

ITALIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Editor-in-Chief: Silvio Scanagatta | ISSN 2035-4983

## Can Schools Help Working-Class Students Access University?

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### Article first published online

November 2018

### HOW TO CITE

Parziale, F., Vatrella, S. (2018). Can Schools Help Working-Class Students Access University? Italian Journal of Sociology of Education, 10(3), 245-268. doi: [10.14658/pupj-ijse-2018-3-12](https://doi.org/10.14658/pupj-ijse-2018-3-12)

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*Abstract:* This paper analyses the complex relationship between social classes, scholastic stratification and educational choices in Italy, paying due attention to the role teachers may play in enhancing working-class students' chances to attend university. Our findings show on the one hand how the Italian educational system contributes to reproducing social inequalities, on the other hand how individuals can challenge the system, by reversing the abovementioned negative trend. In fact, working-class students are encouraged to go on to university, when they encounter teachers who inspire them through a positive relationship, good expertise and interesting lessons. In such instances, teachers can become "transformative intellectuals" who contribute to change students' social dispositions towards education.

*Keywords:* educational inequalities, social classes, parental education, pedagogical relationship

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## Introduction

This article deals with the relationship between educational inequalities and egalitarian practices in the Italian education field, with particular regard to the upper secondary school. More specifically, we refer to the transition from school to university, when the tensions between the universalistic promises of the educational system and the social stratification effects are more evident. About this, we are going to show that what we call “positive pedagogical relationship” increases working-class students’ chances to continue to higher education, especially if they are female.

In analysing the theme we focus on, first we consider the Italian way to distinguish upper-secondary schools in three different types, high schools (called “licei”), technical and vocational schools, as a key policy device that contributes to reproducing the intertwining between school and social stratification (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2003). Furthermore, we consider the overlapping between primary and secondary class effects (Duru-Bellat et al., 2008; Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2013). The primary effects are expressed via the association between students’ class backgrounds in terms of parental education, and their levels of scholastic performance; the secondary effects consist of the differential of participation to the education system on the basis of the social origin, being equal the scholastic results (Barone, 2005; Checchi, 2010; Ballarino, 2015). From this point of view, the senior secondary students’ decision on whether to continue to higher education or to enter into labour force would be influenced by the assessment of risks, costs and benefits that in turn would be affected by the social origin.

Given the above, in what follows, we want to test four hypotheses:

Hypothesis I – the choice to go to university depends on the social class and parental education, but the last one is more relevant since the evaluation of risks and benefits is influenced by parental education, in turn, associated to social class;

Hypothesis II – the direct effect exercised on educational choices by parental education is more important than its indirect effect through scholastic performance;

Hypothesis III – the working class students can reduce their social distance from school thanks to a good relationship with teachers, who can give a motivational boost to go to university, also when parental education is low;

Hypothesis IV – the dynamics above is less important for middle and upper-class students: they tend to have a middle-high parental education and to choose the university, also when their scholastic performance is low, and the pedagogical relationship is not positive, given the apprehension to lose the social position inherited.

The hypotheses are tested by resorting to the data collected by the Italian National Statistical Institute (Istat) in 2011, on the graduates from secondary education in 2007 (our sample is composed of 8,334 interviewees). The data are analysed, employing a complex research strategy, which combines three techniques: the binary logit model, the multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), and the cluster analysis. In particular, the first two hypotheses are tested through the binary logit model as this technique allows us to examine the influence of principal factors on university choice (yes/no). The second two hypotheses are verified via MCA joined to cluster analysis because this strategy is more useful to analyse university choice according to the not linear connection between social class, scholastic stratification and pedagogical relationship.

The article is structured in three parts. First, we present our theoretical framework, showing how it has informed our analysis and turned our attention to the complex intertwining between social classes, scholastic stratification, and pedagogical relationship. Moreover, we illustrate the methodological strategy and tools we resort to in analysing the data collected by Istat. Second, through a logit binary model, we show how the primary and secondary effects combine each other and affect the senior secondary students' choice to continue to higher education. Then, via the MCA and cluster analysis techniques, we explore the intertwining between social classes, pedagogical relationship and scholastic stratification. These methods allow us to follow our theoretical framework better (see par. 2). Third, we demonstrate how school confirms its reproductive role regarding social inequalities, but it can also become an emancipative field. In effect, the working class students, especially if they are female (see par. 5), increase their likelihood of choosing the university when the pedagogical relationship within they are engaged inspires them to invest in education.

### **Theoretical framework: social classes, scholastic stratification, and pedagogical relationship**

The international landscape shows that inequalities in educational attainment, including the lower university attendance by working-class students, depend on the intertwining between primary and secondary effects (Duru-Bellat et al., 2008; Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2013). That is to say, the components – briefly mentioned above – that were identified by Bastide and Girard (1963), underpinned by Boudon (1973), and then developed by several research perspectives.

As it is known, for years rational choice (RC) scholars (Boudon, 1973; Gambetta, 1987) have been stating that secondary effects are more important than primary ones. According to this perspective, the factors that would

affect the students' expectations and their scholastic choices are just the material resources. In such a framework, students from the upper class are impelled to choose a high level of education in order to maintain their social position; while those of lower class get the low or middle level of education, i.e. the level they consider sufficient enough to maintain their social position (Goldthorpe, 2000). Furthermore, class differentials in educational attainment persist even controlling scholastic performance (Breen & Yaish, 2006). Therefore, rational evaluation due to material resources seems to be more important than educational learning and performance, since the risks and benefits the students consider just in the short term.

However, some RC scholars have recently begun to argue that primary and secondary effects are connected. In effect, they highlighted that educational attainment and scholastic choices depend, at least in part, on cultural capital, in particular on parental education, more than economic income (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2012). In particular, they claim that students from different class backgrounds build their educational career within the range of choices that their previous scholastic performance allows them. In other words, evaluation of risks, costs and benefits depends on scholastic performance in turn connected to familial, cultural capital (Jackson et al., 2007).

RC perspective is not the only one by which primary and secondary effects are studied. From a completely different point of view, Bourdieu (1979) stressed the relevance of these effects by showing how the primary effects are more relevant than the secondary ones. The scholar argues on the one hand that the cultural capital of the working class students is inadequate to scholastic requests; on the other hand, he demonstrates how the school itself incorporates and reproduces high classes' culture (Bourdieu, 1984). He considered this phenomenon as an example of «symbolic violence», produced by the dominant class that imposes its 'worldview' through cultural institutions, and school above all. The French sociologist stated that schools select students from cultural parameters that reward middle and upper-class students. This selection is not only connected to scholastic performance since it also depends on the relationship between social class and schools.

In such a framework of long-lasting academic and research traditions, we follow a perspective that tries to intertwine them in an original attempt to consider the school choices as made on the basis of a complex interweaving of systemic factors and individual resources. At this aim, we make a double "heuristic move" (Abbott, 2004). First, we analyse the Italian education system through the lenses of the bourdesian perspective, i.e. in so far, it contributes to reproducing educational inequalities. Therefore, we pay attention to the processes of social and cultural reproduction that the Italian schools enact. Second, by following the New Sociology of Education (Young, 1971; Giroux, 2005; Apple, 2012), we try to understand the role school plays in

contrasting inequalities in educational attainment through the pedagogical relationship.

From a systemic point of view, the Italian education (i.e. the way in which upper-secondary school splits itself) contributes to reproducing educational inequalities. As known, high schools are generally perceived as harder and preferred by upper and middle classes students. Moreover, they pull students to continue to higher education, enhancing their probability of getting more prestigious occupations. Whereas, technical and vocational schools are thought as more comfortable and often preferred by working-class students (Schizzerotto & Barone, 2006; Romito, 2014), so they allow the immediate integration into the labour market, but in that segment made up of manual and less prestigious occupations. It was without saying, that in our perspective the Italian education system fosters and naturalises the overlapping between school stratification and social stratification (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2003; Lombardo, Parziale, 2018).

We do not mean that the educational system deterministically works towards a one-way direction. On the contrary, we suppose that where the educational system differently works, students' motivation to continue to study increases and educational inequalities decrease.

In this regard, particularly interesting are the findings emerging from an RC Israeli study (Gabay-Egozi et al., 2010), that we assume as landmark in so far as it implicitly 'denies' the emphasis on the secondary effects, by showing how working-class students evaluate risks and benefits not only in the short term, but also in long-term. So, this research suggests that the educational system itself can nurture students' motivation and reduce the effect that the class subculture produces on educational attainment (Jackson, 2013).

According to Gabay-Egozy and colleagues, the educational system contributes to nourishing the students' motivations thanks to the way in which the curriculum is organised. "The secondary school curriculum is composed of compulsory and elective subjects, such that students can choose from a range of advanced academic courses in different subjects [...]. In general, students from less affluent and less educated families seem to be aware of the risks and utilities associated with the different subjects available to them, and they mix them to their apparent advantage (Gabay-Egozi et al., 2010, p. 450-460).

In other words, Israeli students combine long-term utility and short-term risks; they mix scientific subjects (riskier because the long-term utility they yield) with social sciences (easier and less risky in the short term, but almost completely devoid of long-term utility).

"These results suggest that educational systems that allow multiple rather than alternative choices may enhance the attainment of working-class

youth because they enable them to opt for long-term utility while providing a safety net in the form of additional safer subjects” (Ivi, 447).

These findings, on the one hand, indicate how the educational system affects students’ motivation, acting on the definition of risks and benefits (Young, 2007), on the other hand they suggest how “class subculture” affects the evaluation of risks, costs and benefits, that in turn may be reduced by the educational system (Jackson, 2013).

So, the study implicitly convinced us to consider the bivalent nature of the educational system that on the one hand legitimises the social order, on the other promises emancipation and universalism (Collins, 1979; Brint, 2006). Such tension may counteract the reproduction of social inequalities through a positive pedagogical relationship (Giroux, McLaren, 2014) and the enactment of inclusive teaching (Apple, 2013).

### **Database, variables and statistical techniques**

Consistently with our theoretical frame, we built a multilevel research design. Employing the data collected by Istat in 2011, among secondary school graduates in 2007 (our sample is composed of 8,334 interviewees), we analysed the interviewees’ situation in 2011, i.e. four years after they acquired the upper-secondary school diploma. Therefore, in order to test the first two hypotheses (see introduction), we point at the unequal likelihood of going to university between the upper-secondary school graduates that come from different social classes. At this aim, we evaluate the influence of principal factors that reproduce social inequalities regarding scholastic attendance in university, through a binary logit model. It is a model where the decision to go to university (68.8% of interviewees) or not (38.5%) represents the dependent variable, whereas social class and parental education are the independent variables. Moreover, interviewees’ social class is classified according to their parents’ position in the division of labour when the students were 14 years old. Furthermore, they are classified on the basis of their parents’ job and the “dominance method” (Erikson, 1984). So, students were attributed to 1) Working-class (43,9%) when dominant occupation corresponds to a waged worker (in routine and semi-routine occupations); 2) Upper-class (12,4%) when they are sons of entrepreneurs, managers or professionals; 3) Middle-class (43,7%) in the other cases.

This classification returned to macro Goldthorpe’s scheme (Goldthorpe, 2016) in salaried, intermediate classes, and working class.

Instead, parental education was considered high (15%) when at least one parent is graduated, and the other one got an upper-secondary school diploma. If neither parent achieved the upper-secondary school diploma, then the parental education was considered low (32,2%). In all other cases, we

classified parental education as the middle (52,8%). Moreover, our model includes gender (41.7% male, 58.3% female) and geographic area (North: 45% and Centre-South: 55%), both conceived as confounding variables. Further, we selected three mediating variables. The first one is the type of upper-secondary school students attend: high (52,2%), technical (27,7%) and vocational schools (20,1%). The second one – we choose because it represents a good proxy of scholastic performance – is the exit exam result, whose score is on a 100-point scale. We divided marks in four modalities: 60-70 (35,3%); 71-80 (27,4%); 81-90 (18,7%); 91-100 (18,6%).

Eventually, we built an index that reproduces 63% of the variance of three variables through the principal component analysis (PCA). These last ones concern students' satisfaction with teachers' expertise (+. 454), relationship with teachers (+. 437), and lesson content (+. 366). The values in brackets represent the factor score coefficients (Di Franco & Marradi, 2003). The numeric index was converted into a categorical variable with the following modalities: negative when the score is less than zero (22,5%); neutral when it is zero (56,1%), this value corresponds to the average of the sample; positive when the score is more than zero (20,4%). Therefore, this index is used as a third mediating variable, since it allows us to measure the relationship between students and teachers in upper-secondary schools: the higher its value, the more positive the pedagogical relationship becomes.

As said above, in order to test the second two hypotheses (see introduction) – and by resorting to the previously examined panel of variables – we adopted MCA joined to cluster analysis. In effect, these techniques allow us to focus on the role that a good pedagogical relationship may play in reducing social distance between working-class students and school, motivating this kind of students in choosing the university.

Briefly, the binary logit model was useful to get accurate evaluations about the influence on scholastic choice by social class and parental education, in order to understand how primary and secondary effects are important. Then, the MCA joined to cluster analysis was revealed better fit to make us analyse the complex not linear connection between social class, parental education, pedagogical relationship, scholastic choice and also other variables, as gender.

## **Empirical findings**

### ***Primary and secondary effects on university choice***

In what follows we show: 1) whether and how social class and parental education affect the senior secondary students' decision on whether to continue to higher education; 2) the role parental education plays in such



a decision. To this end, we first need to present the descriptive statistics of the independent, confounding and mediating variables by university choices (see table 1). Consistently, with previous studies in Italy (Bianco, 2001, 2015, 2017) and elsewhere (Weis, 2010; Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2012), we found that boys, working-class students and those with low parental education are less likely than others to go on to university. Further, students who attended vocational and also technical schools do not tend to choose the university. Indeed, choice of previous upper-secondary school path is crucial in building the educational career, besides the apparent role of scholastic performance.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis: students who chose the university

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Modalities</b>	<b>University</b>
Gender	Male	58,4
	Female	63,4
Social class	Working class	56,5
	Middle class	64,5
	Upper class	71,8
Parental education	Low parental education	48,7
	Middle parental education	65,9
	High parental education	76,3
Geographic Area	North	64,5
	Centre-South	59,5
Secondary-Upper schools	Vocational schools	36,9
	Technical schools	59,0
	High schools	72,4
Scholastic performance (Exam result)	60-70	47,0
	71-80	61,2
	81-90	70,4
	91-100	80,6
Pedagogical relationship	Negative	63,8
	Neutral	63,7
	Positive	63,5

Bivariate analysis shows that differences based on gender or geographic area are less relevant than those based on social origins and mediating variables, except for the pedagogical relationship that would seem irrelevant.

As expected, we also see that students, who attend vocational and technical schools, are disproportionately drawn from a more disadvantaged social background than those who chose the most prestigious high schools (table 2).

Table 2. Choice of upper-secondary school by social origins

<b>Social class</b>	<b>Vocational</b>	<b>Technical</b>	<b>High schools</b>	<b>Total</b>
Working class	24,7	29,1	46,1	100
Middle class	17,2	28,1	54,7	100
Upper class	11,5	21,8	66,7	100
Total	19,8	27,8	52,4	100
<b>Parental education</b>	<b>Vocational</b>	<b>Technical</b>	<b>High schools</b>	<b>Total</b>
Low	32,2	28,4	39,3	100
Middle	15,9	30,6	53,5	100
High	6,6	16,5	76,9	100
Total	19,8	27,8	52,4	100

Given the above, we can now try to understand the relationship between social origins, education system and University choice, according to the statistical model described in the early paragraph (table 3).

Indeed, the binary logistic regression indicates that working-class students' probability to continue to higher education is twenty-one percentage points less than the probability that upper-class students make the same choice, being equal parental education, gender and geographic area. As a first step, the logit model does not analyse mediating variable. In this case, the parental education results most important variable that influences the likelihood of going to university. Social class, gender and the geographic area being equal, students with an excellent parental education tend to choose the university with a likelihood that is 200% (Exp(B) is 2,065) higher than that one of students with low parental education.

Therefore, parental education is more relevant than social class, as we early hypothesised (hypothesis I). In other words: evaluation of risks and benefits associated to social class seems to be carried on according to what Bourdieu (1979, 1984) called familial, cultural capital and we could approximately refer to as 'class subculture'. Continuing to analyse the same four variables, male students seem a little less interested to university, but this result is not valid for southern students (in this last case coefficients' significance level exceeds 0.05).

Table 3. Binary logit model: the effects of primary and secondary effects on choice of university

Variables	B	Exp(B)	Variables	B	Exp(B)
Upper class			Upper class		
Middle class	-0,103	0,902	Middle class*	-0,146	0,864
Working class*	-0,251	0,778	Working class*	-0,231	0,793
Parental Education:			Parental Education:		
Low			Low		
Middle*	0,691	1,996	Middle*	0,498	1,646
High*	1,154	3,172	High*	0,725	2,065
Gender (male vs female)*	-0,303	0,739	Gender (male vs female)	-0,055	0,947
Area (centre-South vs north)	-0,088	0,915	Area (centre-South vs north)*	-0,112	0,894
High schools			High schools		
Technical			Technical*	-0,464	0,251
Vocational			Vocational*	-1,383	0,629
Exit exam result:			Exit exam result:		
60-70			60-70		
71-80			71-80*	0,554	1,741
81-90			81-90*	1,030	2,8
91-100			91-100*	1,583	4,869
Pedagogical relationship: negative			Pedagogical relationship: negative		
Neutral			Neutral	0,071	1,073
Positive			Positive*	0,160	1,174
Constant	0,342	1,407	Constant	0,176	1,193
Model $\chi^2$	895,932			1263,54	
N.	7,748			7,748	
R square – Nagelkerke	0,063			0,205	

\*Significance Level &lt; 0,05

When mediating variables are analysed, gender lost its importance (because boys get worse scholastic performance, and this last one makes them do not decide to go on university). While the effect produced by the geographic area slightly increases: considering all variables of our model, stu-

dents from the most deprived area of Italy (Centre-South) continue to higher education to a lesser extent with respect of northern young people.

It is interesting to notice that working-class students keep continuing to be disadvantaged, also when we consider scholastic performance and the other mediating variables. The social class effects on university choice are quite all direct; whereas about a third of the total effect produced by parental education is indirect: school type and scholastic performance are influenced by the amount of parental education. More educated families tend to enrol their children in high schools, which motivates students to go on to university. Furthermore, parents with higher education also hand down scholastic competences, which improve their sons' performance and thus motivate them to continue their scholastic career (Jackson, 2013).

However, two-thirds of the influence of parental education is direct. So, we can state that: living in a highly educated family, continuously and in part subconsciously, motivates children to follow long scholastic careers, even when their performance is low. This mechanism seems to represent the strength of class subculture: parental education is associated with social class (table 4), revealing itself as a component of the last one (Rosenberg, 1968).

Table 4. Parental education by social class

Social classes	Parental education			Total
	Low	Middle	High	
Working-class	44,3	51,1	4,6	100
Middle class	25,7	57,4	16,8	100
Upper class	10,2	43,1	46,7	100
Total	32,0	52,8	15,2	100

If we introduce mediating variables in our model, we will discover that different upper-secondary school types are significant in affecting choice that students make after they have got a diploma. In turn, the type of upper-secondary school is chosen on the basis of social origins (Gamoran, 2010; Ballarino, 2015): parental education is more relevant than social class also because it exercises an indirect effect on university choice, whereas – as said – the social class has a quite all direct effect.

Resuming our logit model, upper-secondary school stratification of three tracks appears as a powerful device that is suitable for reproducing social inequalities (Triventi, 2011; Pitzalis, 2012; Fasanella, Parziale, 2018). Social dispositions are connected to this scholastic device.

Further, looking at social origins and the other variables, school types included, scholastic performance is shown to be relevant.

To sum up, primary and secondary effects are also intertwined if the second ones seem to be more relevant. About this we have to pay attention to parental education: this variable affects university choice mainly in a direct way.

### ***Pedagogical relationship and scholastic stratification***

The framework becomes more complicated when we discover that being equal all variables (scholastic performance included), students who indicate a positive relationship with teachers have a likelihood to attend University by 20% higher than that one revealed among students with a negative pedagogical relationship. Briefly, if we use the multivariate analysis, we will discover a “suppressed association” (Lazarsfeld, Rosenberg, 1955) between our index of pedagogical relationship and the likelihood of choosing university (compare table 1 with table 3).

This result can be better understood if we pay attention to the complex intertwining between social class, scholastic stratification and pedagogical relationship. At this aim, we resorted to MCA; in doing so, we focussed on two main factors that account for 28 variance percentage (inertia) of the eight variables in the exam. The first factor represents the reproduction of social inequalities. The negative side of the factor is associated with: choice of university, good performance (81-90 as the final exam result), middle and upper-class students, female, high schools and North Italy. Coherently, the positive side of the first factor is associated to no university choice, bad scholastic performance (60-70 final exam result), vocational schools, male, centre-southern students, working-class and low parental education (table 5). The first factor also represents the opposition between neutral and negative pedagogical relationship.

The reproduction of social inequalities through the educational system also occurs because the typical relationship between school and social classes does not change. In effect, students belonging to middle and upper classes distinguish themselves by their cultural capital that is closer to the scholastic culture. They suddenly recognise the teaching code (Bernstein, 1975), because their cultural capital exceeds academic knowledge (Bourdieu, 1979; Lareau, 1987), so they do not appreciate the teachers' skills. Hence, these students show a pedagogical relationship that is neither positive nor negative, but “neutral” (in line with the average sample: see par. 3). Instead, working-class students feel distant from the scholastic field (de Graaf, 2007) and tend to build a negative relationship with the educational system (table 5).

Table 5. Description of the first factor

<b>Factor 1</b>		
<b>T.Value</b>	<b>Category Label</b>	<b>Variable Label</b>
-56.34	Yes	Choice about university
-44.12	High Schools	School type
-31.90	High	Parental education
-26.57	81-90	Exit exam result
-21.12	Female	Gender
-20.95	Upper class	Social class
-20.68	Middle class	Social class
-15.60	Middle	Parental education
-12.36	Neutral	Pedagogical relationship
-9.31	North	Geographic area
<b>Middle area</b>		
11.36	Technical Schools	School type
12.33	Negative	Pedagogical relationship
12.92	Centre-South	Geographic area
19.26	Male	Gender
22.54	Working-class	Social class
33.45	Low	Parental education
40.11	Vocational Schools	School type
47.85	60-70	Exit exam result
54.02	No	Choice about university

In sum, the first factor shows the persistent inequality in the link between the type of school students attend and social dispositions. So, scholastic stratification shows itself to be congenial to the reproduction of social class inequalities (Scuola di Barbiana, 1967; Willis, 1977; Bourdieu, 1979; Bowles & Gintis, 2003; Apple, 2012; Parziale, 2016).

Nonetheless, the second factor reveals that the school does not promote only social reproduction. The negative side of this factor is associated with the following modalities: high schools, upper and middle class, male, negative pedagogical relationship, bad scholastic performance, North Italy, but also the choice of university. We can notice that a bad relationship can be associated even with upper and middle-class students. At the same time, these students tend to go on to university, also when the pedagogical relationship is negative. This result seems to predominantly concern male students.

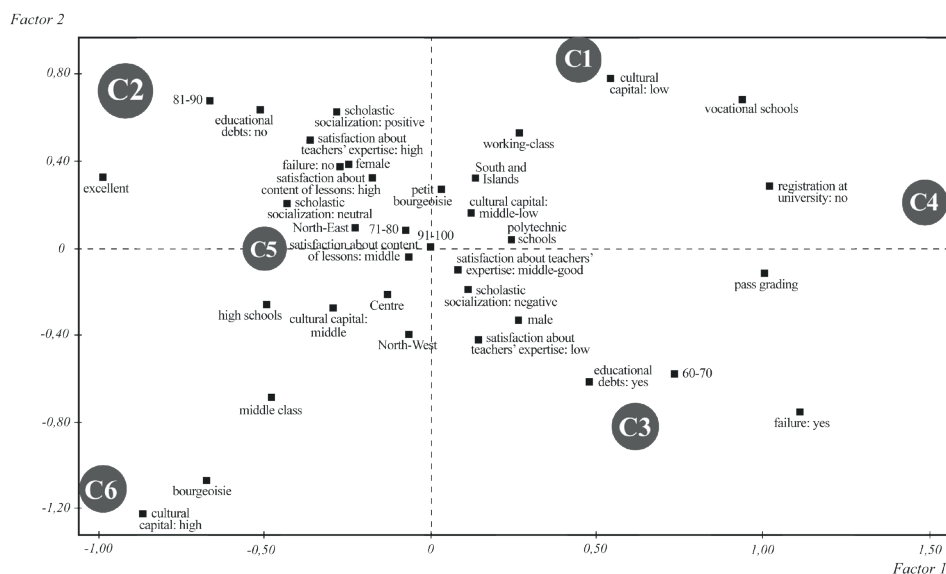
Nonetheless, our findings show that working-class students and students with low parental education may have a positive pedagogical relationship, especially if they are female (table 6). This result confirms that women tend to believe in scholastic achievement more than men, also among working-class families (Bianco, 2017). Women can better identify themselves in teaching personnel, mainly made up of women (Schizzerotto, Barone, 2006), and look for the scholastic resource a tool for social emancipation, given the inequalities paid by them in labour market and more comprehensive terms in society (Parziale, Pastori, 2018).

Table 6. Description of the second factor

<b>Factor 2</b>		
<b>T.Value</b>	<b>Category Label</b>	<b>Variable Label</b>
-46.55	High	Parental education
-37.72	Upper class	Social class
-34.43	60-70	Exit exam result
-30.22	Middle class	Social class
-25.05	Male	Gender
-23.45	High Schools	School type
-18.80	Negative	Pedagogical relationship
-16.07	North	Geographic area
-14.84	Middle	Parental education
-10.20	Yes	Choice about university
<b>Middle area</b>		
7.78	Low	Parental education
11.56	No	Choice about university
11.97	Neutral	Relationship between students and teachers
15.09	Positive	Relationship between students and teachers
20.03	Centre-South	Geographic area
24.37	81-90	Exit exam result
26.37	Female	Gender
29.07	Vocational Schools	School type
38.19	Working-class	Social class
43.82	Low	Parental education

Eventually, we divided interviewees into six groups employing a cluster analysis elaborated on the base of two factors just described in order to further define the relationship between the variables we examined (figure 1).

Figure 1. Six groups of students based on two main factors previously extrapolated by means MCA



Note: C1 = Docile students; C2 = Heretics; C3= Indifferent students; C4 = Not Inclined students; C5 = Dedicated students; C6 = Guardians

If we analyse the six groups identified, we can understand the dialectical relationship between schools and social classes. About 55 per cent (“GRP/CAT”) of working-class students belong to the first two groups. The first group represents students (14.2%) that tend to choose vocational schools. This group is made up of 47.7% vocational schools students and 64% working-class students. The likelihood of not going on to university is twice as high as that revealed in the total sample. In effect, 50% of them did not choose the university. This group is labelled “docile students” (C1): they tend to have a neutral pedagogical relationship, that is not enough to feed their motivation to go on to university.

The second group is made up of “heretics” (C2). More than 93% of them are registered at the university, 54% of the group are working-class students. In other words, many students deny the social trajectories generally expected by sociologists. Most of these students are girls (70.7%), and 71.7% live in Centre-South, the most deprived area in the country. This scholastic trajectory depends mainly on two factors: scholastic stratification and pedagogical



cal relationship. Most of these students have chosen high schools, the most prestigious scholastic track in the Italian educational system. Therefore, they are already highly motivated students, as shown by their quite good scholastic performance.

In general, disadvantaged students survive social selection produced by the school system, only when they are particularly motivated to study. These students could even choose high schools that, in turn, encourage students to proceed to university. However, this process arises just because this group is constituted by a small number of motivated students (Mare, 1981), who have been so since they were children. Nonetheless, nearly 40% of heretical students attended the other two types of schools. So, there is another factor that helps disadvantaged working-class students choose university: a positive relationship with teachers. One-third of students who reveal a positive pedagogical relationship belong to this group. To conclude, the point to register here is that the difference between docile and heretic students concerned pedagogical relationship: heretics show a positive relationship with teachers, whereas docile students tend to have a neutral pedagogical relationship. Unfortunately, heretics tend to have middle and not a low parental education (table 7, in appendix).

Therefore, our third hypothesis is only partially validated. Logit model has shown the weak positive influence that positive pedagogic relationship exercises on university choice and now cluster analysis suggests that university choice can be feed by this factor. Nonetheless, our findings suggest that working-class students are led to go on to university thanks to the cooperation of those teachers that engage their students through exciting lessons and right expertise (see index, par. 3) as long as their parental education is at least middle. One-fourth of interviewees (25.3%) belongs to heretical students, but this group is not made up of a particular rate of young people with low parental education.

However, in many instances, this group represents individuals who have changed their traditional disposition toward schooling. Teachers' work led to a change in the social dispositions that disadvantaged students usually show towards school.

These conclusions are supported by the analysis of the other four groups.

The third group is made up of "Indifferent students" (C3) that tend to come from North Italy, without a class distinction: in this group, 57% are boys and nearly half come from technical schools; two third of them come from families with middle education. Further, 80% of them achieved a diploma with a low mark (60-70).

Less than 15 per cent of interviewees (13.7%) are labelled as "Not inclined students" (C4): more than half (55.7%) are made up of working-class students, and two-thirds are vocational schools students.

“Not inclined students” tend to come from Centre-South and revealed a low scholastic performance and also a low parental education. Quite 30% of them show a negative pedagogical relationship. Both indifferent students and not inclined students are made up mostly of males (table 8, in appendix).

Eventually, we have the other two groups: they are the “dedicated students” (C5: 12.6%) and the “guardian students” (15.7%). Many of dedicated students are female (69%). They chose university (88.8%) without associating to a specific scholastic performance or a specific pedagogic relationship. More than of the half comes from the middle class (53.1%), and almost all indicate a middle parental education.

Probably these students consider school as a “social ladder”: they are motivated enough to access higher education, but they are not particularly interested in the values handed down by the school or in the lessons.

The other group (C6) is made up of upper-class students for 53.9%, while the other students belong overall to the middle class (32.5%). Therefore, almost all of them live in white-collar families. These students got a good scholastic performance and attended the most prestigious type of school (82.1 per cent of them come from high schools) in order to reproduce their advantaged social position: they are the guardians of social reproduction; about 70% of upper-class students are “guardian”, without gender differences (table 9, in appendix).

Looking at the six groups together, we discover that a positive pedagogical relationship was useful in university choice only for working-class students, especially if they are female. So our last hypothesis results validated, also if it has to be better specified considering the role of gender.

## **Summary and Discussion**

According to RC scholars, educational choices depend on the attempt to avoid downward social mobility. However, as they recently admitted, economic and cultural resources are interweaved as scholastic performance affects rational choice, but it is also affected by parental education. Meanwhile, other scholars revealed that the higher parental education is, the longer educational career is, being equal scholastic performance.

It is a point of view we tried to challenge in order to underline the complex interweaving between systemic factors and individual choices. In other terms, we attempt to show: on the one hand that the interaction of social class and parental education affects the rational evaluation of risks, costs and benefits connected to large educational investments. On the other hand, how the educational system—that mainly works by reproducing educational inequalities—may play an emancipative role via a pedagogical work, motivating working-class students to attend university.

In order to pursue the objectives mentioned above first, we analysed the specific roles of social class and parental education, taking under control the effects of other variables, the scholastic performance included. Second, we concerned with the role of the relationship between teachers and students may play in affecting university choice. Our findings underline that middle and upper-class students choose the university to a greater extent of working-class students, also when they have attended vocational or technical schools and/or they achieved a negative scholastic result. Social class exercises only a little direct effect, whereas parental education is more relevant and it exercises overall a direct effect on university choice. It means that the RC theory is not entirely right. In other words, consistently with a perspective that intertwines the Bourdieusian thought and the approach proposed by the New Sociology of Education, the university choice mainly depends on the social distance by parental education and school culture. In this framework, middle and upper-class students have a wealth of knowledge that allows them to follow a positive scholastic trajectory. These students can rely on a right amount of parental education that motivates them to choose university also when the scholastic performance and (or) the relationship with teachers are negative.

Following the bourdieusian approach, one presumes that middle and upper-class students can fit their proper knowledge, experiences and values (their “subculture”) within the scholastic interactions, and overall they share the worldview conveyed by schools. On balance, their social dispositions leave them to be not involved in the pedagogical relationship because their cultural capital goes beyond scholastic knowledge (Lareau, 1987). So, they tend to use and develop their knowledge autonomously (like the “Guardian”); otherwise, they did not attach any importance to education, but they evaluated it only as a means of gaining social advantages (like the “Dedicated students”). In both cases, the students do not need a positive pedagogical relationship in upper-secondary schools to access higher education, since they can rely on good economic, cultural and social resources offered by their families (Ball, 2006).

Working-class students, for their part, have low cultural capital, so they are disadvantaged in their scholastic learning. On the one hand, their social dispositions lead them to feel detached from school. On the other hand, they rely on the teachers’ evaluations. Our results suggest that working-class students in many cases attribute a sort of social superiority to teachers, as Bourdieu had already noted (Bourdieu, 1979). Therefore, working-class students can react to an asymmetric social relationship with their teachers, and further distance themselves from school. In this last case the students did not show interest in education (like the “Not inclined students”) nor did they have enough confidence in their scholastic career. In this case, their perfor-

mance, therefore, was not very high (like the “Docile students”). However, when the interactions with teachers are positive, working-class students tend to improve their performance, become particularly motivated to study, may choose to attend university (like the “Heretical students”).

So, working-class students can enhance interest in studying when they encounter teachers who inspire them through a positive relationship, good expertise and exciting lessons. It means that when there is “happy cooperation” (Eco, 1979) between subaltern classes and teachers, disadvantaged students can fully believe in their scholastic career. It is perhaps this situation that generates their trust in schools’ promise of universalism, and the school proves to be an institution, which promotes social emancipation.

These findings show the importance of the pedagogical relationship as a transformative factor (Gramsci 1975; Giroux, 2005), that can counteract the social reproduction, by changing the relevance attached to education by the working-class students. Unfortunately, the effect of pedagogical relationship is much weaker than that exercised by structural factors connected to scholastic stratification.

As widely shown above, on the one side, a positive pedagogic relationship compensates for low familial resources owned by working-class students only if their parents have at least a middle level of education. On the other side, scholastic stratification continues to prove to be a powerful device that reinforces social distance between school and working-class. Vocational school (prematurely) pushes disadvantaged students to participate in the labour market, also because it corresponds to what they expect of themselves. Briefly, they usually think they are expected to have a manual job, just as middle and upper-class students are expected to go to high school (licei), and then to university.

## **Acknowledgements**

This article is the outcome of the collaboration of the authors. However, in order to ascribe responsibility, we declare that Fiorenzo Parziale wrote paragraphs 2, 4.1 and 5, whereas Sandra Vatrella authored paragraphs 1, 3 and 4.2.

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**Appendix**

Table 7. Docile Students and Heretical Students

DOCILE STUDENTS (14.2%)						HERETICAL STUDENTS (25.3%)					
T. Value	GRP/CAT	CAT/GRP	GLOBAL	Mod.	Var.	T. Value	GRP/CAT	CAT/GRP	GLOBAL	Mod.	Var.
30.6	31.0	71.3	31.6	Low	Parental education	27.1	46.4	51.9	28.3	Very good	Exit exam result
23.6	33.8	47.7	20.0	Vocational Schools	School Type	25.9	32.0	93.5	68.5	Yes	University choice
19.5	27.5	50.0	38.5	No	University choice	18.8	44.8	33.1	18.7	81-90	Exit exam result
16.4	24.8	47.9	27.4	71-80	Exit exam result	13.2	30.5	70.7	58.3	Female	Gender
16.1	21.4	64.0	42.6	Working class	Social class	12.3	32.1	54.1	42.6	Working-class	Social class
5.6	38.4	68.0	56.1	Neutral	Pedagogical relationship	11.1	30.3	62.6	52.2	High Schools	School Type
7.3	17.8	67.8	55.0	Centre-South	Geographic area	10.4	31.6	71.7	55.0	Centre-South	Geographic area
4.2	15.5	64.2	58.3	Female	Gender	9.4	32.6	66.3	52.8	Middle	Parental education
						9.1	34.0	32.8	20.4	Positive	Pedagogical relationship

Table 8. Indifferent Students and Not Inclined Students

INDIFFERENT STUDENTS (18.5%)						NOT INCLINED STUDENTS (13.7%)					
T. Value	GRP/CAT	CAT/GRP	GLOBAL	MODALITIES	VARIABLES	T. Value	GRP/CAT	CAT/GRP	GLOBAL	MODALITIES	VARIABLES
40.9	42.3	80.6	35.3	60-70	Exit result	35.9	43.8	64.0	20.0	Vocational Schools	School Type
17.9	31.2	46.8	27.7	Technical	School	32.5	35.9	67.6	38.5	No	University choice
15.4	32.8	55.7	45.0	North	Geographic area	20.1	24.2	62.3	35.3	60-70	Exit result
13.6	25.4	56.8	41.7	Male	Gender	19.2	24.7	57.0	31.6	Low	Parental
10.2	25.6	68.1	52.8	Middle	Parental education	9.8	18.5	51.5	38.2	Centre-South	Geographic area
						9.6	18.0	55.7	42.6	Working class	Social class
						9.1	17.9	53.8	41.7	Male	Gender
						2.6	14.6	28.1	22.5	Negative	Pedagogical relationship

*Global: percentage of interviewees with a specific characteristic in the total sample; GRP/CAT: percentage of interviewees with a specific characteristic that belong to group; CAT/GRP: the distribution of the students belonging to the group for a specific characteristic*



Table 9. “Dedicated students” and “Guardian students”

DEDICATED STUDENTS (12.6%)						GUARDIAN STUDENTS (15.7%)					
T. Value	GRP/CAT	CAT/GRP	GLOBAL	MOD.	VAR.	T. Value	GRP/CAT	CAT/GRP	GLOBAL	MOD.	VAR.
18.4	38.7	81.9	52.8	Middle	Parental education	64.6	86.5	81.4	14.8	High	Parental education
12.5	15.1	88.8	74.2	Yes	University choice	43.2	70.4	53.9	12.0	Upper	Social Class
7.4	15.4	64.0	52.2	High Schools	School Type	24.6	24.7	82.1	52.2	High Schools	School Type
5.3	14.8	69.0	58.7	Female	Gender	17.9	19.5	92.2	74.2	Yes	Choice of University
4.1.	30.1	53.1	43.7	Middle class	Social class	4.1	19.2	22.9	18.7	81-90	Exit exam result

*Global: percentage of interviewees with a specific characteristic in the total sample; GRP/CAT: percentage of interviewees with a specific characteristic that belong to group; CAT/GRP: the distribution of the students belonging to the group for a specific characteristic*