

**The VAE, or the need for ordering: an impossible quest?**

**An analysis of representation and translation processes in  
the  
the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* in a French  
University**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study presents an analysis of the processes of representations and translation involved in the practice of the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)*, or Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning, in a French University. This analysis is based on a qualitative research using semi-structured interviews with VAE candidates, advisers and academic staff, and recorded interactions between candidates and their advisers, and the validation juries.

The research was at first influenced by the life history and educational biographies perspective (Josso 2001; Dominicé 2002; Pineau 2002), which privileged a dialogic approach. This has led to the decision to let the candidates tell their story of ordering struggle, where the resistance, dissidence and controversies circulate within and around the VAE 'object'. This study is interested in the ordering modes enacted through the VAE and their relational effects with subjectivities.

The analysis draws on Callon's (1986) four moments of translation, as a way to give an initial frame of reference for the research. It presents the actors' voices in a sequence of accounts, disrupted by the researcher's running commentaries.

It also focusses on the role the portfolio plays in 'ordering' the heterogeneous elements of the candidates' lives, subjecting them to a form of 'disciplinary writing' through 'technologies of the self', whereby subjectivities are mobilised into specific modes of ordering.

It analyses how the VAE becomes a stabilized network (Star 1991), insisting on speaking with a unitary voice, erasing the multiplicity of selves and the messy realities of the candidates' lives, until the heterogeneous elements of the network escape again. Finally the study seeks to investigate further the recognition of heterogeneity, the possibility of multiplicity of cultures and agencies, multiple identities.

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