

Why Teach Sociology? Processes of Legitimizing the Teaching of Sociology in Brazil

Abstract

This essay aims to answer the following question: why teach and learn sociology? To this end, a historical perspective of the teaching of sociology in Brazil up to the present time is addressed. It is assumed that three social fields influence the pedagogical meanings of sociology teaching. The first one refers to the political field, where agents linked to this space create discourses concerning the importance of learning sociological contents in school, thus legitimizing the disciplinary presence of sociology in high school, based on the formation for citizenship and for the world of work. The second space is the scientific field, where a critical perspective on sociology is presented, linked to the denaturalization and estrangement of the social world, as well as to the development of the sociological imagination. Finally, there is the representation of the teachers themselves, who in everyday life at school, resignify the relevance of learning and teaching sociology, in which a critical perspective aimed at the transformation of social structures is presented, and may also be associated with the training characteristics of the teachers who teach the subject. Based on a literature review, this essay discusses and presents these different conceptions about the political, scientific and scholarly relevance of teaching sociology in Brazil.

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Introduction

The pedagogical meanings refer us to the question: why teach and learn Sociology? However, a broader analysis may show that it is not just a matter of a strictly pedagogical sense, but rather of a status of legitimacy and social prestige that goes beyond the educational space. The teaching and the meaning of a school subject are related, therefore, to other social spaces and, mainly, to the agents with greater decision-making power about what should be transmitted in pursuit of a certain civilizational project. Thus, the definition of the pedagogical meaning of Sociology is linked to a body of epistemological, methodological and pedagogical knowledge that guides teaching practice in the transmission of sociological knowledge. This knowledge is polyphonic, because it carries in its constitution multiple voices that relate to the scientific field, which guides and defines the categories of understanding of the social world; to the political field, which regulates and legitimates the knowledge to be taught; and, to the school field, which re-signifies the official curriculum by making the didactic transposition of a scientific knowledge to a school knowledge (Chevallard, 2013). Therefore, we can consider that there are different ways to investigate the elaboration, definition and re-signification of pedagogical meanings for the teaching of Sociology, since scientists, politicians, teachers and students have understandings of the relevance of why to teach and learn Sociology, perspectives that vary according to the historical period and the place of these subjects.

In the process of development and institutionalization of Sociology in the West we can see, at least, two distinct directions regarding its own constitution. The first one focuses on understanding the social world in an analytical-descriptive-normative way, which aims at understanding the structures of domination and exploitation while guiding a path of transformation of these structures - of which the best known theorist is Karl Marx. The second direction, marked by the abandonment of normativity, not considering that the role of Sociology, as a science, is to dictate the norms for the construction of a new society, but rather to focus on the analytical-descriptive-comprehensive aspect of the functioning of the social world - in this category are present the contributions of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, just to mention these authors were consecrated as "classics" of the area.

In Brazil, some research on the pedagogical meaning of Sociology has occurred in parallel to the historical debate related to the compulsory teaching of the subject in High School (Azevedo, 2014; Cigales, Franke and Dallmann, 2018), having observed different views on the role that the subject of Sociology could offer to the generations that were in the process of schooling. Such perceptions are varied in view of the different: i) levels of education: High School, Normal School, Higher Education, Youth and Adult Education, Military Education, etc. ; ii) historical periods in which it was present in a compulsory way - from 1925-1942 and from 2008-2017 in Secondary School, from 1946-1971 in Normal School, and from 1932 to the present year 2020 in Higher Education; iii) political and educational projects, such as those observed at the beginning of the 20th century between Catholic and renovationist intellectuals, or the recent discussions between conservative groups, driven by religious and nationalist interests.

Other studies have highlighted the different views on the role of teaching the subject during the passage of the Bills (3.178/1997 and 1.641/2003) that aimed to make Sociology a compulsory subject in the High School curriculum (Azevedo, 2014; Gesteira, 2018). These studies, analyzing the arguments put forward by the members of the National Congress (Deputies and Senators), created categories to understand the meanings of Sociology in the view of political agents, which place the subject in different positions, ranging from instrumentalization for the world of work and for the exercise of citizenship to the development of critical sense and social transformation.

In addition to research that considers historical and political aspects, those that discuss the representations of students and teachers are also present (Santos, 2016; Rêses, 2016). Through interviews and focus groups, and using different variables - place of residence for students and training for teachers - such researchers highlight different meanings about teaching and learning sociological knowledge in school. Regarding teachers, although both groups agreed that teaching the subject would be an instrument of awareness for a citizen education, a more detailed analysis points to different meanings of the words "awareness" and "citizenship", because for those trained in the Social Sciences, Sociology would be a means of forming a citizen with sociological awareness, while for those trained in other areas, sociological knowledge would be a means of forming a citizen with political awareness.

Regarding the students, the appreciation of Sociology as a science capable of offering a greater understanding of society, institutions and for the formation of a critical sense and citizenship is also shared by all the subjects interviewed. However, what differentiates them is the practical use of the subject in their daily lives. While the students from the peripheral region have a view toward the improvement of their living conditions, the others, from the central region of the Federal District, have a view toward school progression. Thus, although both groups affirm the relevance of Sociology teaching in their personal formation, their purposes diverge according to the different socioeconomic contexts.

Although it does not constitute a scientific production on the teaching of Sociology, we would have the official documents that address different pedagogical directions. The Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDBEN) of 1996 presented, before the 2017 amendment, the knowledge of Sociology as relevant to the development of citizenship. In the 2000s, the National Curricular Parameters for Secondary Education (PCNEM), based on the LDBEN, sought to reformulate the necessary skills for secondary education, and the concepts of contextualization, interdisciplinarity, and autonomy were some of the guidelines advocated for the constitution of this level of education at that time. More specifically, the Curricular Guidelines for Secondary Education (OCNEM) criticize the previous documents for considering that the motto "form for citizenship" would be a general function of formal education, bringing more specific contributions on the meaning of Sociology, such as denaturalization and estrangement, achieved through the relationship between the methodological provisions - concepts, themes and theories - of Sociology, which can be mediated through the use of research as a pedagogical principle. We should also mention the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC), where the objectives for Sociology are more dispersed, being considered relevant to develop the ability to inquire about the social world.

The question about pedagogical meanings has generated several researches in the subfield of Sociology Teaching, because the legitimacy of a school subject is not only related to its prestige in the scientific field, but in the different political, academic and social views about its contribution to the education of youth in contemporary society. In this aspect, Lahire (2013) points out that Sociology in Basic Education would

constitute an adequate response to the modern demands of citizens' schooling, because, like other sciences, Sociology has analytical tools such as ethnographic objectification, statistical objectification and sociological interview, which can be used as teaching tools towards a society in which individuals are more subjects of their actions from the objectification and denaturalization of social processes.

Finally, a research agenda about the pedagogical meanings could continue investigating the discourses and representations about the teaching of Sociology in other spaces, such as those produced by television, cinema, internet, etc., as well as its meanings for non-formal education, or even, turning to the differences between the areas of Social Sciences (Anthropology, Political Science and Sociology), or between undergraduate and graduate degrees, noticing the differences and similarities between regions, courses and university teachers. Revisiting classical and contemporary authors, incorporating other views, such as those of Simmel and Tonnies, or contemporary authors such as Wright Mills, Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and Talcott Parsons. In this agenda would be, for example, the question posed by Émile Durkheim, who distinguishes the Educational Sciences that "tell how things are" from the Pedagogy that points the way to how "things should be". Thus, what pedagogical meanings does the teaching of Sociology entail? Would it be possible to turn to Anthropology, Political Science and Sociology and question the meanings that these sciences construct for themselves and take them as a subsidy for the construction of the pedagogical meaning of teaching? How to "produce" pedagogical meanings that manage to resist the invariably uniformizing character of educational policies that convey aprioristic pedagogical meanings to the detriment of the possibility of re-signifying Sociology due to the different levels of education, historical periods, and educational political projects of each social group that intends to appropriate it? These are some questions for a research agenda in the area.

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