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▶ **To cite this version:**

Olivier Marty. A Proposal for Teaching Philosophy in the Lycées Professionnels. Prospero: a journal of new thinking in philosophy of education, 2015, vol. 21 (n° 1), pp. 10-13. halshs-01183503

HAL Id: halshs-01183503
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01183503

Submitted on 18 Aug 2015

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OLIVIER MARTY

A Proposal for Teaching Philosophy in the *Lycées Professionnels*

[In this paper the author sets out a case for extending philosophy teaching into French Vocational High Schools. He bases his argument on the intrinsic value of philosophical knowledge, and suggests emphases which would be needed to initiate practically-minded students into its charms.]

A French inspector recently floated the idea of an extension of philosophy teaching, during a *Collège International de Philosophie (http://www.ciph.org/)* meeting, at the Paris Ministry for (Higher) Education. What if philosophy teaching were extended to *Lycées Professionnels*, the equivalent of vocational high schools? Historically in France, philosophy has been reserved for elitist students of high social standing. This can be traced back to Plato's academy and for centuries 'philosophy' was university teaching was supposed to be all about. (Is it not surprising that "Philosophy" Doctorates, (PhDs) are a norm for higher education within the English speaking world whatever their specialization is?) More specifically, in recent years in France, philosophy teaching has been extended from *Lycée General* to *Lycée Technique,* but it has not yet reached the *Lycée Professionnel* ---the schools which provide the bulk of pupils contributing to the democratized baccalaureate (1985). How can a "Lycée", bearing the name of Aristotle's school, escape from a proper teaching of philosophy?

These kinds of Lycée are named "Professionnels" since they prepare their students for professions – etymologically the ability to speak in front of people about something, ideally about a daily activity useful for the common good. (The translation into English, authorized by the *European Training Foundation* agency (www.etf.europa.**eu**/), is "vocational high school".) These institutions are generally divided into different branches of economic activity: agriculture, industry, services, etc. How could philosophy be usefully included within these institutions of secondary education? What would be the proper way to deliver philosophy to the students? What would be the role of the professors within these institutions?

In this paper, my aim is to air the conditions for such a project in order to define a potential programme for vocational high school philosophy teachers. Let's start with an analysis of the term 'vocational'. Whatever vocabulary one uses, it is clear that the "voice" can be internal or external. That is to say, a vocation ---a call to do something--- can come through a heard inner voice or a listened external voice. The professionalism of the teachers should be based on articulating out loud what will trigger the inner call which will activate the pupils in the required direction.

A philosophy for vocational high schools would then be built on training of the teachers' capability to tell their students something that will endear them to the subject. It is more than a mere orientation, it is throwing a light onto an activity or place that will attract the pupils; it is a discourse about the know-how of this activity, and the collective identity of the profession thereby implied. Learning by doing, a traditional method in these institutions, would then be associated with learning by listening ---an *ergology* focused on the community. This would be given in the form of a discourse which introduced history, language, law and professional care. Key wisdoms would be explained briefly, to lay a plan for pupils' lifelong learning within this specific area of knowledge.

Such a discourse would be adapted to the realities of the activities targeted. For agriculture vocational high schools, Nietzsche's metaphors of a growing natural

life, and mythical wild beasts could be used to educate the young. Such a tree of knowledge could lay down its roots in 19th century biology and naturalism. It would offer a shelter for Zarathustra's animals, popularized by Heidegger ---see my philosophy doctoral thesis[1] Both the eagle circling high in the sky looking for a prey, and the canny snake lurking before biting, could be used to talk to future agriculture workers, who may be already familiarized with wildlife, hunting and animal intelligence. Behind the words of any idiom, images are universal in our national culture, and using the proper terms could help to create a frame a mind to see and describe the realities according to a shared professional vision.

Another approach could be taken in industrial vocational high schools: behind mechanistic comparisons and visions of organizations, from windmills to coal mines and nuclear factories, the very idea of *the hand* and its proper use may be an educative motif. Plato's often mentions "the hand" to designate the educator who will indicate the direction of study, and take the student "by the hand" to conduct him. It is the very idea of a *pedagogy* ---a learning path, across different institutions. Telling, in the appropriate manner, how to manipulate tools within a professional high school should also be developed. The recent philosophy doctorate complementary thesis of Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, defended in 1958 at Poitiers University, shows how technics and aesthetics can be intermingled and how a description of mechanisms can be associated with a sensibility for artifacts, components and their association.

A third and last example would be the *Lycées professionnels* leading their pupils towards the delivery of services. The ways and means of negotiation, selling, hosting, caring, etc., necessitate a deep introduction to the humanities. A philosophy teacher should then be wise enough to introduce Nicomachean ethics ---the value of courage and *phronesis* as virtues for example--- but also about political urbanism, sociology and psychology, offering a base for applied sciences ---whether marketing or management, dealing with technical aspects of human relations. The French 20th century philosopher Emmnauel Levinas analyses the face ("le visage") and how to read it. Learners in vocational high school aiming at careers in services should hear about the meaning of glittering eyes, frowning eyebrows, an evasive smile or even the interpretation of wrinkles. To start an interaction with The Other, expressing the right facial signs and body language is fundamental. It prepares the ground for an emotional acceptance of the intended message.

Such a philosophical programme, based on a three-part structure adapted to the three dominant kinds of vocational high schools, raises the question of the democratization of knowledge. How can the philosopher, who is King in Plato's Republic, share her or his insights with these practical learners? There is a paradox implicit in the dispersion of knowledge that enhances the common wealth: the distribution of wisdom from in-house academic philosophical colleges to the bulk of society would not necessarily reduce its power. A modern economy of networks shows that the more links there are between individuals, the richer they become ---and the more distant the link is, the stronger the effect is. An acceleration of information flow creates a richer community. It is therefore in the interest of philosophers to adapt their knowledge and give it to professional teachers as a means to enrich technical training.

Last, but not least, St Augustine of Hippo confesses that language can serve to recall an Inner Master. The "inner voice" guiding the pupils to work can be triggered by the spoken voice of the professional teacher. Music, in the sense of verbal cadences, would then be fundamental, since the melody and the rhythm of the teacher's speech would induce the learner into a meditation preceding his or her decision to act. The art of the craft of teaching in a vocational high school would then be

incorporated into the common competences of professional teachers: theatrical staging implies a mastery of the body, acquired through dance, and a musical mastery of the voice. Virtual classrooms for online education would add the mystery of modern media to this art ---hopefully creating shared communities of teachers and learners. But the core know-how of the teaching profession would still be based on the traditional arts: music, dance and theatre[1] Marty O. (dir.), 2013, « Formation et théâtre » in *Éducation permanente*, n°193, Paris..

1 Marty O. (dir.), 2013, « Formation et théâtre » in *Éducation permanente*, n°193, Paris.