

Social Sciences in the Classroom: International Perspectives on Knowledge, Power, and Citizenship

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Abstract

The collection *The Teaching of Social Sciences in an International Perspective* [*O Ensino de Ciências Sociais em Perspectiva Internacional*] organized by Marcelo Cigales, brings together contributions from researchers across multiple countries and stems from the First International Congress on the Teaching of social sciences. The volume interweaves epistemological, curricular, and political debates, helping to consolidate the field of Sociology education, especially in contexts marked by democratic tensions and conservative backlash. Structured in two parts, the book covers themes such as democracy, citizenship, digital technologies, ethnic-racial education, the historical development of the discipline, and the role of textbooks. The chapters emphasize Sociology's importance as a critical and emancipatory tool, exposing ideological conflicts in curricula and advocating for inclusive, context-sensitive education. The analysis spans various national settings, including Brazil, Argentina, France, Uruguay, Spain, Canada, and South Africa, offering a comparative and international perspective. While the collection makes significant strides, the review notes certain gaps, such as the limited focus on everyday classroom practices in basic education and the underrepresentation of Indigenous and traditional epistemologies. Nonetheless, the work is a key reference for advancing the field and reinforcing the role of social sciences education in promoting democracy and social justice.

Key-words: Sociological Teaching, Sociology of Education, Democratic Citizenship, Curricular politics.

This book is the result of the First International Congress on the Teaching of social sciences (CIECS), held in November 2023 at the University of Brasília (UnB), and it brings together contributions from researchers from various countries. However, more than just a simple collection of texts, the work should be understood within the context of the strengthening of a specific research field — the Teaching of Sociology — which, despite being historically marginalized, has been gaining ground in Brazil, particularly after the enactment of Law 11.684/2008, which made Sociology a mandatory subject in

high school. This requirement not only spurred curricular debates but also influenced the very structure of teacher training programs, which began to rethink their curricula in order to meet the regulations concerning mandatory teaching internships. It is also worth highlighting a series of public policies and programs that have strengthened undergraduate degrees in social sciences over the past decades (Oliveira, 2023; Bodart & Tavares, 2021; Pereira, 2022).

In this context, the volume organized by Marcelo Cigales, professor at the University of Brasília (UnB) and coordinator of the Lélia Gonzalez Laboratory for Sociology Teaching, represents an important collective intervention. Structured in two parts, the book first offers reflections on democracy, citizenship, and digital technologies in education; the second part presents discussions on history, textbooks, and ethnic-racial education. By bringing together 15 authors across 11 chapters, the book not only shares experiences and research but also contributes to the consolidation of social sciences Teaching as a field of theoretical, methodological, and political production, situated between the classroom and academia, with global concerns and local roots.

In the preface, Diego Ezequiel Pereyra, from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), highlights the challenges faced by research in the social sciences amid disputes over the meaning of quality education in a tense geopolitical context. The main challenge lies in balancing quality and inclusion as complementary dimensions of the right to democratic education, tied to meaningful learning and social justice. Added to this is the hostility of conservative movements that view the social sciences as a threat to the social order and advocate for their removal from school curricula. In this context, Pereyra defends the essential role of social sciences in promoting critical, civic, and emancipatory education.

Another key point he raises is the need to invest in teacher training and technologies that support inclusive practices and respect diversity. There is also the challenge of balancing autonomy and heteronomy in curricula, especially in the face of local demands that, if poorly mediated, may fragment teaching and reinforce

exclusion. Pereyra emphasizes that the comparative studies presented in this volume offer theoretical and methodological alternatives for addressing these dilemmas, aiming to build a shared research agenda and a collective memory of the social sciences that values plural voices and silenced perspectives.

Democracy, citizenship and digital technologies in education

In the first chapter, *“For Democratic Perspectives in social sciences Education,”* Raewyn Connell, emeritus professor at the University of Sydney, advocates for the social sciences as an essential tool for strengthening democracy, due to their ability to analyze contemporary crises, such as those related to climate and public health, that stem from the inequalities of the Sociocene. Connell criticizes the commodification of education, reflected in curriculum standardization imposed by international corporations and performance assessments based on meritocratic and individualistic logics.

In contrast, she proposes a democratic curriculum, collaboratively built by teachers and students, and responsive to local realities. Such a curriculum should be evidence-based, encourage investigative and creative skills, historicize social processes, and critically address inequalities in the geopolitics of knowledge. This includes breaking with Eurocentrism and valuing knowledge produced in the Global South. Finally, Connell calls for a rethinking of the teaching profession, emphasizing student agency and collaborative learning processes guided by supportive and engaged educators.

The second chapter, *“Citizenship and the Teaching of Sociology in the Context of Democratic Crisis: An Invitation,”* by Amurabi Oliveira (Federal University of Santa Catarina - UFSC), explores the role of social sciences education in the face of a democratic crisis exacerbated by conservative movements. In Brazil, citizenship has been a legal principle of education since 1996, yet in practice, many remain excluded from it. It is the task of the social sciences to shed light on these marginalized

subjects, using intersectionality to understand how overlapping inequalities affect access to citizenship.

Oliveira analyzes the attacks on education promoted by moral entrepreneurs—such as the “School Without Party” movement—who aim to suppress discussions on gender, sexuality, race, and diversity. In this context, Sociology becomes a prime target, and its educators are often stigmatized. The author advocates for actively listening to youth and examines graffiti and messages on the walls of Brasília as expressions of their pain and exclusion. The classroom, therefore, must become a space for dialogue between theory, practice, and lived experience—where student agency plays a key role in rethinking social theory and in strengthening citizenship and democracy.

In the third chapter, *“How Can the Teaching of Sociology Strengthen Citizenship? Some Reflections Based on the French Case,”* Igor Martinache (University of Paris-Nanterre) argues that Sociology’s contributions to citizenship depend on how both concepts are contextualized. Drawing on T.H. Marshall, he emphasizes that citizenship encompasses interdependent civil, political, and social dimensions, which challenge the limits of formal equality in the face of real inequalities. Sociology, in this context, must critically examine these contradictions as part of a dynamic and conflictual process.

The teaching of Sociology faces a dilemma between scientific standardization and the flexibility needed to engage with students’ lived experiences. In France, two didactic models coexist: one centered on analytical rigor and the other more academically oriented, resulting in disciplinary fragmentation. To foster critical education, it is necessary to overcome the dominant technical focus of Economics and the standardizing effects of national exams. Martinache advocates for the use of active methodologies, such as debates, research projects, and problem-based learning, to develop critical skills in the face of fake news, conspiracy theories, and the anti-intellectualism that characterize the current democratic crisis.

In the fourth chapter, *“Thinking About Social Reality from the Classroom,”* Isabelino Siede (National Universities of La Plata and Southern Patagonia, Argentina) analyzes teaching practices in Sociology education based on interviews with high school teachers in Buenos Aires. He identifies the predominance of an “explanation–application” model, characterized by extensive content, lecture-based instruction, and a focus on classical authors. This model reinforces teacher authority and limits students’ autonomy and critical thinking. It disconnects knowledge from thought, prioritizing memorization over inquiry and creativity.

As an alternative, Siede proposes the “problem-posing–conceptualization” model, which integrates theory and practice through problem-based situations, fostering active and contextualized learning. For him, the central goal of teaching is to teach students how to ask questions.

In the fifth chapter, *“Teacher Training and the Teaching of Sociology through Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs): The Uruguayan Case,”* Dinorah Motta de Souza (Artigas Teachers' Institute, Uruguay) examines the relationship between Sociology education and democracy in the Uruguayan context. Under authoritarian regimes, the discipline was hollowed out, reduced to moralizing content merged with Law and Civic Education. During progressive governments, a national curriculum was developed with active teacher participation, granting Sociology greater autonomy and disciplinary specificity.

However, the political shift in 2020 reversed these advances by reintegrating Sociology into Law, hindering specialized methodological training. Despite the introduction of ICTs, teaching remained centered on individualistic approaches and external performance metrics, thereby weakening the critical, collective, and ethical dimensions of education. Curricular instability reveals the tensions between pedagogical projects and political disputes within Uruguayan democracy.

This chapter demonstrates that ICTs can contribute to the teaching of Sociology, provided that collective work, critical thinking, and the ongoing effort to build a synergistic didactic relationship between teachers and students are preserved.

Conversely, the teaching of Sociology can foster the development of critical reflection by problematizing the impacts and consequences of ICTs on society, particularly regarding inequalities and the reproduction or transformation of power relations.

The sixth chapter, “*Visions and First Steps Toward an International Network for Teaching Sociology by Global Educators*,” by Annette Tézli, Katherine Lyon (both from Canada), and Sultan Khan (South Africa), concludes the first section of the book by discussing the challenges and possibilities of building a collaborative international network for Sociology education. The text critiques the white, patriarchal, and Eurocentric epistemic hegemony of the Global North, which is imposed as universal across curricula, teaching materials, and pedagogical practices—thereby marginalizing knowledge produced in other regions such as Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa.

This inequality reinforces an elitist and reproductive view of Sociology, stripping it of its critical and emancipatory potential. In response, Thematic Group 9 on Sociological Teaching, part of the International Sociological Association, proposes a global network that values peripheral knowledges and promotes the construction of more inclusive, collaborative, and decolonized knowledge.

History, textbooks and ethnic-racial education

The chapter “*The Importance of Taking Institutions Seriously: Notes on the Study of the History of Sociology Teaching*,” by Juan Pedro Blois (National University of General Sarmiento and CONICET, Argentina), opens the second section of the book by highlighting the significance of socio-historical analysis in understanding the trajectory of Sociology teaching in Argentina. Drawing on Bourdieu’s dispositionalist perspective, the author investigates how institutions, curricula, socializations, and professional practices shape the identity of Sociology, especially in the face of democratic instability and authoritarian governments in the country.

Rather than focusing solely on prominent figures, Blois emphasizes the role of sociologists’ everyday practices and their struggles for legitimacy within the academic

and professional fields. He advocates for a critical institutional approach that is attentive to both ruptures and continuities, while avoiding teleological or formalist interpretations. The process of internationalizing research, he argues, has required analytical distance, enhancing reflexivity and creativity in the formulation of sociological problems.

In the chapter *“Introductory Sociology Textbooks in Brazil (1917–1950): A Historical Perspective,”* Cristiano das Neves Bodart (Federal University of Alagoas – UFAL) analyzes school textbooks in Sociology to understand the formation of the field in Brazil. The discipline was included in the secondary education curriculum even before the establishment of university-level Sociology programs and was particularly relevant in the training of female teachers in the *Escola Normal* (Normal School).

Bodart shows how these manuals reflect the authoritarian contexts of the time, featuring moralistic, civic, and nationalist content, and reveal tensions between Catholic and secular approaches to Sociology. Authors such as Durkheim, Comte, Spencer, and Tristão de Athayde were frequently cited, pointing to an effort to legitimize Sociology as a science. The analysis highlights how textbook content was shaped by ideological and political forces, revealing the permeability of teaching materials to external disputes over the meaning and purpose of the discipline in Brazil.

The chapter *“Production Systems in the Teaching of Natural Sciences through Textbooks Published in Spain (1965–1990),”* by Ana Maria Badanelli Rubio and Cecília Valbuena Canet (UNED, Madrid), analyzes how natural and social sciences textbooks represented the relationship between nature, labor, and industrialization during the late Francoist period and Spain’s democratic transition. Based on a qualitative analysis of images and discourses, the authors demonstrate how school content reflected both productive and ideological transformations.

Before the rise of industrialization, the emphasis in textbooks was placed on raw materials; as industrial development progressed, the focus shifted toward factory labor. During the redemocratization period, the discourse transitioned from one of survival to one of quality of life, highlighting technical professions and raising

awareness about the environmental impacts of human activity, thus aligning educational content with new social and political demands.

In the chapter “*Sociology Textbooks in Brazil*,” Ana Martina Baron Engerrof (Federal Institute of Santa Catarina - IFSC) analyzes textbooks as expressions of the political struggles within educational policies and the broader process of Sociology’s institutionalization in Brazil. She identifies three generations of textbooks: the first (1920–1940), linked to the initial institutionalization of the discipline; the second (1980–2000), associated with its gradual reintegration into the school curriculum; and the third, beginning in 2012, following the mandatory inclusion of Sociology in high school and its incorporation into the National Textbook Program (PNLD).

The author also suggests the emergence of a fourth generation, characterized by multidisciplinary textbooks driven by the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) and the New High School reform, potentially representing a setback in the consolidation of Sociology as a distinct subject. By mapping these phases, the chapter highlights how textbooks reflect ongoing struggles for legitimacy and help us understand both the progress and vulnerabilities of Sociology education in Brazil.

The final chapter, “*What Does the First International Congress on the Teaching of social sciences Have to Say About Ethnic-Racial Studies?*” by Ana Clara Damásio (University of Brasília – UnB), analyzes the intersections between Sociology education and Ethnic-Racial Studies, highlighting their ethical and political significance. The author discusses how the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture, racial quotas, and the leadership of Black women scholars have influenced academic production and teaching practices.

Based on an analysis of works presented at the CIECS, Damásio demonstrates the growing presence of racial topics within the field. However, she also points out existing limitations, such as the need to deepen discussions on whiteness and to include still-invisibilized groups, such as traditional communities. She concludes that, despite progress, there is a pressing need to broaden epistemic diversity in order to build a truly inclusive and democratic education.

Main Contributions and Limitations of This Book

This work is highly relevant to both researchers in Sociology Education and educators at the secondary and higher education levels. For the scientific community, it highlights the convergences and specificities across diverse contexts, demonstrating the coexistence of regularities and singularities in the teaching and research of Sociology Education. Recurrent theoretical-methodological frameworks and didactic approaches can be observed, as well as shared themes and significant absences that must be problematized in order to transform the geopolitical landscape of sociological knowledge production.

Despite a growing inclusion of more diverse voices within the international network on Sociology Education, there remains a pressing need to deepen the engagement with intersectional markers such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and generation. This is crucial not only to broaden the research agenda but also to diversify the composition of the academic community itself.

Both school and academic communities may benefit from the issues addressed in this collection to rethink their pedagogical practices. This includes exploring more active and inquiry-based methodologies, bridging theory and practice, incorporating students' lived experiences as starting points, and valuing intersectionality and the plurality of the student body, moving beyond traditional, lecture-centered methods that prioritize memorization and standardized assessments.

The collection stands out for offering a comprehensive and international overview of social sciences education, weaving together epistemological, curricular, and political debates. Its most significant strength lies in the diversity of voices and approaches, which critically interrogate the role of Sociology in contexts marked by democratic erosion and moral disputes. Nevertheless, despite its commitment to plurality, the book could have delved more deeply into concrete pedagogical experiences from everyday school settings, particularly in primary and secondary

education, and provided greater visibility to Indigenous epistemologies and those of other traditional and marginalized knowledge systems.

For future works and events aligned with this collection's perspective, aiming to critically engage with the features and contributions of an international network on social sciences education, we recommend broadening the range of authors by more rigorously incorporating intersectional markers such as gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. Additionally, it is crucial to engage secondary school teachers in dialogues about successful practices and real challenges of implementing Sociology Education at the school level. This also calls for the inclusion of students' perspectives and the broader dynamics of the school community.

Engaging both school and university educators and students would foster creative and collaborative thinking around real classroom challenges, ensuring that the knowledge produced by the international research network in Sociology Education can be meaningfully and effectively integrated into educational practice.

Nevertheless, this book serves as an important reference point for consolidating the field and reaffirming the commitment of Sociology Education to social justice and democracy. It is hoped that future studies will expand this dialogue, further connecting theory, pedagogical practice, and the educational territories where the meanings of citizenship and emancipation are actively contested.

In sum, this work challenges educators and researchers to be more creative and innovative in their theoretical, methodological, and didactic approaches. It invites a sociological imagination in the teaching of Sociology, one grounded in creativity, contextualization, and inclusion, for a more practical and meaningful engagement with the discipline's potential in both research and education, from a pluralistic and democratic standpoint.

This collection opens the horizon for the urgent need to expand methods and pedagogies in Sociology Education. Moreover, it provokes us to reinvent the ways we research and teach the social sciences, epistemologically transforming how we understand the field, its audience, and its agents. However, it could be more inclusive

by engaging more directly with school communities and rethinking the epistemological status of the researched subject-object.

This review aims to offer a critical contribution to the work by emphasizing the need to recognize secondary school teachers and students not merely as research topics, but as significant agents in the production of scientific knowledge. A more horizontal and democratic exchange of knowledge and experiences between secondary-level educators and students and researchers in Sociology Education will further strengthen this emerging international network, which has been gaining momentum in recent years.

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