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Once Upon a Time in the Workplace: Imagination and Representations of Professions in the Past and Future

In a society in the midst of change, the professional values and representations, acquired by young people, are constantly disrupted. What imaginary forms can these representations of professions take and what might be deduced from them?

We have studied original documents of adolescents, produced in the context of a contest sponsored by the Office National d'Information sur les Professions. The objective of this project was not to determine objective knowledge about professions, but to arouse imagination and privilege the creative expression of these young people regarding professions in the past and future. Through this study, we have attempted to establish a link between imagination, representations and temporal perspectives. Young people attribute specific values to the past and future, they project themselves therein in different ways. Indeed, research shows, overall, that young people tend to have a nostalgic vision of the past and an anguished one of the future.

This study underscores just how much the representations are stereotyped and sexually marked. Having said this, the originality of our work is more concerned with the nature and quality of these representations, and makes it possible for us to consider the relationship human beings have with professions and the world. Young people wonder about the meaning of the word "profession" and its place in one's life. From an existential point of view, the profession contributes to the development of the human being in society.

In their approach to the workplace, young people demonstrate a certain social maturity. Indeed, they place the profession within a context and they establish typological correspondences between the world and the workplace. Thus, in the future, the world is technical and marked by macro-social problems; the emblematic figure of the professional is the scientist. In the past, the context was on a human scale; the problems were relational and affective and the emblematic figure of the worker was the artisan. Texts thus show a certain sensitivity to the intricacies between the profession, the person and the environment.

In order to support our study, we present different theoretical approaches to the notion of the imagination. We also address the practice of writing and its functions during adolescence. From former work relative to young people's representations, we put together the questions which underlie our research hypotheses. Then, we define and follow a methodological procedure which consists of a thematic analysis and statistical work. We then present our results and we interpret them in the light of our hypotheses.