people coming from immigrant populations.

Admittedly young people from the North African countries, and to a lesser degree from sub-Saharan Africa, leave school with a lower level of training. Nevertheless, those who left the school system in 1998 with a CAP or a BEP have a 1.6 times greater probability of being unemployed at the end of three years of active life than their French origin peers (Silberman R., Fournier I., 2006<sup>37</sup>). A lower level certificate and discrimination on hiring prompt French sociologists to speak of a “double handicap” in access to jobs. This is confirmed by our observations, which have highlighted two discrimination processes.

34 Sabine Fortino (2002), after observing recruitment processes in the same major public enterprise (excluding apprenticeship), reached similar conclusions.

35 If not a national of a European Community country, for a young foreigner to be able to sign an apprenticeship contract, he must have a residence permit authorizing him to perform a salaried job or to have entered France by virtue of a family reunification. (Circular of August 22, 2007).

36 The Discrimination Observatory survey (2004), using the “testing” method, highlighted a rate of positive answers (obtaining an interview for a job) for an applicant from the North African countries which was five times lower than for a reference applicant (French surname and first name, white skin, etc.).

37 “Young people from immigrant populations. A drawback when it comes to hiring which is perpetuated” CEREP, *Digest*, No. 226.

Table 7: Comparison of the origins of apprentices' parents with those of pupils and students<sup>a)</sup>

	One of the two parents was born outside Europe	One of the two parents was born in a North African country
Apprentices	9.46	2.59
Pupils or students	16.68	7.11

Data taken from the "Génération 2001" survey of the CEREQ, 2004.

<sup>a)</sup> Note that in France, collecting "personal data revealing racial or ethnic origins directly or indirectly" is prohibited, hence the difficulty in taking into account the situation of immigrants' grandchildren or the situations of individuals from the French DOM-TOM, even though these segments of the population are discriminated against. Cf. P.Y. Cusset, "Discrimination and ethnic statistics", *Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales*, No. 148, 2008.

The first is employers' straightforward exclusion of applicants coming from immigrant populations. This practice was revealed from observing a promotion of young people enrolled in a university CFA of the Paris region who wanted to sign an apprenticeship contract to pursue a professional license in the tertiary sector by means of an apprenticeship. For this purpose the CFA sets up contacts between the promotion of the 40 pre-selected young people – 6 of whom are from immigrant populations – with a "portfolio" of enterprises with which it maintains a regular relationship. Two months after the academic year resumed, 6 of them – including 5 of the 6 applicants mentioned above – have still not found an employer and have had to abandon the training. The next year in order to reduce the number of young people not finding an enterprise, the region sets up a "system targeting as a priority those young people who have not yet found an employer one month after the start of the theoretical teaching"; the finding is the same; seven out of the nine young people concerned come from immigrant populations.

The second process, specific to the two public enterprises, is presented as a measure of "positive discrimination". In fact, although the applications of the young people coming from immigrant populations are selected here, they are being recruited for training in the services sector preparing for jobs as operatives in geographic areas defined as "sensitive" (the "suburbs"). To quote the recruiters, these applicants are selected for their "community experience", their knowledge of the "high rise residential estates" which transform these applicants into "cultural mediators". Emmanuelle Lada (2004) has also shown how the recruiters of a major public enterprise, looking for individuals to fill reception and prevention positions at marginalized urban sites, make their selection on the basis of the presumed or assigned geographic and cultural origin of their applicants. This is a situation which leads to an ethnic origin-oriented recruitment process and to the stigmatization of these young people with the label of "young people in difficulty". A relative disqualification, since these young people, she says, and particularly the young women, all have diplomas and have had various salaried jobs.

These conceptions and practices are legitimated by the representatives of the education system. For example, a school inspector justifies the recruitment “*of young people from problem districts, losing interest in school and dropping out socially, who are better placed to perform these mediation roles (...) because they share the culture of those with whom they will have to work*”<sup>38</sup> for the position of mediator in the heart of “sensitive” areas.

These *selection* and *ranking* processes, which have gradually been taken on board by the education system, tend to legitimate the mechanisms specific to the social, ethnic and sex-oriented division of labor.

## 6 Conclusion

I believe the term “silent revolution” describing the changes to apprenticeship over the last 20 years is not an exaggeration because these changes have undertaken a significant transformation in the relationships between the work environment and the education environment. The creation of higher levels has resulted in the reproduction of the ranking of professional knowledge already applied in schools. It contributes to gradually excluding the CAP and the BEP from the diplomas offered while using the latter as a reference point to select and rank applicants to apprenticeship. The resulting ranking presupposes a one-dimensional order of knowledge, originating in the nomenclature of the levels of training (Tanguy, L., 1998). Establishing the CAP and the BEP (level V) as a minimum level voids the unskilled workers’ qualification of its substance, barring it *de facto* from the ladder of certificates, its holders are “marginalized” because they are “not in the game”. This ranking of knowledge is accentuated by the fact that although it reproduces the scholastic order by superposing levels of ranked training, it does not allow any development inside the training channels. The very name “channel” could imply there is an opportunity for social promotion by way of apprenticeship, but this is not the case. The CAP, now discredited, does not give access to recruitment at a higher level of training insofar as some major enterprises are recruiting apprentices at the end of their contract and are not accompanying them along a training path. Finally, many CAP training schemes (this is the case of the SRD CAP or the baker’s CAP) give practically no outlet to the high level diplomas. According to Gilles Moreau (2003), only 28% of apprentices in their sector of training are formally offered a complete channel paving the way to further education. According to the author, this representation in a “channel” is abusive. It hides the compartmentalization of apprenticeship between training specialties and training levels.

This first ranking is accompanied by another, induced by the enterprises’ practices. Yesterday’s apprentices are no longer quite the same as those of today

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38 Cf. Le Tiec C., 1995.

who, better equipped in educational terms, are also more gifted socially. Access to apprenticeship is a course strewn with pitfalls and when young women and young men from immigrant populations do have access to it, it is quite often in the name of very strongly naturalized qualities.

The tools used by enterprises which have become training agents<sup>39</sup>, through among other things the overhaul of apprenticeship, select applicants who already have a certificate based on new characteristics linked to interpersonal skills. The major enterprises, relying on science and technique, spread the idea in the education system itself that “interpersonal skills” are supposedly a component of knowledge alongside (acquired) knowledge and know-how<sup>40</sup>. Not only do they emphasize but they also legitimate the selection and exclusion mechanisms specific to the functioning of the job market (Kergoat P., 2007).

The reform of apprenticeship, furthered by the policies of the major enterprises, is gradually reconfiguring the traditional hierarchies by combining two forms of inequalities; the inequalities due to the education system and those of the work environment. Not only are the ranking and selection processes used by the enterprises legitimated but they are reinforced – which distinguishes apprenticeship from the other forms of education – since they are actually displaced upstream of the training.

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39 “The French tradition in its most consistent form for more than a century consists in distancing enterprises from the training of young people (...). It is absurd, when abilities are recognized as being the all important key for enterprises, to allow the initial training to take place where they have no influence (...). The time when the initial training was forbidden territory for enterprises is long past. We should be able to draw the necessary conclusions” (National French Employers’ Council, Deauville meetings, October 8, 1990, opening address, Y. Cannac).

40 “Initial training in schools is recognized as having an occupational training role (...). In addition to knowledge (fundamental learning, general culture, development of a critical mind), the initial training must dispense know-how and “interpersonal skills” or the desired behavior patterns (...). To meet this requirement of dual abilities, it became necessary to develop dual training programs combining both general knowledge and practical experience. (Senate No. 311, Annex to the minutes of the April 16, 1997 session on apprenticeship).

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