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Sociology in high school: the case of Greece

Dr. Foteini Kougioumoutzaki

fkouyoum@hotmail.com

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Abstract

Studies have shown that sociology is one of the most downgraded and misinterpreted school sciences. This article reports the results of a study of high school sociology in Greece. The aim was to reveal how and why education misinterprets and devaluates sociology. The basic assumption was the following: the science of sociology, which has special features and differs from other physical/natural sciences, is being transformed to a school course full of misconceptions concerning the sociological discourse, because of the dominance of a teaching model that advocates a positivistic aspect of science. The above assumption was examined through an analysis of the two main factors that are involved in the formation of the school course: sociology curriculum and sociology teachers, with regard to the way they use and perceive sociology's special nature as a science. The results indicated that the sociology course is based less on the science of sociology, and more on the everyday knowledge of society, on the presentation of social problems and issues familiar to the students, and on the promotion of citizenship education. These results bring to light new data on the issue of high school sociology in Greece. At the same time, they confirm and reinforce what has been asserted from other relevant studies elsewhere, revealing that, regardless of the specific educational environment under study, a specific pattern seems to be recurring: sociology courses produce a distorted image of sociology.

Introduction

It is unquestionable that the knowledge we derive from sociology increases our awareness of society and of ourselves as active social beings. In this sense, it is important to teach sociology, especially at the level of secondary education, because it can provide the students of this age (who very shortly are going to be part of the adult world) with critical analytical tools. Yet, sociology is not part of many secondary education curricula; what is usually the case, is that it is integrated into the subject of social studies. In the few cases where sociology is being taught as an individual subject, not only is it one of the most downgraded school courses, but, more importantly, it seems that what is being taught under the name of sociology has little to do with the sociological discourse. In particular the content, the objectives, and the teaching of the course shape a subject that is based on the study of social problems and current events, promoting citizenship education (DeCesare, 2004). Due to this, students of this age miss the unique opportunity to be introduced to the sociological imagination; at the same time, a distorted image of sociology is being reproduced in the society.

In this paper we present the results of a study that examines how and why education produces a false image of the science of sociology. The context of the study is the Greek secondary education that is among the few cases where sociology is being taught as an individual course. In order to reveal what specific interpretation of sociology is being reproduced, we need to examine the structure of the transmission of the school knowledge in general, and of the sociological knowledge in particular. For that purpose, a systematic examination was undertaken regarding the aims and the content of the sociology curriculum, and the perceptions and teaching techniques of the sociology teacher. The above issues were examined in view of an important element, sociology's special nature as a science. Sociology has some unique features that differentiate it from other sciences; we assume that these features are involved in the structure and teaching of the school subject. To our knowledge school sociology has not been examined from this point of view. Most of the studies have been focused on the status of this course and the teachers' preparation. Here we attempt to go beyond these analyses focusing on the inner logic of high school sociology; that is, on the logic that is embedded in the content, the objectives, and in the teaching of the sociology course.

The remainder of the paper is set out as follows: In the next section we discuss about the status of sociology course in several secondary education curricula and particularly, in the Greek secondary curriculum. In section three we discuss about the formation of school sciences and the epistemological assumptions underlying knowledge transmission in school. We also, discuss about sociology's special nature as the science, as it is involved into the formation of the sociology course. In section four we present the methodology of the study of high school sociology in Greece. The aim of the study was to reveal what specific interpretation of sociology is being

reproduced through education. For that purpose we analyzed the Greek sociology curriculum and teacher with regard to the way they use and perceive sociology's special nature. The results of the study are given in section five, and reveal that high school course is full of misconceptions about sociology as it is presented as an everyday and easy science that deals mostly with social problems. The final section six is devoted to some conclusions.

Sociology: A Downgraded School Subject

A closer look at the secondary education curricula in several countries worldwide¹ shows that sociology rarely exists as an individual subject. In the most cases, it is integrated into the subject of social studies. This indicates that sociology is not considered to be a significant area of knowledge. Indeed, relevant studies focus on sociology's marginalization in school. In the United States for example, where sociology has been taught in secondary education for many years, surveys reveal that it is one of the most downgraded courses mainly due to the dominance of other social studies subjects (i.e. history and civics), the unsuitable textbooks, and the teachers' inadequate preparation (see for example, Lashbrook 2001, Brown 1999, Rienarth et al. 1998, Roberts and Piker-King 1995, Short and Matlock 1982, among others). Other surveys that focus on sociology in colleges, where it is being taught as an introductory course, disclose that college teachers are also inadequately prepared, and that academic sociologists present sociological knowledge in a philosophical and abstract way that is difficult to connect with the real world. They also disclose that sociology curriculum is dominated by a positivistic logic and quantitative approach. Because of all these problems, many scholars focus their efforts on finding ways to improve the teaching of sociology. The methods they propose involve the use of technology, service learning, and literature, poetry, music, etc., as pedagogic tools (see for example, Misra 2000, Eitzen et al. 1999, Ault 1996, Eckstein et al. 1995, among others).

In Europe, the majority of the secondary education curricula (either at the lower or at the upper secondary level) include the subject areas of *social studies* or *social sciences* that mainly consist of the courses of civics, history, and geography, while gradually they encompass the courses of economics and political science. Greece, Malta, and Slovenia are the only European countries where sociology is part of the upper secondary level curriculum. In addition, there are courses in other secondary curricula where their title implies the science of sociology (i.e. *Human being and Society* (Romania), *The world and individual* (Bulgaria), *Man and society* (Bulgaria, Hungary)). It is notable that even though sociology is basically absent, a closer look at social studies subjects reveals an interesting finding: sociological knowledge is used in the formation of these subjects which, furthermore, intend to promote citizenship education. In Germany for example, where civics is an compulsory subject throughout compulsory education, it is stated that the course's aim is "to provide students with an understanding of: the structural and institutional aspects of

a democratic society at the local, regional and national level; the interrelationship of the various sectors of society; and the relevance of social/civic policy-making for the individual and society as a whole. It is also intended to enable students to take effective actions and make decisions as responsible citizens and to be conscious of their rights and duties as a member of society, as a citizen of the state and as a member of the community".²

As we have mentioned above, Greece is among the few (European) countries where sociology is taught as a subject in its own right. It is remarkable however, that even though it is a relatively new school subject, it became very soon, one of the most downgraded high school courses. More specifically, sociology has been taught for no more than twenty-four years in the 3rd grade of *Lykeio*—the last (12th) grade of the upper secondary education—and only to a specific group of the 12th graders. During all this time the course has been undergone several changes in regards to, the syllabus, the textbooks,³ the status as an optional or compulsory subject, the status at national exams for university admission,⁴ and the sociology teachers' specialties.

More specifically, sociology's introduction into the high school curriculum in 1982 was regarded as a very progressive movement. The aim was to establish sociology as a scientific field and as a basic high school course. This was reflected by the fact that, during this first period, sociology was part of the national exams for university admission. The first textbook was also, consistent with this logic; it was written by academic sociologists in a scholarly way. Ten years later, however, sociology was permanently removed from the national exams. As a consequence students lost interest for the sociology course. The course's objectives also, were stated as follows: it would inform students about various social problems and spur them towards being involved in their solution. The new textbook reflected these changes. It was an easy book, written by a non-sociologist who used simple language and a plethora of examples from students' everyday lives. In the school year 1998/99, a new educational policy was adopted that designated sociology as an optional subject. This new status landed it almost in obscurity since very few students chose it. The textbook was similar to the second one; it used simple language without any complicated structure. The years that followed, sociology was again to become a compulsory subject. Finally, in the school year 2001/02, it became compulsory for all students of 12th grade but this latest adaptation has made no difference in regards to the course's status.

Another aspect of sociology course in Greece is the variety of the sociology teachers' specialties. Initially, literature specialists almost exclusively taught sociology due to the lack of sociologists; there were no graduates until 1984, and there was only one sociology department at that time. That many sociology teachers, up till now, are not sociologists—most of them have majored in economics, literature, political sciences, marketing, and law—makes students think of sociology as a subject of little importance; and this intensifies the flux and the vagueness that characterizes the

history of high school sociology in Greece.

Overall, these numerous changes have created misconceptions about sociology, and doubts regarding its value as a school subject. The few relevant studies in Greece, were concerned with these problems, and they stressed the need for changes in the curriculum and in teachers' training (Kouzelis 1991b, 1996a, 1997; Kasimati 1985).

One of the most expansive analyses on high school sociology is M. DeCesare's (2004) who studied the condition of this course since it was first introduced to the USA curriculum. He revealed, among other things, the absence of scientific sociology in the high school classroom and the lack of agreement between teachers and academic sociologists about the proper approach. It came out that the dominant approach that was advocated mostly by teachers and less by academic sociologists is the following. *The main objective of high school sociology is, or should be, the promotion of citizenship education and the development of good citizens; its content should be dealing with social problems and current events that are more interesting and relevant to students.* As we will see later on, these results are similar to ours. That we derive similar conclusions, even though these refer to different educational environments, indicates that there are some crucial common aspects underlying the introduction of sociology, regardless of the educational context. A basic assumption of our study is that those aspects are related to the structure of the educational system as regards the transmission of knowledge in general, and of the sociological knowledge in particular.

The Structure Of Knowledge Transmission In Education

The New Sociology of Education (NSOE) that developed mostly during the '70s in Europe and the United States emerged as a critique to the empirical/analytical tradition in the sociology of education where the focus was on patterns of educational opportunity and social mobility within industrial democracy. That is, on the relationships between social origins and educational achievement. NSOE's focus was on the processes of educational transmission. The emphasis was given on the school curriculum, on what was going on inside the 'black box'. The relevant studies—even though from different methodological perspectives (neo-Marxism, interactionism and the sociology of knowledge)—perceived the school curriculum as an organized and standardized reflection of social and ideological interests and beliefs; thus, the curriculum was conceived as a socio-political construction (Ball 2004). Our interest in these theories derives specifically, from their focus on the structure of (scientific) knowledge transference.

There is no doubt that any science that is going to be part of a school curriculum has to be formed in such way so as to be coherent and accessible to the students. This is a necessary process because scientific knowledge is going to be used in a different cognitive context—school—that has different discourse (as regards logic, structure, language, functionality and purpose). This process is called

recontextualization⁵ process and it involves the selection, simplification, condensation and reorganization of scientific knowledge in order to be appropriate for the context of education; moreover, it involves the interference of (the dominant) ideology. As a result, the formed school subjects do not correspond precisely to the sciences they derive from; they are transformed science discourses. In other words, there is a distance between what students are taught about a specific science and what that science really says (Singh 2002, Bernstein 1996).

Two factors are mainly involved in the selection and the organization of what is to be acquired: the dominant science curriculum and the science teacher. These factors reflect the official educational policy. More specifically: Educational policy makers, textbook authors⁶, editors, and formal educational institutions are involved in the construction of the curriculum, and they create what is called the formal recontextualization field. The agents of this field make the choices of, content, sequence, evaluation, learning processes, and objectives of the school subject matter; in other words, they set the dominant teaching/learning model. In regard to the teachers, their work occurs in the informal recontextualization field. They take the knowledge already formed by the curriculum and recontextualize it for a second time, according to their epistemological and teaching assumptions. Despite the dominance of the curriculum, teachers' special importance is that they are the final mediators between the knowledge and the student.

According to theories in the field of Pedagogy, there are three types of knowledge that are involved during the process of knowledge transmission: the scientific knowledge, the school knowledge, and students' everyday knowledge (Koulaidis and Kouzelis 1990). Students' knowledge of a subject, which derives from their everyday lives and experiences, plays a crucial role in the process of science teaching and learning. More particular it is considered that students' common sense and prior ideas concerning their social and physical world should not be excluded from the teaching process; it is some knowledge extremely useful, functional, and above all, irreplaceable (see for example, Akerson et al. 2000, Jones et al. 1999, Johnson and Gott 1996, among others). The question is how this knowledge is being used in education. Studies have shown that the dominant teaching/learning model embedded in science curriculum is the one that advocates the improvement⁷ of students' prior knowledge. The principles of this model are derived from positivism, the empirical-inductive model of science. The teaching practices that are associated with this model are usually based on the simplification of the science knowledge and the generalization of the students' everyday knowledge. This kind of practices does not allow the development of specific skills such as critical analysis, abstract thought, or awareness of contradictions (Kouzelis 1991a, 1995). Relevant studies on the teachers' epistemological perceptions reveal that they also tend to promote a positivistic scientism, and consequently a simplistic empiricism (see for example, Mellado 1998, Southerland and Gess-Newsome 1999, Hashweh 1996, among others). These perceptions are a result of the teachers' own school lives, during which they have been socialized into epistemological models like the above, the

influence of what is referred to, as “everyday epistemology”, that is, public’s “spontaneous” perceptions and ideas regarding science (Kouzellis 1996a), where, again, a positivistic aspect is dominant. Furthermore, of how they have been taught their discipline in colleges and universities, that is, the influence of higher education curriculum and professors.

Overall, every school science, due to the recontextualization process, is formulated to a school course that its content is a simplified, compressed, reorganized, aspect of the science it derives from. Additionally, both curriculum and teacher’s discourse are dominated by the positivistic logic and the quantitative approach that promotes an unsophisticated use of students’ common sense and everyday knowledge. Our concern is to see how the above dominant model of knowledge transmission is applied to a knowledge—the sociological one—that deals with social relationships and interactions that are not always countable or permanent as the subjects of other sciences are; in other words, sociology is not a typical or “hard” science. Indeed, sociology has some unique features/particularities that distinguish it from the other sciences, especially from physical/natural sciences, and are related to the special nature of its subject, methodology, and objectives (Kouzellis 1996). These features are: i. the special relationship that seems to exist between sociology and everyday knowledge about society (common sense). The two cognitive contexts seem to be alike, as they share a similar language and are interested in the same issues. ii. The coexistence of several contradictory interpretations and theories concerning the same social issues (“multi-paradigmatic” character), and iii. Sociology’s dual nature, as scientific on one hand but devoted to the reforming of social ills on the other (DeCesare 2004:77).

4. The Study Of The Greek Sociology Curriculum And Teacher

The basic question of the study was how sociology’s special nature is being perceived and used by an educational system that uses knowledge as we have already described. For that purpose, we set three issues which intent to examine each and every one of the three particularities of the sociological discourse, on the context of the dominant model of knowledge transmission. These issues were set as follows:

- i.** The use of students’ everyday knowledge dominates the teaching process—regardless of the school subject. Based on that, it is important to examine how students’ everyday knowledge about society is being used during sociology teaching, considering that this knowledge is thought to be extremely close to the sociological discourse.
- ii.** Education, in general, advocates (social) consensus; social and physical studies curricula promote the idea of consensus in science while there is total absent of elements like argument and contradictions (Apple 1990). Based on

that, it is important to see how sociology's "multi-paradigmatic" character is being presented during sociology teaching.

iii. The existence of a practical sociological discourse promotes the idea that the only purpose of this science is to solve social problems in an effective way; otherwise it is a merely theoretical and useless discipline. The question is whether school sociology promotes this perception of sociology as a 'social reform' being related to one of the main educational goals, the citizenship education.

Our assumption is that because of the school logic as regards knowledge transmission, sociology's particularities are being perceived and used in such way that the school subject is something more like a distorted discourse. Based on the above assumption, we formulate the following hypothesis: *The sociology curriculum and sociology teacher use and perceive sociology's particularities in such a way that a specific interpretation of this science is being created. This interpretation is full of misconceptions about the sociological discourse, as regards its relationship with the everyday discourse, its "multi-paradigmatic" character, and its dual nature as scientific and 'social reform'. Thus, the two factors co-form a course that is far from the sociological discourse, lessening its potential to provide the students with a different perspective of their experienced world.*

The above hypothesis was examined through an analysis of the Greek sociology curriculum and teacher during school year 1997/98. In regard to the sociology curriculum, we examined five components: The textbook, the teaching instructions, the timetable, the course's status in the national exams for university admission, and the sociology teachers' specialties. Regarding the last three components, the following were in effect at the time of the study: The course had been taught two hours per week, instead of four as it was at the beginning of its introduction to high school. It was compulsory only to a specific group of 12th graders and it had been excluded from the national entrance exams five years earlier. Finally, a large part of sociology teachers had no-or limited-knowledge of sociology since they had majored in economics, political sciences, marketing, law, or literature. Due to all these reasons, the course was downgraded. With regards to the first two components we analyzed the sociology textbook and the teaching instructions in effect at the time of the study, in order to reveal the underlying logic of the sociology curriculum. The results are given in the next section.

In relation to the sociology teachers, an empirical survey was conducted using a questionnaire. The 35 questions aimed to reveal teachers' perceptions about the science of sociology, as well as their perceptions about the content, teaching, and objectives of high school sociology. In the questionnaire, we used a combination of check-off responses and short, open-ended questions. For the statistical analysis of the data, we used the statistical package SPSS in order to create frequency tables and crosstabs. The survey population consisted of all sociology teachers of the Athens Prefecture public high schools (203 teachers). The area of Athens was

chosen because of the considerable proportion of sociology teachers (about 20% of the national total). The majority of those teachers (52.2%) had majored in economics, political science, marketing, law, and literature. The findings are referring to all the survey teachers regardless of their specialty, since—surprisingly—there were no strong indicators that their perceptions were affected by it.

Findings

When the studies of the Greek sociology curriculum and Greek sociology teacher were analyzed and examined in light of each other, three main findings emerged. The findings reveal how the sociology curriculum addresses and the teacher perceives and uses sociology's particularities, that is, the relationship between sociological and everyday discourse (i), the “multi-paradigmatic” character of sociology (ii), and the perception of sociology as ‘social reform’ (iii). Below we will describe each of these main findings, with reference to the curriculum analysis and the survey of teachers. It is crucial to consider that at the time of the survey, the course was extremely downgraded due to the reasons we have mentioned above.

(i). “There is no difference between sociological discourse and everyday knowledge about society”

The research revealed that both the sociology curriculum (textbook and teaching instructions) and the teachers reinforced the above misconception. This occurred through a non-elaborated use of the students' common knowledge of society. Due to this, students got the impression that sociology was nothing more than just well articulated everyday opinions and beliefs about society, and therefore, there was no substantial difference between the science of sociology and what they already knew from their personal experiences as social individuals. This pattern recurred in both curriculum logic and teacher perceptions. More specifically:

The above pattern was apparent in the textbook that was being used, the “Simple Lessons of Sociology”, which additionally, was written by a non-sociologist. As we mentioned in section two, the first prescribed textbook was written by academic sociologists. That book was considered to be very difficult for the students of this age who had not been introduced to the science of sociology before. It was reasonable therefore, for the education policy makers, to prescribe another, more comprehensible book. The difference, however, between the two textbooks was enormous—it was like the education officials wanted to introduce a different course. The use of the word “simple” in the title of the textbook indicates that the lessons would be based on issues familiar to the students and not on a complicated, abstract scientific discourse. This discloses the logic of the curriculum, which was to introduce the sociology course and subsequently, the science of sociology, as easy and undemanding. Additionally, the content of the textbook almost entirely concerned sociology's basic issues; there were only two chapters, at the end of the

book, which presented the science of sociology and its methodology.⁸ Almost every section began with an example from students' everyday lives, while overall, the textbook used simple language and a plethora of such examples. Phrases like the following were used very often: "*according to the common sense*", "*let's give an example*", "*we are all aware of...*". Those examples, even though they were presented as different knowledge form the sociological, they were not given under a re-constructive logic. That is, they should be re-set, after the sociological perspective had been presented, so as students to see them differently, and to add a new point of view to their already existing knowledge.

As regards the teaching instructions, they are indeed very illuminating on the issue we are discussing here. First of all, it was clearly stated that "*the official policy on high school sociology was to, progressively, simplify the sociology curriculum*". At another part of the instructions it was stated "*the textbook is easy because it uses a simple language*". With these statements the authors of the instructions justified the selection of the specific textbook and made their intentions clear on how to introduce sociology: as simply as possible. In regards to the basic teaching principles, the following were stated: "*the starting point of the teaching should be the topics, not the science of sociology*", "*sociology should be taught on the basis of the students' empirical, everyday knowledge, regardless of its difference to the scientific knowledge*". The authors justified this by stating that, "*the students are not mature enough to understand this science; this is going to happen gradually*". Moreover, the authors suggested "*the use of examples from the Greek society, which are familiar to the students*". Indeed, the content of the textbook was consistent with this aspect. At another part of the instructions the teachers were urged "*to use their own experiences and knowledge from their everyday lives, during sociology classes*". Thus, teachers were explicitly encouraged not only to use students' everyday experiences but also their own everyday knowledge about society, and their own experiences.

From all the above we conclude that through the sociology curriculum was promoted an oversimplified version of sociology; and this was stated in a very explicit and clear way. The emphasis on the necessity of using the everyday discourse, along with the lack of instructions on how to use it, revealed the underlying logic of the curriculum, that **sociological and everyday discourse are too similar to be organized a transition from the latter to the former**. Let us now proceed to how the survey sociology teachers perceived and used everyday discourse.

As it came out, sociology teachers were also involved in perpetrating the above logic. More specifically, regarding their perceptions of the relationship between everyday and sociological discourse, it came out that they perceived these two discourses as very close to each other. This conclusion derived from the following findings: The teachers were asked if high school sociology was an easy or difficult course. 43.1% answered that it was easy and 56.9% that it was difficult. Quite interesting are the

reasons the teachers' gave to justify sociology's ease or difficulty. The teachers, who answered that the course was easy, are distributed as follows with regard to the reasons: 50.0% chose as a reason that *the students are familiar with sociology's subject*; 32.1%, that *the social sciences, in general, do not demand the specialized knowledge the other sciences do*; and 17.9%, that *the textbook is a good introductory book*. In other words, these teachers believe that sociology is easy because of its close relation to the students' already existed knowledge and common sense. The same conclusion derives from the teachers' justifications concerning sociology's difficulty. Only 16.5% chose as a reason *sociology's subject and terminology*; the majority chose as reasons the *unsuitable textbook* (69.5%) and the *lack of previous teaching experience* (14.0%). From the above, we conclude that regardless of the teachers' opinion on the ease or difficulty of the school course, the vast majority considers sociology an easy science due to the similarity between sociological and everyday knowledge. Therefore, the dominant teachers' perception is that there is a close relationship between the two discourses.

How does the above teachers' perception affect the teaching of sociology? To begin with, as the findings revealed, the teachers use students' prior knowledge on society frequently. In particular, when they were asked how often they were using examples from everyday life, all but one answered that they were using them *very often* or *often*. Moreover, when they were asked to comment on whether the examples of students' everyday lives should be increased, decreased or stay as they were during sociology teaching, 87.5% answered that they should be increased, 8.9%, to stay as they were, and only 3.6%, to be decreased. At another question where they were asked to grade the textbook in respect of how close its content was to students' experiences, they graded it very low (5.2 out of 10). What is interesting about this finding is that the specific textbook, as we have mentioned, was written under this perspective as it was full of examples from everyday life. This indicates how much the teachers based their teaching on the everyday discourse—more than what the curriculum imposes. The following findings provide a reasonable explanation for this: 73.3% and 75.5% respectively, agreed with the statements: "*it's more **useful** to talk about issues that are familiar to the students, instead of using complicated terminology*" and "*the similarity between the sociological terms and the everyday expressions **facilitates** the teaching of sociology*".

From all the above we conclude that the survey teachers use everyday discourse on society very often during sociology teaching, mainly because they believe that its similarity to the sociological discourse is a useful tool to approach social matters. The question is how exactly they used the student's discourse. As it came out, only 30.9% were using it with the intention *to reveal the difference between the two discourses*. The majority (68.9%) chose that they were *generalizing it in order to end up in the sociological knowledge*. Finally, another outcome that indicates how valuable the everyday discourse was for the survey teachers is the following: 96.0% agreed with the statement "*a socially informed student performs better in sociology class*"; from those teachers 90.6% believed that this performance was apparent

during class discussions. This shows how highly teachers validated the teaching technique of discussion since they used it very often and they wanted students' opinions on various matters. But, while teachers seemed to demonstrate certain interest and respect for students' thinking, they did not demand well-reasoned arguments—quite the opposite, in fact. They let children voice their opinions without encouraging analytical exploration of their ideas. As one of the teachers mentioned, “... *we came to our own conclusions—actually, the children did, and they liked it very much*”. Overall, for the survey teachers, the existence of students' everyday knowledge was considered to be the basis for sociology teaching. What is crucial though, is that most of the time they seem to use this knowledge uncritically. They did not very often move beyond superficial discussions; on the contrary, they moved without elaboration from everyday to sociological knowledge and vice versa.

In conclusion, everyday knowledge was the backbone of most sociology classes. As a result, the idea of similarity was reproduced. Sociology teaching was characterized by the uncritical use of everyday knowledge, without the intention (on behalf of the curriculum-planners and the teacher) of using the analytical tools of sociology in order to help students comprehend their social world.

(ii). “Sociology consists of several different and contradictory theories, which makes it less reliable and valid; it would be better not to reveal this conflict to the students”

The research revealed that both the sociology curriculum and the teacher reproduce the above idea. Generally, education, due to the dominance of the positivistic epistemology, has a negative definition of the sciences' “multi-paradigmatic” character and promotes (social) consensus instead. School sociology in terms of its curriculum is not an exception to the above logic; on the contrary, a certain perception related to this, is that this coexistence is a transitional period and that eventually sociology is going to be unified in one theory. More specifically:

The above logic was apparent in the textbook, where there was a tendency to present one definition for various sociological terms regardless of the differences that exist between the sociological schools of thoughts. Even though the textbook had some references to the sociological theories, their presentation was far from reflecting the “multi-paradigmatic” character of sociology, and therefore, it was far from sociology itself. As we have mentioned above, there were only two chapters at the end of the book, which concerned the science of sociology and its methodology. We quote some phrases from the textbook, which show how valuable it was for promoting the (sociology) curriculum logic, the idea of consensus. In regard to definitions of *society* it purported: “*Be careful! Many times there are contradictory definitions*”. The following phrase implies that sociology is going through a period, and that eventually all the different theories will unify: “*Nevertheless, despite the lack of consensus, generally most of the sociologists agreed that in modern*

societies...”. The textbook also contained phrases that implied a positive appraisal of social consensus: “*If things go on properly, society will continue to exist. Life would be unbearable for anyone who would attempt not to obey the social rules*”. Although it was mentioned that different sociological schools had different definitions and that these definitions should be opened to any critique, there was a hidden tendency of diffusing the idea of consensus in sociology and in society in general. Therefore, the textbook provided limited enlightenment of the variety of the sociological discourse, which is the essence of this science. There was also a tendency to present sociology under the positivistic perspective (to which some aspects of the functionalistic theory are related): “*Sociology does not make evaluations... does not oppose against or for a certain value. For the calm and composed researcher-sociologist, all values are legitimate, as they are part of his study...*”. Elsewhere, *society* was defined from the functionalistic perspective that, overall, was predominant in the textbook: “*We all agree that society is an organization; that is, it is an organized whole, a system that is characterized, like any other system, by the structure and its functions*”. It seems therefore, that sociology was being introduced mostly, from a functionalistic perspective; that is, from a macro-sociological, a positivistic and naturalistic point of view. There was—implicitly and explicitly—an emphasis on the objectivity-seeking, the quantitative methodology, and the production of fact-like conclusions and law-like generalizations about human behavior and social interaction. The absence of any reference to sociology’s “multi-paradigmatic” character in the teaching instructions was also a strong indicator of the curriculum’s aspect. The authors, as we have mentioned, were concerned mostly with urging the teachers to use their own, as well as the students’ everyday knowledge and experiences, and to give emphasis on the topics, not the science of sociology. That left no room for statements on the necessity of using the sociological discourse(s).

In regard to how the survey teachers perceived and used sociology’s “multi-paradigmatic” character, the findings revealed some vagueness in their discourse. More specifically, 66.7% of the teachers perceived this characteristic as *intrinsic to sociology*, 21.8%, as *a temporal period that ultimately will result in a unified sociological theory*, and 11.5%, as *undesirable but unavoidable*. Therefore, for the majority of the survey teachers, it was—one way or another—a permanent characteristic. When they were asked about the reasons for its existence, 71.4% of the teachers chose *the different ideologies of sociologists*. (The remaining chose as reasons the *different societies that are under study* (23.6%) and the *different methodologies* (4.9%)). The teachers thus, believe that the variety in the sociological discourse is mostly, the result of the lack of objectivity in sociologists’ work.

The vagueness of the teachers’ discourse is also revealed when they were asked about the teaching of the “multi-paradigmatic” character of sociology. More specifically, while 88.7% of the teachers considered its teaching *important*, when this characteristic was presented through the concept of ‘conflict’, they seemed to be against its teaching. In particular, in the question “*do you think the references to*

sociology's conflicts should be increased, decreased, or stay as they are in the content of the course?", (we should not forget that this kind of references were already limited by the curriculum), 56.1% chose, to *stay as they are*, 14.4%, to *be decreased*, and the remaining 29.4%, to *be increased*. In other words, the teachers did not seem to be certain if it was suitable to teach conflict to children. Moreover, when they were asked to choose the appropriate content of the course, they answered as follows: *social problems* (46.9%), **critical presentation of the sociological theories (19.8%)**, *sociology's terminology* (15.6%), **sociological theories (12.5%)**, and *the history of sociology* (5.2%). These results indicate the extent to which perceptions that support the idea of consensus have become part of the consciousness of teachers, since only the one third (32.3%) chose answers that were related to the "multi-paradigmatic" nature of sociology.

In conclusion, the sociology curriculum and sociology teacher promoted the logic of consensus, by limiting the references to and the teaching of the sociological theories and methodologies and by de-emphasizing the importance of the diversity of the sociological way of thinking.

(iii). "A part of sociology's discourse has a practical aspect that is focused on finding solutions to social problems; inform students about these social problems and spurring them into being involved in their solution is the best way to present sociology and to promote citizenship"

The study revealed that both the sociology curriculum and teacher reinforced the above perception. In this sense, the school subject undertakes a very specific role: to socialize the students, enhance their social sensibility, and promote the ideals of citizenship and civic competence as well. More specifically:

With relation to the textbook, we observed that the majority of the referred examples were related to problematic social situations, while overall its content, as we have mentioned above, was based on the presentation of social issues and problems that are familiar and relevant to the students. In this sense, social problems were presented as one of sociology's basic concerns. Moreover, the frequent references to the functionalistic theory that embodies a practical discourse strengthened the above perception. Therefore, the perception of sociology as 'social reform' was cultivated through the textbook.

In the part of the instructions, which referred to the objectives of the sociology course, the following were stated: "*High school sociology helps students accomplish a simple entry in the society. It regulates their social behavior, which is regarded as indispensable for the social security and productivity of the young person. It, also, helps them to readjust to the chaotic industrial society in which the heterogeneity, inconstancy, and vagueness cause internal conflicts that result in the growth of marginal ideologies and the disorganization of the social foundation*". In other words, sociology helps students become sensitive and responsive citizens who will work to

preserve the society as such. The presence of alternative ways of living, are considered to be disturbing and undesirable. Further down, the authors stated that, “*the course promotes critical thinking by sharpening students’ awareness of their social world and their ability to understand their reality*”. But when it came to the instructions about the evaluation criteria, there was a contradiction that revealed the real intentions of the authors. In particular, the authors instructed the teachers “*to base the exams strictly on the textbook. The questions should test students’ ability to rephrase the text, and to extract its main ideas and points. The questions that demand knowledgeable combinations and judgments should be limited*”. This contradicts the reported objectives, since it is mostly the latter group of questions, which the authors did not consider very important, that could promote students’ critical thinking. What we usually get from the first group of questions is a fruitless repetition, making the promotion of the curriculum’s objectives easier. Overall, what was clearly manifested and cultivated by the sociology curriculum was the promotion of citizenship education through a problem-solving approach.

Sociology teachers also appeared to reinforce the above perception of the objectives of this course. More specifically, the majority of the teachers surveyed agreed with the following statements: “*high school sociology should focus on students’ sensitization to social issues, and on their citizenship education*” (96%), “*a socially informed student performs better in the sociology course*” (96%), “*social sciences, more than the other school science, need sensitized teachers*” (81%). Moreover, as we have mentioned above the majority of the teachers chose as an appropriate content for the sociology course, *the presentation of the social problems*. All these findings indicate how strong the following perception was to our survey population: Sociology’s topic is mainly social problems, troubles, ills, etc. Thus, the objective of sociology course should be not only to inform students about various social problems and spur them into being involved in their solution, but to enhance their social sensibility, and promote the ideals of citizenship and civic competence as well.

Discussion

From all the above findings it is concluded that the survey teachers’ discourse on sociology’s content, teaching, and objectives complied with the curriculum logic—even though, occasionally, they used different criteria and had different motives.⁹ Both these factors created a course that was not relevant to the science of sociology. This was realized using sociology’s particularities in a specific way, by emphasizing or de-emphasizing them. More specific, there was emphasis on the similarity between everyday and sociological knowledge, and on the idea of sociology as a ‘social reform’. This justified the use of the everyday discourse during sociology teaching, the use of the social issue/problem approach in the content of the course, and the promotion of citizenship education. At the same time, the diversity in

sociology, which is the essence of this science, was de-emphasized by limiting the references to its “multi-paradigmatic” character. This furthered the distance between sociology and students. All in all, a specific interpretation of sociology was being reproduced, which presented it as an everyday and easy science that deals mostly with social problems and their solution.

We strongly believe that this is still the case regarding high school sociology in Greece, since nothing has been done to indicate the contrary. High school sociology is still a misinterpreted high school course of low status. It is not, therefore, excessive to say that, what is being taught in Greek secondary education as sociology is far from this science. What is more crucial is the assumption that this seems to be the case in different educational environments. Our belief is that this similarity is due to the underlying logic of education in general: education—among other things—has been structured to maintain and reproduce the social order. Thus, a different mentality in sociology’s introduction would contradict the inner logic of school itself.

Does this mean that sociology has no place at school? If the course’s structure and teaching remains the same, there is no point of keeping ‘sociology’ in its title. But if we want students to be introduced to this discourse, we should try to find ways to make the existing courses meaningful and efficient. Since the inner logic of education is almost impossible to change, it is the sociology teacher we should focus on. The sociology teacher—like any other teacher—is the one that can make the difference, as she/he is the final medium between curriculum’s knowledge and students. A study of the sociology university departments could illuminate the reasons the teachers present sociology the way they do. This knowledge could be a useful tool so as to suggest ways the teachers could, either change the teaching conditions of this discipline, or at least, restrict the obstacles that are set by the curriculum, presenting sociology in a way that is closer to the sociological imagination. This is an issue we hope to report on in future work.

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¹ Information about the secondary curriculum subjects of several European, N. American and Asian countries can be found in the following sites: [Hwww.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)H and [Hwww.inca.org.uk](http://www.inca.org.uk)H

² German Unit of the EURYDICE information network on education in Europe, 2002. ([Hwww.inca.org.uk /1431.html](http://www.inca.org.uk/1431.html)H). The use of sociological knowledge for the formation of other subjects is an interesting issue that needs further study.

³ In Greece there is only one textbook per subject, which is prescribed (written and distributed by the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religion).

⁴ Public higher education is divided into Universities and Technological Education Institutes. Students are admitted to these Institutes according to their performance at national level examinations taking place at the third grade of *Lykeio* (12th grade). The 3rd graders are separated into groups and tested at a specific set of courses. These courses are overvalued since they are the only access for the public Greek higher education.

⁵ The term recontextualization refers to the process of knowledge transmission from the primary context of its production (science) to the secondary context of its reproduction

(education).

⁶ One of the most important aspects of this field is the textbook as it is “that one artifact that plays such a major role in defining whose culture is taught”. The textbooks are the realization of curriculum’s logic; that is, of specific group’s logic. They “...are at once the results of political, economic, and cultural activities, battles, and compromises. They are conceived, designed, and authored by real people with real interests”. Moreover, textbooks “...signify, through their content and form, particular constructions of reality, particular ways of selecting and organizing the vast universe of possible knowledge” (Apple 2002)

⁷ The model of “improvement” is based on two principles: a. the most general ideas of a subject should be presented first and then progressively differentiated in terms of detail and specificity. b. Instructional materials should attempt to integrate new material with previously presented information through comparisons and cross-referencing of new and old ideas (Kouzelis 1991a).

⁸ The fourteen chapters of the textbook were the following: 1. Introduction: The social aspect of our lives. 2. Modern society. 3. Society and Culture. 4. Ideology. 5. Socialization. 6. Social rules-values-control. 7. Social adjustment. 8. Social groups. 9. Social inequality and social class. 10. Social institutions. 11. The evolution of European society. 12. 20th century’s societies. 13. Conclusion: What is sociology. 14. Sociological research.

⁹ In some cases, the sociology teachers seem to promote—more than the curriculum does—certain misconceptions. We believe that their need to enhance their students’ interest, on a downgraded course, could have affected their perceptions on how and why to teach sociology.