

The educational choices of adolescents of working class: opportunities and constraints

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Abstract

The choice made at the end of compulsory school represents a crucial moment in the life of an individual, which will shape both his/her professional career and quality of life. In tertiary societies long-term education has spread throughout the social classes. Nevertheless the uncertainty connected to the increasing precariousness of the labour market could either reinforce or weaken the orientation to risk that is normally connected to investment in education.

On the one side children of the working class are supposed to be much more involved in the high school experience than before (on account of the democratisation of educational opportunities, but also of the increase in the credentials needed to enter the labour market). On the other side, especially when the conversion of the economy from the industrial to tertiary phase is low and incomplete, some good reasons for families in keeping a low profile of education, especially for the working class, could persist.

The research explores the conditions (analysed at micro level) that reduce or maintain the gap between the educational choices of working and middle class during a period of great uncertainty about social mobility and life chances. Is the aversion to risk, traditionally assumed an exclusive propriety of the working class, still exclusive to this group?

Data are provided by a survey (based on CATI method interviews) carried out in 2007 and concerning the school choices and first career steps in secondary school of 1127 children of working and middle class families living in Turin.

Introduction

The literature of the past ten years about the inequalities in educational opportunities has confirmed the role that ascribed characteristics play in the choices of educational paths after compulsory schooling (Schizzerotto and Barone, 2006; Ballarino and Checchi, 2006; Schizzerotto, 2002; Pisati, 2000, 2002; Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). Back in the 70's, Boudon emphasised how disparities in opportunities to acquire education were the most impervious to change within advanced industrial societies (Boudon, 1973). Even today, the family of origin influences both the duration of the studies and their quality too. This evidence contrasts the principles according to which:

- Everybody should have equal opportunities in terms of participation in the education system
- Everybody should be evaluated and promoted on the basis of merit, because merit is the main tool of social selection and the main resource of social mobility (Roemer, 1998; Crompton, 1998; Checchi, 2000, 2006).

The access to social positions should therefore be determined only by the capabilities acquired through education and personal commitment, and not by the social class, gender or ethnic group to which people belong

Throughout the century reforms and legislative measures have been introduced in order to allow a generalised access to school institutions in a formally equal way for everybody. In Italy the reform of the secondary school (1962) and the liberalisation of access to all university faculties with all types of high school diploma (1969) have pursued this aim. doubt they have contributed to raising the overall participation in the education system and the average educational level of the population

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(in 99% of cases of the most recent cohorts the adolescents decided to continue after middle school, by enrolling in a high school course.

The probability of acquiring a high school graduation has increased for less well-off classes, but is still lower than for the upper classes (Schizzerotto, 2002). This means that the type of high school is still highly segregated by social class of origin.

The link between social origin and school career is even more evident for the most qualified paths of education leading to University (high school either specialised in classics or sciences: from now the two will be named: HS-classics/HS-sciences) (Schizzerotto, 1997, 2002; Brint, 1998; Pisati, 2000).

The analysis here proposed focuses on the problem of social segregation in education, by underlining its persistence also within the secondary school, by *type* of school. Despite the democratisation of secondary education all over Europe, then the weakening of the ascribed factors, the most recent research studies on this topic in Italy clearly show the permanence of a strong influence of the family of origin in educational choices of children (Data Istat, 2001, 2004; ILFI, 2005). This is the starting point of our analysis, aimed to explore the factors and, possibly, the mechanisms of this persistence in the specific context of Turin in 2007.

Theoretical frame, scenario and hypothesis

The research adopts the theoretical approach of the action-theories, and in particular the theory of rational choice (Boudon 1973, Gambetta, 1987, 1996). According to this perspective educational choice and destinies are explained by means of the “individual decision-making processes that may sustain the reproductive forces of class” (Gambetta, 1987). The question is: “what are the forces that act without the knowledge of the actors involved in educational choices (hence: action *propelled*, says Gambetta), with respect to intentional ones (hence: action *attracted*) and how statistically relevant are they?” According to Gambetta (1987; 1990; 1996), Checchi and Ballarino (2006), observable and measurable elements that cause the differences in the quantity and quality of education acquired in a reference population have been defined as *factors*. In the literature referred to by this research (Checchi, 2000; Checchi and Ballarino, 2006), the economic and financial situation of the family, the social and cultural environment and “talent” (from now on defined as school performance) children possess during the course of their past scholastic career are considered *endogenous factors*. The availability of institutional education in the area and the situation of the labour market, in terms of positions and professional skills requested, as well as sectors in expansion at local level, are considered *exogenous factors*.

In the perspective of this research, boundary rationality (Simon, 1964; Boudon, 2000) is assumed as the horizon in which choices are made, taking account of the difficulty to clearly calculate the high number of available alternatives, the instability of preferences, the consequences of the choice, and finally the importance of the norms and cultural pattern of parents in guiding children to education.

The definition of bounded rationality as *local rationality* (Bianco, 2007) underlines the importance of milieu in which people live and in which develop social expectations and plans for the future.

Analytical sociology (Goldthorpe, 2000; Hedström, 2006; Coleman 1990) suggests the idea that identifying a high correlation between choices and social factors (for example: between high social classes and long-term education) does not mean automatically identifying, in those factors, the causes that determine the choices in question. Therefore, it is essential to interpret the correlation between factors in order to approach the underlying mechanisms that have actually produced the effects (in our case: inequalities, Goldthorpe, 2000).

In the approach adopted by this research study, the micro-processes underlying the choice are identified mainly as the *systems of preference, opportunity and resources (especially knowledge and information)* available for families with respect to education (patterns of allocation of material and symbolic resources between family members), nevertheless the cultural norms shaping the social expectations of parents and children, are to be considered (we have no direct indicators of this normative dimension, but we could argue that the normative dimension is probably present

when different individual and family situations lead to a common end, i.e.: decision to attend a given level/type of school). In the last fifteen years the Italian education scenario has changed on account of a diversified offer of school paths available for an increasing number of children and fitting with different family strategies and values; the democratisation of school access has gone together with a process of near-artificial raising of social prestige of technical schools, re-named “licei” (social sciences high school, teacher training high school, technological high school, etc.). Data collected by ILFI (Indagine Longitudinale sulle Famiglie Italiane) are indispensable to start our analysis under the hypothesis of a new scenario challenging the decision making of parents and children with regard to secondary school (see table 1). The ILFI study (referred to the educational levels of two age groups, similar to the parents’ and children’s categories interviewed in our survey) shows a complex trend of choices: a decrease in the choice of vocational education, co-exists with the persistence of choice of technical schools and with increase in preference of high schools (see table1). The working class cohorts do not follow this pattern, as the younger cohort, in continuity with the older one, seem to keep the traditional orientation towards technical and vocational education, even if the younger cohorts are slightly more attracted towards high schools (especially “new”).

Table 1 - Italian Population by level of education, 2002.

	Cohort 1978-1987	Cohort 1978-1987 working class	Cohort 1958-1967	Cohort 1958-1967 working class
High school (classics/ sciences)	33.4	14.7	27.0	13.9
Other high school	12.0	12.5	13.5	10.7
IT (technical school)	35.5	41.3	38.3	44.0
IP (three-to five vocational school)	13.7	22.8	18.0	28.7
Other	5.4	8.7	3.2	2.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: ILFI, wave n. 5, 2005.

At local level (see table 2) a picture partially consistent with the national one emerges, if we look at the data concerning school-enrolment. The younger cohort of students enrolled in Turin in 2006-2007 (this group can be compared to the age of children of our survey), is quite close to the Italian sample, with respect to the importance of high schools; but it stands out for the importance given to technical and, overall, to vocational education. Inter-cohort comparison shows that a ten years-older cohort of children was less addressed to attend high school, while consolidating its position in IT and IP schools.

Table 2 - Students enrolled by type of school in Turin (comparison 2007/2008 and 1996/1997)

	Year 2006-2007	Year 1996-1997
High school (classics/sciences)	29.4	17.9
Other high school	10.1	7.5
IT	29.9	48.3
IP	30.56	26.1
Other	0.04	0.2
Total	100	100

Source: Regione Piemonte, School Registers 2008.

Method

Sampling and primary data collection

Starting from secondary analysis on education carried out at national and local level the research has collected information concerning family (parents/children) conditions and school careers of 1127 boys and girls belonging to the working and middle classes.

The target population of the research was a sample of parents resident in Turin, that had at least one child aged between 15 and 18², at the time of the survey (September 2007). They were selected insofar as they belong to the *urban working class*.³ A smaller sample⁴ of households belonging to the middle class office workers, tradesmen and artisans, formed the control group. One parent was contacted by means of a closed answer questionnaire with CATI method. The selection of the households was made through the territorial filter of Census zones. To each zone was associated an index of density of working class in that area; the index defined a different likelihood of meeting people of working class at the moment of the interview. The interviews were carried out at least one year after the entrance in secondary school. So the choice can be supposed stable and definitive.

Variables and indexes

The sample was quite homogeneous by age. Therefore age of parents was used only as a control variable, to estimate the effect of the number of years between adults and children. The hypothesis is that different representations of school and of investment in education could be associated to a narrow or wide age interval between children and parents.

Gender has been considered important in explaining the different degree to which families (invest) in their child's education. In line with the literature a higher level of investment in education both in terms of the quality of the paths chosen and the overall permanence in the circuit of instruction in terms of years of education, the female variable was used in the model.

Siblings. The sibling's attendance at an HS (classics or sciences) has been considered an indicator of a general investment by the family in human capital, independently of the birth order and the number of siblings. The hypothesis is that gender /order of birth criteria are overcome in parents calculating investments in school (either according to "inertia" or "equity" mechanisms), even if this idea is still widespread in the cohort "to" which parents interviewed belong.

Social Class. A simple division into the two great social classes (middle and working class) was considered unsatisfactory. A further inner division concerning working class, was made.

It encompassed both working class families in the traditional sense (namely that part of the class that hold blue collar jobs, manual work, with a medium-low level of qualification, with limited margins of decision-making autonomy in the performance of their tasks, a low level of creativity related to the exercise of their duties and a low social evaluation) and families belonging to the

² This 15-18 age group allows us to observe the school situation between the end of compulsory and the first years of secondary school. In the present paper the analysis refers only to what we call "Child 1": this means that no other child of the same age is present in the household/ the information refers to the elder in case of more children of the same age interval.

³ According to Pisati and Schizzerotto (2000, 2002), the urban working class (COU, in Italian: classe operaia urbana) includes lower-level office workers, manual workers employed in industry, services, construction and commerce, namely generic workers, semi-qualified, qualified and skilled workers. It also includes non-qualified professions in industry and in services. The white collar middle class (in Italian CMI: classe media impiegatizia) includes white collar employees at middle and high levels (such as specialised technicians, teachers, higher-level white collar workers, qualified executives, nurses, etc.). Lastly, the middle class of tradesmen and artisans (in Italian CMA: classe media autonoma) includes freelance workers (traders and artisans), the owners of small businesses (cleaning, services in general) as long as family run and with only a few employees. We have named cross class (CC) the families in which both one parent of middle class and one parent of traders and artisans class was present. The classification adopted is based on the power, degree of freedom and creativity and moreover the purchasing power associated with the job (Goldthorpe, 2002; Pisati, 2000). Forse bisogna spiegare "power" e "market power".

⁴ The sample selected for the research of 1127 families was obtained from the records of the Studio Longitudinale Torinese [Longitudinal Turin Study: SLT], which contains individual and ecological records of the resident population of Turin dating back to 1971, cross-referencing Census data updated as of 2001 with records of the registry office of the city of Turin. The SLT is made up of a system of longitudinal records, both retrospective and prospective, which integrate databases of registry, Census and national health information. Even though healthcare is the most relevant set of information for SLT, the database is useful in other exploratory analyses for which individual characteristics are of interest that are not necessarily health-related, but may also regard demographic and social fields (as in this case).

lower layers of the white collar class (the white collar workers with a low level of qualification, with non-manual tasks, but with a low level of autonomy in the performance of said tasks, repetition, a low level of creativity but nevertheless a higher social evaluation).

School performance: deals with success and failure at school An index of “school performance” was made based on the following variables: marks reported at the end of compulsory school, average marks reported in the current and in the previous year of secondary school and failing marks in individual school subjects (in italian: *debiti formativi*).

Human capital The human capital index was created using the completed levels of education of both cohabiting parents of the children. The index corresponds to the highest qualification obtained by either of the parents⁵.

Cultural capital The cultural capital was mainly referred to activity of reading ks, newspapers, and scientific or popular magazines⁶.

Economic condition: the relevance of the economic factors has been played down by many research studies on inequalities in educational opportunities (Schizzerotto e Barone, 2006; Checchi e Ballarino, 2006); therefore we decided to verify how much, in a specific context and for a specific social group mostly affected by risk of poverty, the stability/fragility of the family could in any way condition their children’s school choices. An index was created using the following variables: number of incomes of parents, ownership of property (owned, rented, council housing etc.), ability to handle unexpected expenses of a considerable sum) help received from families of origin for the purchase of the house, difficulty in handling expenses of a considerable sum to maintain the house⁷.

Associative life. Lastly, some forms of social participation were considered in order to create a summary index based on membership in political parties, professional and trade organizations, voluntary associations.

The heterogeneity of working class

The tertiarization of work has created new (often unqualified) non-manual jobs in the service economy (either private or public) in which people (with low /middle-low level of education) are employed. Even if they can still be considered as belonging to the working class according to a general point of view, some inner distinctions could emerge from the different context of works and related reference-groups, which the non-manual but unskilled workers in terms of planning their daily life and future of the children.

Table 3 describes how the division of the working class into two groups (called “white” and “blue”, depending on the type of job/ and context of work) impacts on the educational choices.

Table 3 - Children by classes (COU white and blue, CM) enrolled by type of school, Turin 2007-2008

	HSclassics/sciences	Other high school	IT	Vocational	Other	TOTAL
White working class	33.3%	9.8%	31.7%	24.8%	0, 3%	306 100,0%
Blue working class	18.7%	10.8%	35.7%	34.5%	0,2%	406 100,0%
Middle class	48.6%	10.1%	29.2%	11.5%	0.6%	356 100,0%
Total	32.9%	10.3%	32.4%	24.1%	0. 4%	1068 100,0%

⁵ Then the human capital index was dicotomised in the following way: value 1 was attributed to households in which at least one parent had a degree; the value 0 was assigned households with a lower level of education

⁶ The index score takes range from 0 to 3.5. The dummy variable for the model was created using the average, distinguishing between low-medium low on one side (from a value of 0 to a value of 1.5) and medium high on the other (with values 2 and over).

⁷ The dummy for the regression model envisaged mode 0 for cases with no or minimum deprivation, and 1 for cases of medium or high deprivation.

The more “appealing” types of school for the *blue working class* are IT and IP, while high school is left at a distance. The situation is very different for the *white working class*, more clearly attracted by high schools, even without giving up the technical and vocational domain of education. Finally the middle class, here presented as control group, is clearly attracted by high school; also technical schools are quite relevant, while the vocational path is absolutely residual.

Table 4 shows the great distance existing between the human capitals available for the two groups, blue and white, compared with the middle class. This polarisation is evident if we set the cut-off for human capital variable) at the level of *university degree*.

Table 4 - Parent’s level of education by social class

	High human capital (university degree)	Diploma of primary and secondary school	Total
COU White	2.3	97.7	310
COU Blue	0.7	99.3	437
CM	2.8	74.2	357

The polarization is rather more nuanced if we cut the variable “human capital” at the level of *diploma*. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 clearly illustrate the *intermediate* position gained by the *white-working class*. Parents, especially mothers, of white working class children, obtain a moderate (medium) level of education that is considerably higher than that obtained by the parents of the children of blue working class..

Table 5.1 Mother’s level of education (detailed) by social class

	Elementary school (Low)	Primary school (Low)	Vocational school (Low)	Secondary school (Medium)	Degree (High)	Total
White working class	1.03	31.3.	15.5.	51.3	1.0	310
Blue working class	1.4.	71.2.	11.4.	16.0	0	437
Middle class	0.8	16.8.	9.5	54.1	18.8	357
Total	1.1.12	42.4	12.0	38.2.	6.3.	1104

Table 5.2 Father’s level of education (detailed) by social class

	Elementary school (Low)	Primary school (Low)	Vocational school (Low)	Secondary school (Medium)	Degree (High)	Total
White working class	9.4	42.6	10.3	36.1	1.6	310
Blue working class	9.8	67.0	9.1	13.4	0.7	429
Middle class	11.2	21.3	3.9	52.1	11.5	357
Total	10.1	45.4	7.8	32.3	4.4	1106

Table 6 shows the different school performances by social class and points to the likelihood of its depending on human capital. The distance between the social classes varies depending on the threshold of performance considered.

Table 6 – Performance of Child 1 (index > = 3) by social class and type of school

	HS (classic/sciences)	Technical	Vocational	Total
White working class	45.4	38.8	25.7	38.6
Blue working class	52.8	33.7	30.0	30.5
Middle class	59.2	47.5	24.4	48.7

When we consider a medium threshold, white and working class become somehow close to each other, even with some meaningful differences.

In the case of white working class, the proportion of children of middle-high performance and attending the high school is not too far from that observed among the children of technical school, but quite distant from the percentage of children attending the vocational school; the situation of the blue working class is somehow reversed the proportion of students medium-highly performing are similar in technical and vocational schools, but very much lower than in high schools. In the case of middle class the quote of middle-high performers is much more displaced between all the types of schools. The distinctions between the three groups are clear with this respect.

If we put the threshold of performance higher (the index to or higher than 5), the distinction between white and blue working class is more nuanced and the middle class clearly distinguishes itself from the other two, with regard to the performance obtained in every type of school: even when children of the middle class attend vocational schools, they show a higher school performance.

Table 6.1 – Performance of Child 1 (index > =5) by social class and type of school

	HS(classics /sciences)	Technical	Vocational	Total
White working class	15.5	8.9	3.0	9.3
Blue working class	18.1	10.6	4.6	10.5
Middle class	30.0	18.8	8.1	23.1

The problem of attending a secondary school by social class proves to be twofold: attendance at which type of school/ depending on which ascribed and acquired factors.

In order to measure the concurrent role of the variables dealing with socio-demographic status, parents' capability, children's performance, and economic condition of the family, a regression model has been created.

The regression model⁸

In the model presented in table 7 the dependent variable is the school attended by Child 1 (namely the choice of education after middle school. The aim of the models is to explain which factors influence the entrance and permanence in secondary school after compulsory education.

The backward procedure (BSTEP) was used. In the model "high school" (classics or sciences) was chosen as the reference category. Therefore the contrast is between those that fully exploit opportunities available through a long term education (up to university: from 9 to 11 years after the compulsory school) and those that complete (if they want) their educational career stopping earlier (from 2 up to no more than 5 years after the compulsory school) .

The number of cases was 831 valid cases and 296 invalid ones. The explained variance is over 21%. At step 7 of the regression, the result indicated in table 1 was obtained. The variable "white working class" was eliminated, but only at step 4.

⁸ The model has been realised with Paola Maria Torrioni, researcher in Department of Social Sciences of Turin.

It means that the white working class is a condition whose educational and life chances are not totally and easy predictable: belonging to this group neither fully prevents the behaviour of aversion to risk, that is the choice of a short-term education, nor definitively guarantees access to high school.

Table 7 – Likelihood to attend high school – (DV=school attended by Child 1)

	B	E.S.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Exp(B)-1*100
Step 7(a) High human capital of parents	1,015	,265	14,677	1	,000	2,760	176
Working class blue collars	-,639	,188	11,615	1	,001	,528	-47,2
Index of economic deprivation	-,483	,171	7,978	1	,005	,617	-38,3
Index of cultural capital	,539	,166	10,483	1	,001	1,714	71,4
Gender F	,413	,163	6,396	1	,011	1,512	51,2
Index of performance at school	,378	,170	4,937	1	,026	1,460	46
Failures	-,388	,226	2,946	1	,086	,678	-32,2
High school experience of siblings	1,112	,390	8,136	1	,004	3,041	204,1
Constant	-,993	,199	24,930	1	,000	,370	

Variables included at step 1: age of father and age of mother, high human capital, white working class blue working class, index of economic deprivation, index of cultural capital, index of associationism, gender F, index of performance, failures, high school experience of siblings, siblings in high school, siblings in university. Reference categories: low human capital, middle class, gender M, no failures, siblings not in high schools.

In the model reported in table 7 the variables mostly lowering the likelihood to have a long-term education are: belonging to the blue working class, having a failures at school and economic deprivation.

The factors that mostly increase the probability of attending high school are:

- The presence of a brother or sister having already attended or completed a high school
- The human capital of the parents
- The good performance at school.

With respect to the relevance of siblings' experience of long-term education, the underlying mechanism is not immediately clear; does it correspond to normative values (equity, citizenship for every child, apart from gender and order of birth) or to a strategic orientation, or to some kind of decision process inertia? Or does it simply reflect the background conditions of better off families that plan the future of every child according to fixed criteria of social prestige of high school? At least we can argue that traditional cleavages (gender/order of birth) are no longer clearly operating, since the female gender is a favouring factor and the order of birth a neutral factor.

Besides female gender, also cultural capital of the family and school performance of the child 1 increase the likelihood of attending high school.

Regression model suggests that the first factor counts more than gender and, in its turn, gender is more important than scholastic performance.

Variables that decrease the likelihood to attend an high school are mainly:

- belonging to the blue collars working class
- having failures in a scholastic career
- having a very high level of economical deprivation

But if the performance at school is one of the more involved variables in educational choice, and also the variable that literature indicates like main opponent of class predestination, the question is: what does it changes with high or low levels of performance, unchanged other variables? To answer to this question we create two sub-samples, composed by:

- Children with high performance at school
- Children with low performance at school

The division between two groups has made with the index of performance average. In table 8, we can observe the role in educational choice of the parents' human capital, of siblings having attended high school, like in the original model. Social class continues to exercise a negative affect, independently of performance. Also which Child have a good performance, if social class is blue collars the likelihood to attend an high school decrease. Specially the parents' human capital can explain choices, because also when child is a bad student (like in table 9) if the human capital is high the likelihood to attend an high school increases.

In table 9 it's possible to observe what's happen when child 1 has a low performance. A quite strong relation between high human capital of (at least one of) the parents, and carrying on secondary studies, is confirmed partly apart *from the school performance*. The high human capital of the parents pulls towards high school, also in presence of poor performance; even if with a higher level of uncertainty.

Table 8 – Likelihood to attend high school – sub sample Child 1 with low performance at school (value < 3 of the index of performance, under the average)

	B	E.S.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	Exp(B)-1*100
Step 7(a) High human capital of parents	.931	.371	6.303	1	.012	2.536	153,6
Blue working class	-.556	.262	4.488	1	.034	.574	-42,6
Index of economical deprivation	-.559	.231	5.875	1	.015	.572	-42,8
Index of cultural capital	.577	.230	6.301	1	.012	1.781	78,1
Gender F	.473	.222	4.536	1	.033	1.605	60,5
Siblings in high school	1.205	.502	5.770	1	.016	3.336	233,6
Siblings in University	.539	.279	3.728	1	.054	1.714	71,4
Costant	-1.250	.247	25.700	1	.000	.286	

Variables inserted at step 1: parents' age high human capital of the parents, white collars working class, blue collars working class, economic deprivation index, cultural capital index, associative life index, female gender of child 1, failures, number of siblings, siblings having attended high school or university. Reference categories: low human capital-bad scholastic performance, low human capital-good scholastic performance, gender M, middle class, no failures, siblings not in high schools. References categories: low human capital, middle class, gender M, siblings not in high school, siblings not in university.

Table 9 shows also that the blue collars working class cannot overcome the social class barrier even with a good school performance A good performance is more effective than a poor one in encouraging the blue working class to attend high school, but it cannot enable it to overcome the barrier of educational inequality.

Generally speaking, the good performance could be defined *as inus condition* (an insufficient part of the total amount of causal factors), because it cannot guarantee the enrolment in high school on its own. It is, nonetheless, a nonredundant part of the causality circuit involved, because, without it, the rest of the conditions are not sufficient for the enrolment.

There is room enough to better investigate, also through qualitative insight, also the micro relational conditions in which the choice of secondary school develops and reaches or fails to reach its goal. It does not seem to be accidental that in the blue working class the choice of type of school is left to children (much more than in the other groups), than parents count comparatively less than in the

other groups; and finally that, the role of teachers shows to be fundamental, compared with the role of parents, especially for students of blue working class enrolled in HS/classics-sciences. May be a symptom that working class, when surmounting its aversion to risk, seems to need the support, or the direct intervention of school institutions. But this hypothesis has to be further founded with other sets of data⁹.

Table 9 - Likelihood to attend high school – sub sample Child 1 with high performance at school (value > or = 3 of the index of performance, over the average)

	B	E.S.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	Exp(B)-1*100
Step 9(a) human capital of parents	1.183	.382	9.596	1	.002	3.263	226,3
Blue collars working class	-.664	.269	6.105	1	.013	.515	-48,5
Index of cultural capital	.544	.240	5.153	1	.023	1.723	72,3
Failures	-1.722	.757	5.172	1	.023	.179	-82,1
Siblings in high school	1.085	.627	2.997	1	.083	2.959	195,9
Constant							

Variables inserted at step 1: parents' age, high human capital, white collars working class, blue collars working class, female gender/economic deprivation index, cultural capital index, associative life index failures, presence of siblings, siblings having attended a high school or university. Reference categories: low human capital, middle class-bad scholastic performance, gender M, no failures, siblings not in high school.

Conclusions

The democratisation of the educational system has increased the chance to enter and remain in the middle or long-term educational career also for children of the working class. A strong cleavage has been created between the two cohorts of children and their (less educated) parents.

The situation of the children is different from that of the parents, either because they enter more frequently in the secondary school circuit, or because they get the chance to go to University even coming from technical schools.

Nevertheless, as our data show, the choice of high school still mostly depends on parents' human and cultural capital. The efficacy of human capital, in its turn, is not absolute, but conditioned by the school performance of the children.

In this respect, relevant disparities exist between either working and middle class, or *within* working class. If a good (and constantly high) performance is able to contrast the limits to access to high school, this has to be combined with a very high level of parents' education.

The better knowledge of complex mechanisms ruling the entrance into the labour market with a diploma of secondary schools, could be the base of a more strategic orientation of white working class; also in presence of not very high performance the choice is high school, but also technical school seems to represent a useful alternative to get a long term education.

In case of blue working class the weakness of human and cultural capital (with related scarcity of information), but also the sensitivity to the symbolic strength of the choice of high school, could be the root of the strong selective orientation towards high school whose social prestige is undisputable for everybody.

The aversion to risk proves to be considerably more complex from this analysis especially in taking account of inner diversity of the working class.

- Are they mainly embedded in specific experience dealing with the surrounding context of the family (parents' work/social network of the household, neighbourhood of residence or do they mostly depend on the message devices of schools and teachers of the children)?

⁹ The choice is made by children in 37,6% (cou white), 42,4 (cou blue) and 32,6% (CM); by parents in 29,1% (cou white), 19,2 (cou blue) and 33,7% (CM); by teachers in 13,1% (cou white), 17% (cou blue) and 16% (CM). The likelihoods shows differences between the school attended.

- Is the decision of long term education mainly related to a labour oriented approach, or to a more general meaning of citizenship (equality, freedom, justice) related to higher education ?
Answering these questions is the research task we are committed to for the immediate future, also using the rich qualitative data archive we collected in the second phase of our study.