

*<< A FUTURE THAT FITS  
ME: WHICH SCHOOL?  
WHICH WORK? >>*

*AN ITALIAN EXPERIENCE  
OF VOCATIONAL  
GUIDANCE*

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*TRAINING OF THE  
MASTER IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY,  
ORGANISED BY ICA  
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## ***ABSTRACT***

This poster describes an experience of vocational guidance in the Italian educational system. The participants were 87 third grade students (13 years old) of two Secondary Schools, engaged in facing the first scholastic-vocational choice required by the Italian educational system. The results of the experience underline how it is useful for the pupils to become aware of their vocational interests, skills, personality characteristics, working method and attitude towards scholastic engagement.

These variables were measured through standardised questionnaires and an aptitude test; the personal profiles thus obtained were the theme of individual interviews. As the students themselves have judged through a final satisfaction questionnaire, the acquired awareness about these personal characteristics and about their relationship with the scholastic/professional choice, promoted their decision-making process. Furthermore, gender differences in the questionnaire scores were analysed. Statistical analysis indicate that boys show greater preference for technical works, as expected on the basis of existing literature. Besides, girls judge themselves significantly more skilled to organise an efficient study method.

## ***GENERAL AIMS***

The experience is divided into two parts.

***The FIRST PART*** is on the whole aimed to help students in facing their first important and necessary scholastic-vocational choice, in order to prevent future difficulties in school-achievement and the well-known phenomenon of dropping-out.

***The SECOND PART*** concerns statistical analysis based on weighted scores obtained from questionnaires and tests and on student satisfaction evaluations. These analysis were carried out in order to summarise for the head-master and for the teachers the frequency distributions of student scores in considered variables and to analyse the possible gender differences.

## ***METHOD***

### ***PARTICIPANTS***

The participants were 87 students (12 -13 years old), attending four 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes in two Secondary Schools in the North of Italy (two classes for each school). The total sample included 46 boys and 41 girls; school "A" had 46 pupils (22 males and 24 females), whilst school "B" had 41 pupils ( 24 males and 17 females).

### ***PROCEDURE***

The first part of the experience took place from October '03 to January '04 and concerns the support to individual decision process, whilst the second took place from February to April '04 and concerns the group results about variables investigated and about the student satisfaction evaluations (***see next table for specific aims/activities/tools***)

<i><b>SPECIFIC AIMS</b></i>	<i><b>ACTIVITIES</b></i>	<i><b>TOOLS</b></i>
<i><b>FIRST PART</b></i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ to investigate school orientation needs</li> <li>➤ to share with involved subjects ways to satisfy student orientation needs</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) meetings with head-master and teachers in order to present vocational guidance project and to establish a work-sharing contract about activities, times and places</li> <li>2) presentation of the project to the involved classes</li> </ol>	<p>In each classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ brainstorming about student expectations on the project; subdivision of these into realistic versus unrealistic ones ;</li> <li>✓ use of an habitual choice situation to focus on different criteria involved in the decision</li> </ul>
<p>For each student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ to obtain:</li> <li>✓ a vocational interests profile</li> <li>✓ an aptitude profile</li> <li>✓ a personality profile</li> <li>✓ measures of studying habits and types of</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3) group-class administration of questionnaires, inventories and aptitude tests</li> <li>4) meetings with teachers in order to share respective information and predictions about student scholastic</li> </ol>	<p>( The standardised instruments used in the two schools were partly different in accordance with agreements taken with grammar teachers, on the basis of their personal involvement in the project)</p>

<p>learning-motivation</p> <p>➤ to discuss the overall profile as the starting point for reflecting about the choice</p>	<p>paths</p> <p>5) individual interviews firstly with students and then if possible with their parents, about obtained complete profiles</p>	<p><b>SCHOOL “A”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A questionnaire about demographic and familiar details, scholastic and vocational preferences, personal hobbies and values, ...</li> <li>✓ BPA III (Aptitude tests)</li> <li>✓ MV70 (Vocational Interest Inventory)</li> </ul> <p><b>SCHOOL “B”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A questionnaire about demographic and familiar details, scholastic and vocational preferences, personal hobbies and values, ...</li> <li>✓ BPA III (Aptitude tests)</li> <li>✓ QIP (Vocational Interest Questionnaire)</li> <li>✓ BFQ-C (Personality Test)</li> <li>✓ QES (Survey of Study</li> </ul>
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		Habits and Attitudes)
➤ To help still undecided students/parents	6) Orientation counselling on request	✓ Further individual interviews with students and/or parents
<b><i>SECOND PART</i></b>		
➤ To analyse student satisfaction ➤ To summarise for each school group results on investigated factors ➤ To explore gender differences	7) Administration to the classes of the Anonymous Satisfaction Questionnaire 8) Statistical analysis using the SPSS software 9) Drafting of final reports for teachers and head master	✓ the Satisfaction Questionnaire: <i>“Your evaluation of the experience”</i>

## ***RESULTS ABOUT GENDER DIFFERENCES***

***ENTIRE SAMPLE:*** A series of Independent Samples T-tests on Scores in **Each type of Aptitudes and Specific Skills** (measured through BPA) **by Sex**

**NO SIGNIFICANT RESULTS**

***SCHOOL "A":*** A series of Independent Samples T-tests on Scores in **Vocational Interest Areas** (obtained through MV70) **by Sex**

**ONE SIGNIFICANT RESULT:** **Boys chose significantly more times Technical and Mechanical Activities than Girls** (see next table)

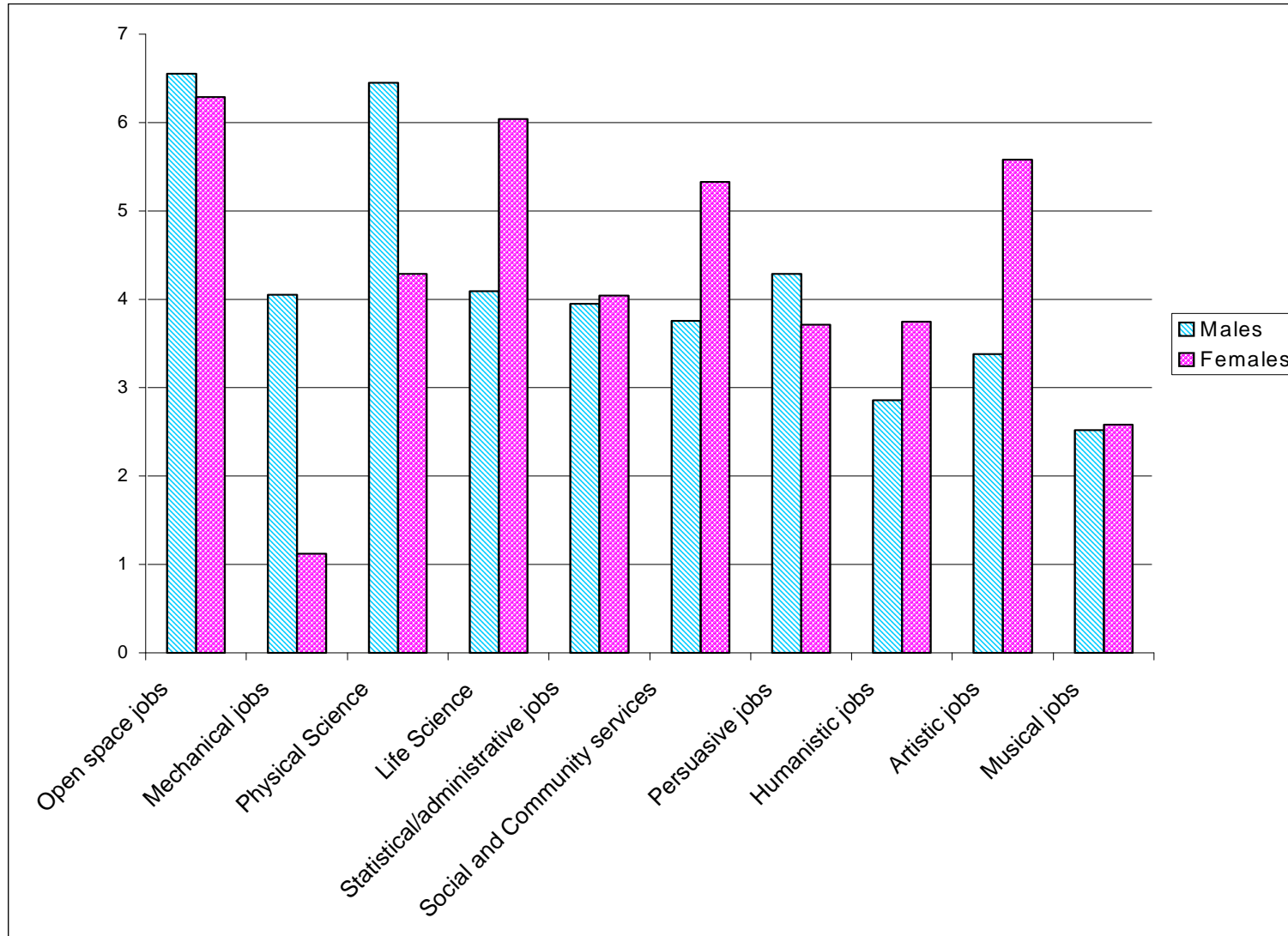
***SCHOOL "B":*** A series of Independent Samples T-tests on Scores in all the Variables investigated (**Vocational Interests Areas- QIP; Personality Characteristics- BFQ-C; Study Method and Motivation - QES**) **by Sex**

**TWO SIGNIFICANT RESULTS:** **Boys chose significantly more times Technical Jobs than Girls** and **Girls obtained significantly higher scores on Work Method in studying than Boys** (see next table)

<b>SAMPLE</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Variances</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>2-tail sig</b>	<b>Male</b>			<b>Female</b>		
						<b>N.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
School A	Technical and Mechanical Activities	Unequal	3,07	30	0,004**	22	4,04	4,02	24	1,12	1,98
School B	Technical Jobs	Unequal	2,5	34,1	0,017*	24	4	2,04	16	2,81	0,91
School B	Study Method	Equal	-3,74	38	0,001**	24	45	10,1	16	57	8,7

**EXAMPLES OF CHARTS PRESENTED IN THE FINAL REPORTS OF THE TWO SCHOOLS  
TO THE HEAD-MASTER AND TO TEACHERS INVOLVED**

**SCHOOL "A": MEANS OF VOCATIONAL INTEREST SCORES BY SEX**



## **SCHOOL “A”**

### ***Vocational Interest Areas of MV70 Questionnaire***

***Open space jobs:*** all the works that people practise in open spaces, i.e. Farming, Fishing and Forestry, Sports, Building, Tourism related jobs, Archaeology,...

***Mechanical jobs:*** i.e., Installation, maintenance and repair, Construction, ...

***Physical Science:*** research activities in the fields of Physics, Chemistry, Engineering, ...

***Life Science:*** research activities about living beings, i.e. anthropology, medicine, zoology, ...

***Statistical/administrative jobs:*** office and administrative support, i.e. accountant, sales and related,...

***Social and community services:*** i.e., healthcare support; nurse; social assistant; traffic policeman; missionary,...

***Persuasive jobs:*** i.e., trade,; politics; business and financial operations; to practise law; trade unions;...

***Humanistic jobs:*** i.e., grammar or foreign language teacher, interpreter, writer, poet, ...

***Artistic jobs:*** i.e., painter, sculptor, interior decorator, set dresser, ...

***Musical jobs:*** i.e., singer, pianist, conductor, composer,...

## **SCHOOL “B”**

### ***Vocational Interest Areas of QIP Questionnaire***

***Environmental jobs:*** Farming, Fishing and Forestry; research activities about pollution and ways to prevent and/or diminish it; veterinary, ...

***Administrative/commercial jobs:*** business and financial operations, office and administrative support, sales,...

***Artistic/artisan jobs:*** i.e., interior decorator, architect, restorer, stylist, jeweller, art critic, graphic designer, photographer,...

***Literary jobs:*** i.e., editor, writer, journalist, literary translator, public relations, advertising agent,...

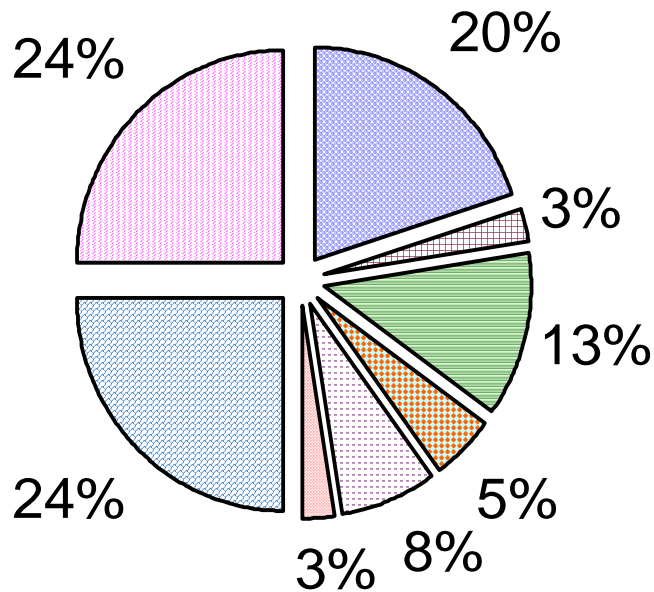
***Scientific jobs:*** researcher in the fields of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Engineering,...

***Social/Community and Educational jobs:*** teacher, healthcare practitioner, nurse; social assistant; psychologist, policeman,...

***Technical jobs:*** i.e., Installation, maintenance and repair, Construction, Building,...

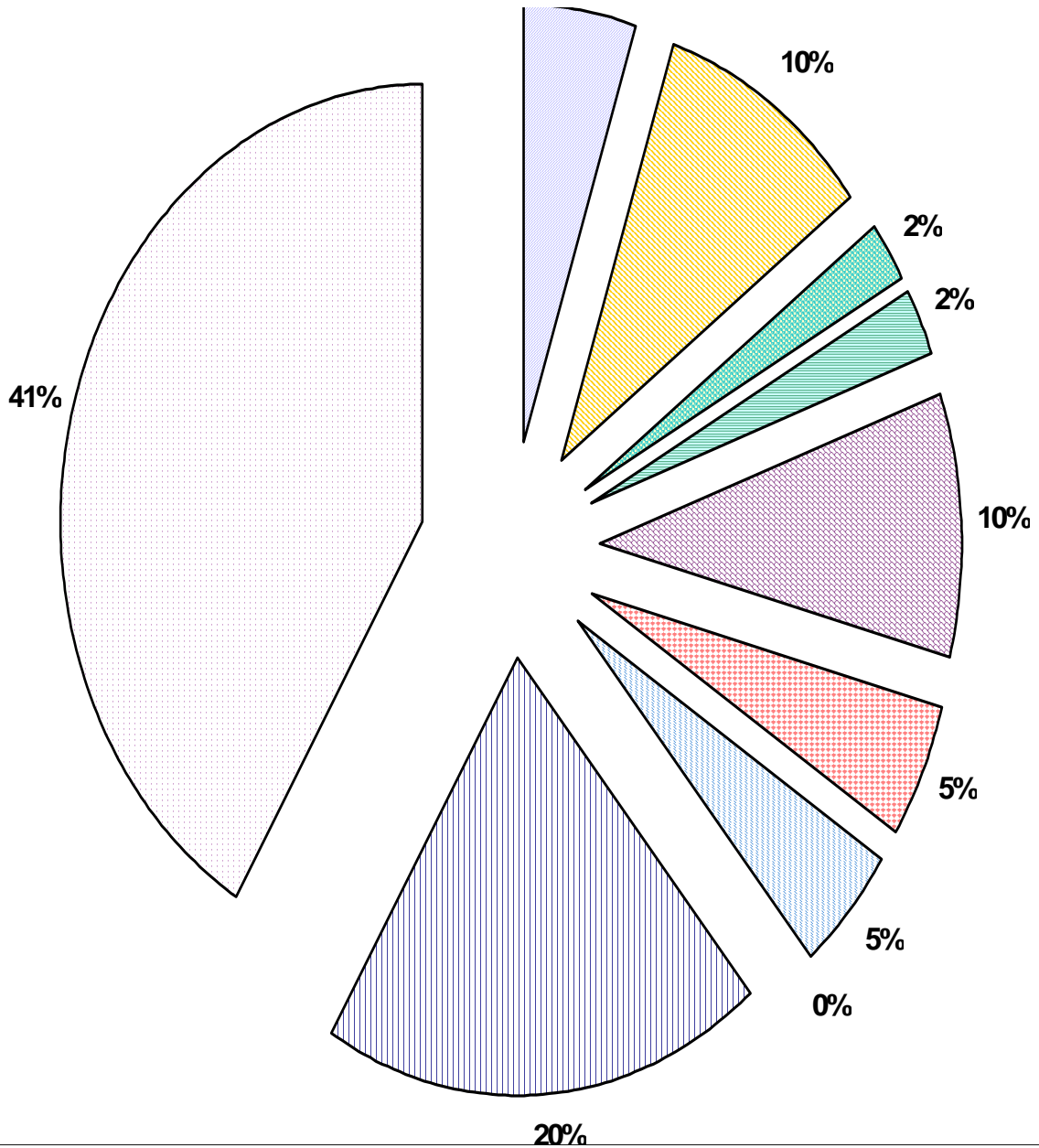
***Tourism and foreign languages related jobs:*** entertainment, interpreter, tour guide, tour operator, hotelkeeper,...

**SCHOOL "B": PIE CHART DESCRIBING STUDENT PERCENTAGES IN APTITUDES**



- Verbal Aptitude
- Numerical Aptitude
- Spatial-Visual Perceptive Aptitude
- Verbal & Numerical Aptitudes
- Verbal & Spatial-Perceptive Aptitudes
- Numerical & Spatial-Perceptive Aptitude
- All aptitudes > mean
- No particular aptitude

**SCHOOL "B": PIE CHART DESCRIBING STUDENT PERCENTAGES IN VOCATIONAL INTERESTS**



- Environmental Jobs
- Administrative/commercial jobs
- Artistic/artisan jobs
- Literary jobs
- Scientific jobs
- Social/community and educational jobs
- Tecnichal Jobs
- Tourism and foreign languages related jobs
- No particular interest

## ***RESULTS ABOUT STUDENT SATISFACTION EVALUATIONS***

**In School “A”** 80.4% of students were satisfied and 71.7% judged individual profiles in line with self-representations. Besides, 82.6% of these students considered obtained information useful in their decision-making process about scholastic choice. Only 10.9 % had different expectations in relation to provided vocational guidance (*see next chart*).

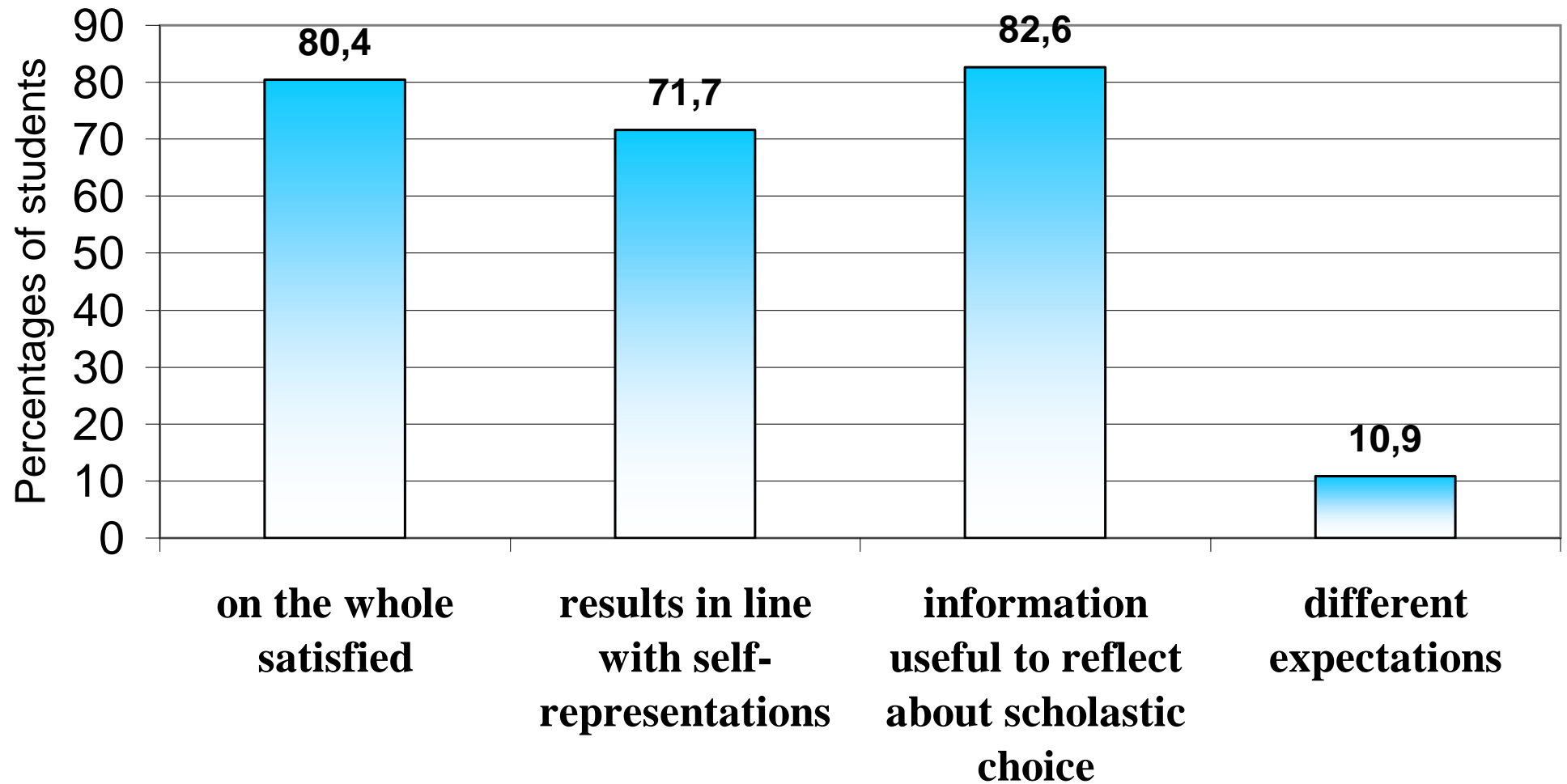
**In School “B”** the percentage of satisfied students was inferior (52.4%), because “Class 2” in this school was mostly unsatisfied about the experience (90% of its students) and had different expectations (60% of its students), in contrast with “Class 1” where most students gave positive answers to questions included in the Satisfaction Questionnaire (*see following chart*).

**About dissatisfaction reasons**, different expectations explained by unsatisfied students of both schools were in most cases:

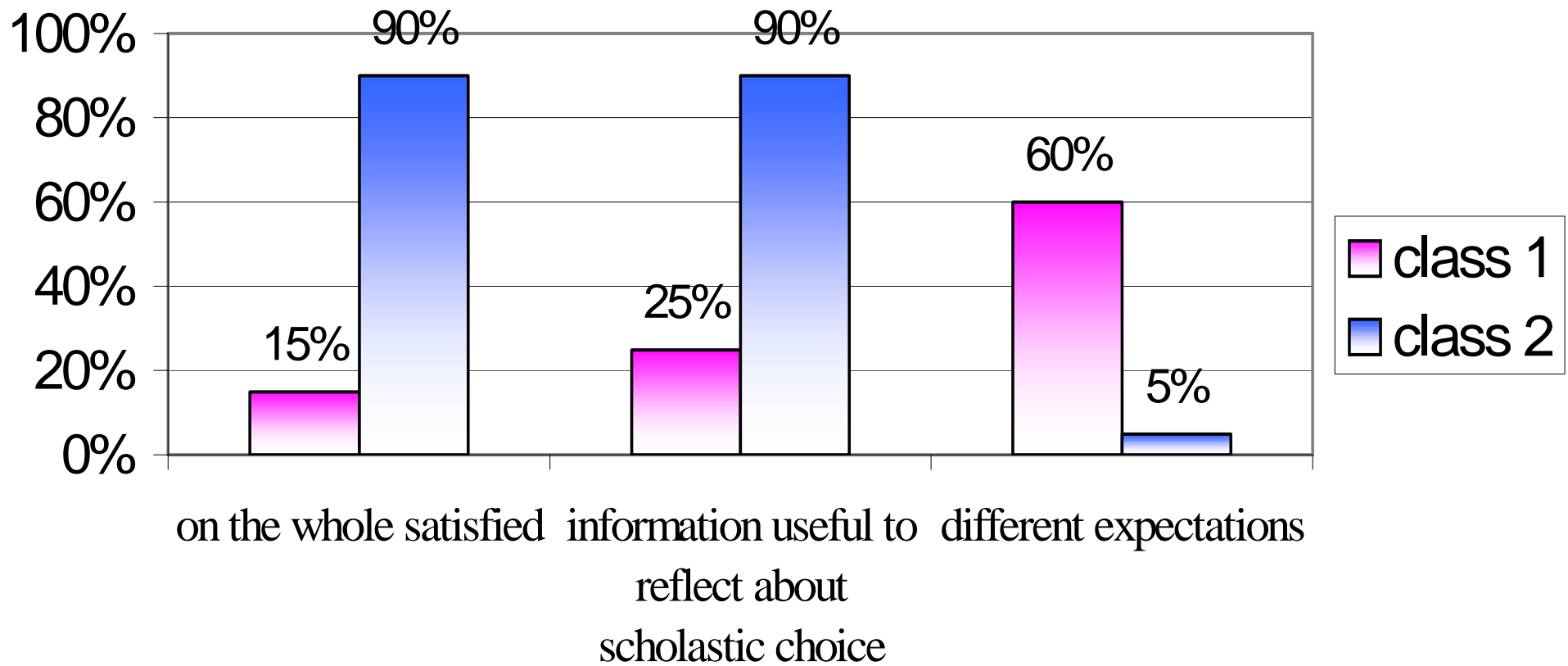
- expectations of precise indications about which Upper Secondary School to attend (they had the idea of a personal passive role in the vocational guidance)
- expectations of more information about future schools and jobs than about themselves (perhaps because of an unclear initial contract with them and their teachers about aims and respective tasks in the project)

## SCHOOL "A":

### *Student positive answers to satisfaction questions*



SCHOOL "B" divided by CLASS:  
*Student positive answers to satisfaction questions*



## **CONCLUSIONS**

The standardised sources of information about factors related to satisfactory scholastic/professional choices, together with the following individual interviews with the school psychologist, were an opportunity for students and their parents to reflect on the criteria that lead successfully to certain scholastic paths. As a matter of fact, the interviews were meant to support subjects (students and/or their parents) in acquiring the competence to re-organise their representations with the help of new relevant information, in order to improve their decision-making ability and to minimise the impact of contingent variables (friend choices, family traditions, etc.).

On the whole, most students were satisfied by this type of support to their choice (three classes of the four involved). The main purpose was to have students as prime decision makers for the pathways they take, without ever suggesting which choice to make. In this regard, it is possible that in the unsatisfied class the preliminary activities for sharing these aims and identifying student unrealistic expectations were for some reason ineffective, as it is suggested by different expectations explained by these unsatisfied students (above all, the one of obtaining precise indications about which school to attend successfully). There are not gender differences in variables investigated (Aptitudes; Personality characteristics; Career interests; Study habits and aptitudes), except for two significant and interesting results. Technical and Mechanical Jobs are preferred by boys significantly more than by girls, in accordance with previous results present in literature (Mannarini, 2002; for a review, Soresi & Nota, 2000). This result is stable in spite of the two different schools and of the two different Vocational Interest Inventories used. Instead, other expected gender differences in Vocational interests were not obtained (for example, in girls' preference for Education job-field and Community/Social Services), perhaps because of the small subject samples.

Finally, in School "B" girls obtained significantly higher scores than boys on "Work Method" in learning: they judged themselves more used to follow effective habits in studying.

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