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Teaching Economics Among Other Social Sciences? The Issue of Pluralism in the Struggles Surrounding the Economic and Social Sciences Curricula in the French High School since 1967

- A comprehensive presentation of Economic and Social Sciences education in France and its evolutions.
- A detailed examination of the different controversies raised by this interdisciplinary teaching.
- An analysis of the curricula evolutions and of their epistemological and political stakes.
- A case analysis suggesting that the issue of pluralism in economics implies the definition of its very nature.

Purpose: This article aims at presenting the original design of the teaching of Economic and Social Sciences (SES) in the French High School and at demonstrating that the issue of pluralism lies at the core of the various controversies surrounding it since its creation.

Approach: This article is based on more than 40 interviews with SES teachers and key personalities, on curricula and official reports analyses and on a ten years participating observation in the SES teachers professional association.

Findings: This text strives to display how the defence of pluralism has become a core issue to SES teachers, as a "mobilized group" as well as in their individual professional practices.

Research implications: Such statements may be deepened in two directions. The first consists in comparing the French situation to that in other countries as regards the teaching of economics and social sciences in high school. The second may imply to investigate deeper about teachers' training and practices about such issues.

Practical implications: The other aim of this text is raising debates about the objectives of teaching economics and social sciences in general in high school in a context where school is more and more committed to strengthening citizenship as well as preparing for higher education and professional life.

Keywords:

Economics, pluralism, France, high school, methods, social sciences, active pedagogy

1 Introduction

In 1967 a new subject was introduced in the French high school: "introduction to economic and social facts". This new teaching was created as part of a larger school reform conducted by the National Education Minister, Christian Fouchet. Soon renamed "Economic and Social Sciences" (*Sciences économiques et sociales* - SES), it was animated by a "desire to modernise the school and open it up to the contemporary world" (Chatel, 1993, p. 7). To do so, its designers chose to emphasize two dimensions: the first consists in overcoming the existing disciplinary divisions in the academic sphere through an entry by "objects". This means that each social phenomenon considered must be studied in its different dimensions (economic social, political, historical, etc.) by mobilizing the tools and knowledge established by the various social sciences - including economics. The second specificity lies in the primacy of an active pedagogy that favours studying documents and dialogue course rather than lecture and dictation. The study of social sciences - chief among

which is economics - means to build an intellectual posture, allowing students to question their own representations and those conveyed in their environment using methods, tools and knowledge established by researchers in the corresponding disciplines, not forgetting that, although one paradigm usually dominates at a given moment, all knowledge is provisional (Kuhn, 1962). The first programs in 1967 were accompanied by the following official instructions: "the originality of this teaching is undoubtedly to lead to the knowledge of our current societies and their mechanisms, to establish an uncertain secondary relationship between culture and economic and social realities. But this knowledge can only be gradually introduced: to ensure the development of an 'experimental' mind, these are the most reasonable objectives of this new discipline"¹ (MEN, 1967).

From the outset, the objectives of this teaching have oscillated between contributing to civic education and introducing scientific reasoning. The objectives set out in the preamble of the latest programs are stated in significant order: "to enable students to progressively appropriate the concepts, methods and essential problems of three social sciences", "to prepare students for the pursuit post-baccalaureate" and finally "to contribute to their civic education" (MEN, 2013). Although these three goals can by no means be considered as exclusive, a certain number of tensions emerge between them as shown by the almost uninterrupted controversies that SES teaching has raised since its creation.

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Indeed, despite these apparently consensual and “reasonable objectives”, this new discipline has soon been under several attacks aiming at its curricula. This article details the struggles for defining what could be considered as a “good” economics curriculum in high school, its main actors and their motivations. Its core thesis is that such struggles are actually inseparably epistemological, pedagogical and political and have decisively fostered the development of a school subject – not to say a specific “school culture” (Chervel, 1998)² – relatively autonomous from the academic fields it mobilizes. The specific culture, largely maintained by the SES teachers' association, rests on two important pillars: the crossing of disciplinary views on different problematic social phenomena and the use of active methods in the name of pluralism and civic education. Such slogans are ambiguous enough to gather around them the majority of teachers, but they do not extinguish debates and research into the best practices for addressing social inequalities in learning. Crossing an analysis of the curricular development until today and a comprehensive sociological perspective with active SES teachers, we will argue here that, beyond their concrete differences in practice, SES teachers are mainly found in defending the pluralism of epistemological approaches as well as that of methods because of their own socialization, which has led them to distance themselves from the economy as it had been taught to them at the University and because they are concerned above all with involving students in their teaching.

The materials supporting the following statements lie upon a ten years participatory observation among SES teachers – and especially in the bodies of the SES teachers association (APSES) –, including the regular reading of several mailing lists among this professional group; about forty semi-directive formal interviews with SES teachers from different backgrounds and generations in three French academic areas (Paris-Créteil-Versailles, Lyon and Lille)³ and with some of prominent figures of the history of the SES; completed by the study of different public and private archives concerning the discipline, including curricula and official reports, and of course a secondary analysis of the existing literature on this subject.

2 The introduction of SES and its constituent ambiguities

When SES were created, economy was already taught in high school since 1952 through a discipline then called Economic Techniques of Management (EMT), to which is dedicated a baccalaureate section⁴. But, while it is “implanted in technical education, taught by teachers of technical education, for students of technical education” (Chatel, 2015, p. 35), the new “Initiation to economic and social facts” teaching is intended for general education students, of higher social background. It is even quickly placed in the centre of a specific section among the five created in the new high school organization carried by the than Minister of Education Christian Fouchet in 1965.

This so-called “B” series comes directly between the A (letters) and C (exact sciences), conferring on the SES the status of a “third culture” alongside the literary and scientific ones⁵. This development did not come without some debate in the academic sphere, but governmental decisions were ultimately taken by the opponents of the status quo. One must keep in mind that, at that time, the school of the Annals founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre that pleaded for a “decompartmentalization” of the humanities and social sciences, enjoyed a considerable aura, starting with its leader Fernand Braudel.

The Minister of Education entrusts the task of setting up the new teaching to his closest collaborator, Charles Morazé. He recruits a geographer, Marcel Roncayolo, and an economy historian, Guy Palmade, to lead the work. The first coordinates the writing of the programs while the second is appointed dean of the general inspection of the discipline. Around them a commission, composed of researchers and “economic or political actors” representing the different academic disciplines covered by the SES is also gathered, with a certain concern for pluralism (but not for gender equality, or social diversity), as it includes figures as different as the sociologist then close to the workers' movement Alain Touraine the liberal economist Jean-Claude Casanova and the leader of the “second left” and future Prime Minister, Michel Rocard. However, they quickly agree on the primary objective beyond their differences: “to give a teaching of the modern world, of the world in which they found themselves - and not only of our industrialized world - to the young people who passed the *bac* [*calauréat*]; [...] to put them back in their time and not only in past historical epochs”, which is summed up by a slogan then in use in the group: “We must make them capable of reading *Le Monde*” (Marcel Roncayolo, interviewed on January 22, 2013). According to Marcel Roncayolo, the SES thus represented the “opposite of a professional education”, turned towards the acquisition of techniques and a profession for a short-term insertion in the “market” of work. The SES are then primarily addressed to a relatively small minority of students dedicated to long studies and therefore requiring above all a certain number of intellectual reflexes associated with a solid general culture⁶.

2.1 Mobilizing academic disciplines: between multi- and transdisciplinarity

In the changing society of the “Glorious Thirty” (Fourastié, 1979) – the three decades of strong economic growth and low unemployment rate in industrialized countries –, social sciences become more and more seen as indispensable to the luggage of the “honest man”. The SES thus adopt a “multi-transdisciplinarity”⁷ (Chatel, 1993) which aims to not only associate but truly integrate economics with the other social sciences thus allowing a “problem-object” to be studied in its multiple dimensions – economic, sociological, political, anthropological and historical – even though, from the very beginning, “economics dominates at all levels of class”

(*Ibid.*, p. 22). These objects must themselves echo as much as possible the problems of the time and the concerns of students. "Family", "population", "human needs and consumption", or "labour and economic activities" are some of the justifiable objects of such an integrative approach in the first programs. As the official instructions accompanying the 1967 programs further specify: "Economic and social education presupposes the knowledge of a vocabulary, of a limited number of rigorously defined concepts, as is necessary for elementary manipulation, reading the encrypted data and their graphical expression; in short, a language that should be familiar to students". But, they add immediately: "This language is difficult to define, because this teaching is different from other disciplines of second degree, as it corresponds to several academic disciplines with orders, concepts and methods of their own. But it would be dangerous to engage pupils in premature specialization, even though they do not possess the basic methods of working and thinking. The introduction to economic and social facts must, while responding to an obvious curiosity among students, facilitate the acquisition of these methods: critical observation, use of quantitative study, reading books and surveys ground "(MEN, 1967). It is therefore a clever mix between the description and analysis of current social phenomena on one hand and the transmission of knowledge and methods from the academic disciplines on the other. In any case, the hierarchy between these objectives is clearly affirmed by the same text: "It is therefore less a question of accumulating knowledge than of creating in pupils a certain intellectual attitude", further specifying that "the encyclopedism of facts is to banish. But it is necessary to establish a certain relativity of the phenomena, to take a certain measure of the distances, the differences, and, if necessary, of the permanences. Maybe to understand the mechanism of certain passages or mutations" (*Ibid.*).

2.2 Teaching intellectual methods before knowledges

Methodology plays a major role in this teaching: its first goal is to transmit to students rigorous methods of analysing and reasoning. But the teachers themselves are required to deploy strong educational know-how insofar as they have to work on social representations. Both of them, students and teachers, are actually asked to adopt the same posture: experimentation by the first programs. Students are thus invited to confront their direct observations, drawn from their own experience or aroused by the teacher, with indirect observations drawn from statistical or textual documents, which enables them, according to the official text, "to pass of the immediate environment, - point of useful but not exclusive application of this teaching - to a less close world" (MEN, 1967). For their part, the teachers are summoned to enrol in a "continuous pedagogical research", and to be attentive to their pedagogical progression while caring to respect a "gradation" from one class to another: "Gradation according to the themes but even more according to the more or less complex levels of description and analysis" (*Ibid.*). It is up to them, above all, to establish a

quasi-permanent dialogue, with and between the pupils, but also between them and the documents: "The very definition of this teaching does not make it possible to distinguish between a theoretical lecture and application exercises. On the contrary, it is desirable that in most cases the study of a theme should be based on a concrete analysis, a set of observations, a comparison of statistics or texts. The interest of this teaching is indeed to gradually clear rules of reasoning and analysis" (*Ibid.*). It is nevertheless pointed out to the teachers that they must be attentive to giving the "grids" of analysis, that is to say the tools of description and analysis that they do not necessarily have⁸, and that "the proposed themes do not lend themselves to this method as well". Still, "under these reservations", the Initiation to the economic and social facts demands "a constant exchange between teachers and students, between concrete data and notions, the teacher intervening at the" strategic points "to guide the students, to make up for their information or reasoning failures, to push them to go beyond superficial analyses, and to provide them with definitions, critical and indispensable schemas" (*Ibid.*). In sum, summarizes Marcel Roncayolo: for the students, "it is not a question of receiving a teaching, but of participating in it" (quoted interview). This original project does not, of course, presume actual practices of teachers at that time or today, the diversity of which too few field researches have unfortunately studied (Chatel, 1995a and b, Deauviau, 2009)⁹. However, to this day it continues to crystallize representations and debates around the teaching of the SES, which partly conceal certain issues, especially that of pluralism.

2.3 The first attacks from within the State apparatus

Despite all the efforts of its architects, this founding project never allures unanimity in favour of it. Oppositions have actually never stopped expressing since its very conception. The commission set up to develop this new teaching is indeed already divided by sharp disagreements between its members. Some professors of the faculty of economics or law as well as the representatives of the general inspection of Economic Techniques and Management write proposals for programs, making it a propaedeutic to university teaching focused on the transmission of tools and techniques – mathematical in particular –, then eliminating any other discipline but economics as it is taught in the University (Chatel, 2015, pp. 43-44 and 46). Nevertheless, these alternative projects are finally dismissed for the benefit of the "integrative social sciences" line defended by Charles Morazé himself. The first attacks against the SES thus actually came from within the State apparatus as soon as this new school subject was born. The Association of Philosophy Teachers especially launched an appeal to the government entitled "For the safeguarding of the philosophy class" asking for the burial of the project while asserting that their teaching already addressed the issues claimed by the SES. It was signed by several thousand people, including major intellectual personalities of the time such as Louis Althusser,

Françoise Dolto or Raymond Aron, but eventually failed after a close governmental arbitration (Chatel, 2015, p. 41). Opponents even could be found among the teachers recruited to teach the new subject and coming from EMT or History-Geography, who also considered that the new teaching threatened to take the "noblest part of their teaching" (Henri Lanta, former teacher and inspector of EMT who became one of the first teachers and general inspectors of SES, interviewed on December 20, 2012).

It can therefore be seen at this stage that the founding project does not lack ambitions, but also ambiguities. These lie in the objectives assigned to this new discipline, both in terms of the knowledge to be transmitted and the pedagogical methods to be implemented and the audiences for which it is intended. All these elements are probably largely due to a top-down definition of this discipline, and open the way to fierce controversy. However, the latter will encourage teachers themselves to take relative control of their teaching, both collectively and individually, which will crystallize into the demand for pluralism at different levels.

3 The never ending struggles for defining the "right" SES curricula and the construction of a specific SES culture

In 1979, the Prime Minister, Raymond Barre, also a university professor in economics, asked Joel Bourdin¹⁰, professor of economics and management at the University of Dakar, to conduct an audit of SES in preparation for a new reform of the high school system. In his report, Bourdin sharply criticized both the multi-disciplinarity and the active pedagogy and advocated the outright disappearance of the SES and the B series, which he qualified as "channel of reception for the rejections of the other series". These conclusions elicited considerable mobilization from SES teachers, coordinated in particular by their professional association, the APSES, created in 1971. It launched a two-day strike for all SES teachers and organized a national demonstration under the catchphrase of the "fight for an adjective" (the "social" in SES) in Paris on June 2, 1980, which ended at the Labour Exchange with a series of speeches by famous "constituent members" (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) who brought their "symbolic capital", as Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Attali, essayist and future personal adviser to President Mitterrand, Françoise Héritier or Edmond Malinvaud, Professor in economics at the Collège de France and former Director of the French National Statistical Institute, then particularly endowed with "scientific capital".

3.1 The transformation of SES teachers into a mobilized group

The then president of the APSES emphasizes the importance of the social capital shared by his colleagues, that is to say the resources related to the personal relations of ones and others knotted during their studies or their professional practice in particular - counting the son of the Prime Minister among his students, as well as an intensive solicitation of personalities with an important academic aura to sign their various petitions for the

defence of the SES¹¹. They particularly took care to solicit academics from different schools of thought by trying to convince them that the defence of SES also served their own interest (Robert Jammes, interviewed on December 9, 2011). This advocacy of pluralism at all scales can also be found in a series of about fifteen posters produced by APS-ES that teachers are invited to post in the classrooms and printed on tee-shirts that APSES constituents wear until today during their gatherings. There are represented different guardianship figures from the SES ranging from Pierre Bourdieu (exclaiming "SES, it's my habitus") and Karl Marx ("SES, it's capital") to Friedrich Von Hayek ("My freedom to think this is the SES") and Gary Becker ("SES for a better human capital"). Thus we can notice that this peculiar group has invented its own "protest action repertoire" (Tilly, 1986), and the 1980 demonstration still works as a "founding myth" that keeps the group of the SES teachers together alongside with the feeling of being under permanent attacks, much more than sharing a professional ideology about what to teach and how to teach it, exactly as other researchers have shown about local policy actors in France (Desage & Godard, 2005). Although most of the practising teachers are too young to have participated, I have often heard about the 1980 events in interviews or during the APSES meetings observed. One of the APSES leader exclaimed significantly during a meeting of the association's director committee¹²: "we are a social movement", what aroused the enthusiasm of many presents (Field notes, October 15, 2017). And indeed, the feeling of being a "besieged fortress" by various lobbies wanting to "denature" their discipline seems to contribute strongly to unifying the group of SES teachers around their association, the APSES, which to date brings together more than 2200 teachers among the approximately 5500 SES teachers in France. Not without irony, everything suggests that it is these attacks that have thus contributed to transforming an association initially created by the Inspectorate General to serve as a "transmission belt" (Robert Jammes, quoted interview) into a "mobilized group" to defend the autonomy of their teaching. Moreover, like any mobilization (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), this would not have been possible - and would not have lasted - without the existence of militant (teachers are one of the most unionized professions in France) and intellectual resources, which are directly related to the subject taught. All in all, one can argue that from this very moment, pluralism has become both an issue and an instrument in the struggle of SES teachers for their autonomy.

3.2 A progressive compartmentalization of mainstream economics in curricula

This mobilization gets enough echo for the Ministry of Education to set up a new commission including the president of the APSES but also Joel Bourdin himself. This one sees his previous report totally disavowed and the place of the SES is even strengthened, entering the common core of the 2nd class while an option is proposed to the pupils of the series A and C. The

commission also prepares the first programs revision that intervene in 1982. It also increases the place of the economy while emphasizing the macroeconomic scale and the "measurement of economic and social facts" on the theoretical analyses. From this date, the separation between the economic and sociological dimensions continues to grow while the historical dimension shrinks, even though the founders of the discipline held up to it (Chatel & Grosse, 2015, p. 37). Six years later, in 1988, the programs are again changed and for the first time make explicit reference to academic disciplines while the requirement to prepare students for higher studies is formulated (Chatel & Grosse, 2002, p. 132). It must be said that, at the same time, attacks against the discipline have not stopped and have even increased. At this time, some academic economists attack the "scientific" quality of SES in line with the Bourdin report (Chatel & Grosse, 2015, p. 37), but a new commission convened on the occasion of the creation by the National Council of programs in 1989. Led by Edmond Malinvaud, its final report which reinforces the SES by distinguishing its "cultural aim" from the "academic aim" of the superior (*Ibid.*). Henri Lanta, then member of the commission, says that Malinvaud "repeated that in the programs of SES he had spotted at least ten 'big questions' which he said he was unable to answer. It was obviously not difficult to point out that advancing students' understanding of economic and social facts and mechanisms did not require College de France level answers" (Quoted interview). The new programs adopted from 1993 as part of the Jospin reform that change the name of the B series to ES (social and economic) seem to reinforce the initial project, by adopting an organization around "integrating concepts", leaving more space for the sociological dimension as well as interdisciplinarity and the study of current events. But at the same time they also reinforce in practice the partition between these disciplines and the concern accorded to "scholarly knowledge" (Chatel & Grosse, 2015, p. 38).

3.3 A new injunction: to transmit a "positive" vision of market and firms

The following attacks will mainly emanate from outside the Ministry of Education, and more particularly from the employers and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. In 2006, the latter set up a Council for the dissemination of economic culture (Codice), bringing together journalists, company managers, senior officials and economists. Together they control several opinion polls that build a new public problem: the supposed "economic inculture of the French". Obviously, it is not about the 'economy' that statisticians and senior officials like, the large aggregates used as tools for steering public action, and even less the 'economy' of everyday life, as it could be apprehended by employees looking at their payroll, worried about the level of reimbursement of their medical expenses or imagining the purchase of a home. It is rather about the economy apprehended through the glasses of the dominant economic actors of the moment (big companies, professionals of the financial sector,

state agencies of regulation of the markets) which enjoy a privileged access" (Rozier, 2009, p. 67). The SES, which actually affect only a minority of high school students, are one of the major scapegoat for this accusation towards the French alleged lack of economic knowledge and hostility to free-market economy. In fact, for nearly three decades several employers' organizations, most prominently the Institute of Enterprise (IDE) created in 1975, take a close interest in the teaching of SES in an attempt to influence it in a direction that it considers more favourable to the market economy.

Through its "Teachers-Companies" program, the IDE aims to "bring together" each other by offering them educational materials to the first, via a dedicated website, but also training courses, especially the "*Entretiens Enseignants-Entreprises*" (Teachers-Companies Meetings)¹³, and even internships in companies. Other associations close to the French Companies Movement (MEDEF), the major employers Union in France, such as the so-called "Positive Enterprise" or "Institute for Economic and Fiscal Research", periodically publish "studies" based on SES manuals rather than programs. They denounce the "reductive" and "pessimistic" vision of "business" and "market". The section "Political Economy, Statistics and Finance" of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences (ASMP), part of the prestigious Institute de France (Delmas, 2006), is another hotbed of attacks against SES. It released a very critical report against the ES series in 2008 led by Yvon Gattaz, former president of the major employers' organization and founding president of an association called "Youth and Enterprise", who also firmly criticizes SES. At the end of 2016, this institution commissioned eight "international" economists (that is to say actually not working in France) an audit of the SES manuals from a given publisher each. Their reports are generally quite measured in their conclusions, even laudatory for some, but the ASMP invites the two most critical rapporteurs at two symposia it organizes in early 2017. Amongst them, an economist at the Citygroup bank in New-York declared that "nowadays no one speaks of social classes" and then advocated to focus the SES on micro-economy and particularly on the study of market by future company executives, and by the future citizen who will have to validate structural reforms" (field notes, conference "Teaching economics in high school", Institut de France, Paris, January 30, 2017).

The current president of this ASMP section, Michel Pébereau alone embodies the permeability of the public and private spheres. Former member of the cabinets of right-wing Finance Ministers, he taught economics at Sciences-Po while chairing the Foundation ruling this elite school, and led the privatization of the BNP-Paribas bank in 1993 before chairing its board of directors for 20 years, also serving on the boards of several huge French companies. President of the Institute of Enterprise between 2005 and 2010, this multipositional agent (Boltanski, 1973) was appointed to the High Council of Education at its creation in 2005 and shortly afterwards was appointed in the commission chaired by the



Professor in Economics at the College de France Roger Guesnerie, charged to audit the manuals and programs of SES. The report that it gives at the beginning of July 2008 recognizes the "solidity of the rooting" of the teaching of SES in high school, its "attractiveness" and the good student and professional integration of ES series graduates. But its authors also affirm the need to bring it towards "excellence" and accumulate a series of criticisms joining the employers' diagnoses. They write that the programs "put more emphasis on the problems of our society and little on its successes", criticize the fact that programs are too busy, but at the same time note a number of shortcomings. The company and the market would suffer in particular from insufficient treatment in their eyes while sociology would often be "too abstract, too deterministic and too compassionate". Following this report, a group of "experts" chaired by the academic economist Jacques Le Cacheux, has been set up to rewrite the programs.

These programs, which came into effect from the 2010, ratified the partitioning between economics and other social sciences – themselves reduced to sociology and political sciences –, except for a small part entitled "crossed views". To each discipline its objects, as if the sociologists had nothing to bring on the understanding of the concrete markets, the currency or the firms, whereas social classes or conflicts would have no relevance in the economic analyses. It is then a question of privileging the transmission of "scholarly" knowledge upon student experience, be that direct or indirect. The APSES, whose president resigned from the commission like some other members in reaction to the "employer influences" within it (David, 2012), finally denounces "the encyclopedism" of the programs, that is to say the inflation of the number of notions to transmit, as well as the new tests of the baccalaureate who favour the restitution of knowledge on the confrontation of ideas, and thus strongly frame learning. The APSES also criticizes the lack of pluralism of these programs. By separating economics from other social sciences and reproducing the division between micro and macroeconomics, they would in fact have given pride of place to mainstream theory to the detriment of heterodox approaches¹⁴. Such a position has also been translated in recent years with associations of researchers and students in economics demanding more pluralism in recruitment and economics courses in University in France like abroad.

4 The issue of pluralism among SES teachers: a pluralism of visions

4.1 A split among the discipline itself

If the correlation between the curricular evolution of the SES and the growing lobbying of certain employer groups appears quite obvious, its precise channels deserve to be studied more precisely (Rozier, 2018). We can nevertheless hypothesize that the influence of the latter is exerted less by direct lobbying than by the vector of shared moments of sociability where the compatibility of the habitus of one and the other plays a full role, such as during the *Entretiens-Enseignants-Entreprises* where the

General Inspection is well represented. It would, however, be far too simplistic to present the SES as a fortress under siege against attacks by liberal lobbies. There are also divisions among teachers themselves about the relevance of the founding project and particularly the object-based approach. Its main opponent is a former active member of the APSES, Alain Beitone, for whom SES must be more modelled on the knowledge taught at university under the theory of didactic transposition (Chevallard, 1991). Its very designer blames more or less implicitly the APSES to defend a "solipsiste" and "endogenous knowledge" deaf to academic evolutions (Chevallard, 1997). Alain Beitone and his supporters, who formed an association competing with the APSES named *Action SES* in 1998¹⁵, consider that:

"There are three conceptions of what the school of tomorrow should be: a conservative, even reactionary position, which formulates a discourse of restoration of an idealized past and which does not resign itself to the opening of middle school, high school and university to a growing proportion of an age group; a falsely modernist position which proposes to respond to the massification of secondary schools by a downward revision of educational content and by emphasising a socio-educational dimension; a position which considers that access to knowledge for all is a requirement of democracy and that for this it is necessary to renew the forms of school organisation, transform teaching methods and deepen didactic reflection" (Orientation Report of *Action SES*, 1999).

This group naturally claims the latter while implicitly attributing the second to the APSES. This split occurred during another educational reform threatening the ES series with extinction, and can then be seen as an attempt to legitimize the school discipline. It seems nonetheless to sacrifice the issue of pluralism, or more precisely the question of the hegemony of neoclassicism, in passing: "The conception of the 'normal science' of Kuhn (a dominant paradigm between two 'scientific revolutions'), on the other hand, seems to be particularly unsuited to economics" (Beitone & Legardez, p. 35), even though these authors claim a "multi-paradigmatic" approach. More recently, a former leader of *Action SES* wrote in defence of the current SES programs in the drafting of which Alain Beitone played a key role, that a "characteristic feature of the 'spirit of SES' is its penchant for heterodoxy, or more precisely for a reading of theoretical oppositions within the economy that gives the opposition between the 'dominant economy' and the 'heterodoxies' a central place" (Buisson-Fenet, 2012). But according to him, "In economics as in sociology, the 'war of the great paradigms' has considerably weakened. It is rather difficult to specify what a Keynesian or a neoclassical is today". He thus invites to a renewal of pedagogical practices inspired for instance by the textbooks in microeconomics where can be found "playful sessions by mobilizing 'economic games' or enigma solving with students born from the observation of empirical data". Such proposals are in line with those put forward by employers' lobbies, such as the animation of



mini-enterprises in classrooms, the effects of which on pupils nevertheless deserve further investigation (Rozier, 2014).

4.2 A majority of teachers committed to pluralism for practical more than ideological reasons.

This opposition among SES teachers actually does not refer to partisan stances in the political field. Alain Beitone defines himself as a "far-left-winger" (Interview by Cloé Gobert¹⁶, July 8, 2013), while some of his supporters militate to the Socialist Party of the alterglobalist association ATTAC. On the other hand, APSES members are found throughout the union and political spectrum, which complicates relations between the association and the teachers' unions (Llobet & Martinache, 2014). Be that as it may, one may wonder why the APSES continues to gather so many SES teachers (2200 out of around 5500 SES teachers) when the Beitone supporters barely exceeds a hundred, essentially Beitone former students who frequently teach SES in the elitist "classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles"¹⁷.

Whatever their position regarding the "APSES-Beitone debate", all the teachers interviewed declare themselves very attached both to social sciences, they often describe however more like a "way of looking at the world", and pedagogy, and are convinced that one cannot teach in high school the same way one teach in University. Many explain that they literally "fell in love" with SES during their own schooling, but also often reproach their own teachers for having lacked of pedagogy. Contrary to what one might think, the trigger for teaching did not always occur in high school, but at University, through the meeting of one or several particularly "open" teacher who made them discover alternative visions of economics:

"At the University, I took Jean-Claude Delaunay's [a marxist economist] classes, and for me it was a revelation, compared to my SES teaching in high school. We had a teacher who without saying it taught us [economic] liberalism during the two years we had it. We didn't even know it was called the liberal economy, it was the natural functioning of the economy" (Man, 55, certifié¹⁸, teacher for 34 years, non-member of APSES, interviewed on July 17, 2013).

For some, the "vocation" came even later, after having begun (or achieved) a Phd thesis. They explain that they had turned to SES teaching because they did not feel comfortable with the excessive specialisation required by research, but also with the need to affiliate to a theoretic paradigm:

"It's my ecumenical side, which makes me uncomfortable in research, because I can't find a chapel, I kind of like everybody. And so, I can't position myself. When I was doing my introductory sociology classes, I was really trying to defend all the authors. I think that's really the beauty of the thing. I'm not here to impose something on the students" (Woman, 33, agrégée, abandoned a PhD in sociology, SES teacher for 1 year in a deprived area, non-member of APSES but "symmathisant", interviewed on April 29, 2011).

Such justification may naturally be interpreted as "necessity made virtuous", as the great reverence, not to say fascination, we could observe from SES teachers every time they face researchers. In the words of one interviewee, "to some extent SES teachers are to academics what general practitioners are to medical specialists." They have a less in-depth but more general vision of economic and social sciences. And even if they do not always realize it, they are also researchers in their own way when they select documents and information to feed their courses, but also when they experiment with pedagogical devices to adapt to their public. Like in the previous extract, as if they had internalized accusations of influencing students, the first professional virtue every interviewed teacher put forward is their "axiological neutrality", often quoting Max Weber. They therefore put their honour in presenting all the arguments in the debate on the phenomenon under study, and often boast that their students cannot guess their political opinions. Others prefer conversely make them explicit as if not to mislead the pupils:

"I always present the discussions between economic liberals and keynesians etc., the pupils quickly understand which side I am on, I think. But I always explain to them, I prefer to be honest than pseudo-neutral, because I don't see how I could be neutral. I do the whole Liberal theory well, and then I always end up with a little ironical remark. And then the others theories or approaches. But it is true that I have a conception of the profession where my goal is not so much to learn a list of knowledge, but to provoke them so that they can think by themselves. I like to come to class and tell them things like 'Unemployed people are lazy' and see how they react. Unfortunately, some often agree... At the beginning, I was very rigorous during my lessons. Now, I'm still attached to that: at the end of the year, students normally have two well filled notebooks. But I like when classes are animated, when they put the pen down and follow, that they think at the same time what. I'm not trying to convince them. If I make a remark that is not politically neutral, I tell them 'that is not neutral, but your point of view isn't either'. Now I'm sure they can differentiate a left-wing speech from a right-wing one" (Man, 34, agrégé, teacher in a deprived area, interviewed on June 27, 2008).

This taste for presenting and even provoking controversies in classes actually appears as a way to adapt to teenagers teachers consider unable to reach too high a degree of abstraction. Even this teacher who works in a privileged private-school and defines herself as "pro-business" and "favourable to change" as regards curricula explains some months after the last programs reform:

"There are some notions that were studied on in the final year, which will now be worked on in Year 12. Honestly, I'm going to have a hard time, and I'm still wondering today: how am I going to bring a Year 12 student, given how little they're interested in current affairs, to explain comparative advantages for example. Already a senior student has a little trouble mastering these notions. It's gonna be pretty tough on some things. I don't always find it suitable for a 15-year-old pupil who is more interested in video games, his mobile

phone and Facebook than in the world around him" (Woman, 32, agrégée, teacher for 8 years, non-member of APSES, interviewed on June 14, 2011).

Beyond that, such a pragmatism nonetheless also corresponds more deeply to the way these teachers see their role: not simply to transmit established knowledge, but to help shape citizens by cultivating their curiosity for the world around them and equipping them with corresponding intellectual methods. From this point of view, scientific knowledge is considered as a tool, not as the purpose. As explained an interviewee: "This year, I really wanted to follow [the official program], but rapidly, it pissed them off, it pissed me off, and I'm sure they won't remember anything. While they are full of questions about how the economy works and what's happening in the world!".

In the same time, many SES teachers consider their knowledge gives them a particular social mission, consisting in "denaturalizing certain categories of thought", be those economic or social. But they don't consider this as a political action. This mission often goes beyond the classroom: some have created blogs where they post and comment on scientific articles, others accompany their students as jurors for the best SES book or comic book of the year award and certain even organize conferences with their pupils involving economic researchers or actors. In all of these initiatives, they shall endeavour to respect as far as possible the pluralism of ideas. One of the most prominent of these "SES entrepreneurs" who created some years ago an economics festival during a whole week where the students of his high school are involved until the presentation of the lectures explains:

"I really try to have a wide variety of speakers. A wide variety of schools of thought [...] One of the very first was Michel Pébereau. It was right after the financial crisis and the pupils had a lot of questions. In addition, it was interesting to see him deliver his speech, because he was the one who criticized the SES handbooks. I was even deterred to invite him, because I was bringing the wolf into the sheepfold I just answer it would be very interesting to put him the position of teaching teenagers" (Man, 55, teacher for 34 years, non-member of APSES but "sympathisant").

To a certain extent, even though SES teachers may sometimes feel an "inferiority complex" as regards academic researchers as regards "scholarly knowledge" (what can besides be discussed), they are nevertheless aware they master a "knowledge about teaching" and a "curricular knowledge" (Deauviau, 2009, pp. 202-203), they are thus eager to promote. Attention to pluralism and debates belong to these ones, what may contribute to explain they don't adhere in majority to the positions defended by Alain Beitone, which may be perceived as placing an exclusive emphasis on scholarly knowledge". Nevertheless, as useful it is may be considered, this intern controversies among SES teachers actually appear

a little be artificial and contribute to conceal other no less crucial issues.

4.3 Some quite artificial debates that hide crucial issues

Even more than the employer lobbies, Alain Beitone and his supporters seem to personalize the main enemy of the SES for the APSES members, at least among the most acculturated of its members. Both camps are aggressively, even insultingly, invective on the professional mailing lists, without succeeding in establishing a constructive debate about curricula and pedagogical practices. A close scrutiny on their respective writings and discussions nevertheless suggest most of their antagonisms lay more on caricatures and misunderstandings than real bones of contentions. On the one hand, Alain Beitone himself does not totally reject a kind of inductive pedagogy based on problem-questions that pupils ask themselves:

"Favour an investigation-structuring approach: [...] It is not a question of sinking into the discussion of coffee trade or ideological debates, but of showing students that all scientific knowledge is an answer to a question. Nor is it a question of believing that students invent knowledge in the classroom. There is a body of knowledge in which students need to be trained. But the pedagogical approach, if we want students to engage in learning, must consist of starting from these questions (investigation) to appropriate the knowledge, including conceptual and theoretical, that are necessary to interpret reality (structuring)" (Beitone, 2010 quoted by Gobert, 2009, p. 147).

On the other hand, APSES leaders are far from being the "anti-scientific relativists" or "leftist activists" their opponents often describe. Protesting against the disconnection between economics and sociology in the latter programs, they indeed decide to build a so-called "bypass program" for Year 12 reorganizing the elements of the official program by objects crossing sociological and economic points of view. They accompanied this programme with a free online textbook built by the teachers themselves, requesting validation of each chapter by university researchers from various schools of thought and also matching each with a cross-interview between an economist and a sociologist. More anecdotally, APSES active members systematically correct their interlocutors when they are designated as professors of economics, insisting on "sciences" as much as "social". We could even hear one of the former APSES national president recently telling that she had attended a meeting organized by her head teacher for science teachers [implicitly nature sciences] to defend the seriousness of her own discipline, triggering the approving laughter of her colleagues.

The core of the divergence may actually lie less in the opportunity to cross disciplinary points of view upon given objects than in the evolutionary vision of science that animates Alain Beitone:

"All disciplines borrow things from other disciplines. There are political scientists who work with the neoclassical

conceptual apparatus, to lead economic analyses of democracy for example. In the same way that economists borrow from sociologists, sociologists from economists, physicists from chemists, etc. [But] to be validated, a knowledge must be subjected to the test of scientific debates, which can only be conducted by people who are competent in the field, i.e. a physicist cannot participate in the evaluation of a political science thesis, and so on. Or even biology for that matter. So specialization is a condition for the existence of scientific debates between people who are experts in their respective fields" (Alain Beitone, quoted interview)

Strongly questioned by some sociology of science works, starting with those of Bruno Latour (De Vries, 2016), this approach clearly excludes discussions of science by lay persons, especially students. It has the merit of avoiding the frequent confusion between "prescribed knowledge" and "experiential knowledge" (Deauvau, 2009, pp. 71-73), which are at the root of many cognitive misunderstandings on the part of students, and therefore of academic difficulties, particularly for disadvantaged students (Bautier & Rochex, 1998). It risks however leaving students in a position of passive reverence towards knowledge and prevent them from really appropriating it. Moreover, even though that is not the purpose of its defenders, who like to introduce themselves as Economic and Sociology instead of SES teachers, this stance does no more justify why economics should be taught alongside with other social sciences. It can thus open the way to a separation of both disciplines desired by employers' lobbies.

It can also be discussed from an epistemological point of view, inasmuch as it refers to the haunting debate concerning the unity of the social sciences (Myrdal, 1975 ; Nachane, 2015 ; Cat, 2017). In his latest book, Bernard Lahire proposes an alternative vision of scientific progress that puts the growing specialisation of research fields under tension in an inspiring way:

"The history of scientific progress is made up of periods of specialization during which researchers work on specific points in a dispersed and uncoordinated manner (in different disciplines and in different sectors of each of these disciplines), and periods of synthesis in which researchers gather and articulate what was scattered, translate into a common language all the significant results written in a multitude of disciplinary dialects, and develop integrating theories or synthetic models" (Lahire, 2018, p.16).

Be that as it may, there is undoubtedly a way to maintain together scientific rigour, transdisciplinarity, pluralism, student interest and civic education purposes, while striving to contain social inequalities in learning. Curriculum developers could, for example, draw more inspiration from research programmes on *Socially Vivid Issues*, which refer to "complex and interdisciplinary issues that do not have a single, universal solution because they are based on distributed and situated knowledge" (Simonneaux & Legardez, 2006; Simmoneaux & Calmettes, 2013). There is no need to explain that socio-economic life is full of such issues, which also imply an

enhanced dialogue with other sciences, in opposition to the inward-looking tendency of mainstream economics.

5 Conclusion

The issue of economic pluralism has become particularly acute in recent years, as recently recalled in France by the publication of a provocative essay by two neo-classical economists (Cahuc & Zylberberg, 2016). They indeed describe any heterodox approach to the neo-classical current as "economic negationism", which has sparked lively debate in academic circles and in the public arena (Coriat & al., 2017). This focus on the case of the SES teaching nevertheless aimed to show that the question of pluralism does not exactly arise in the same way in high school economic education as well as in the academic sphere. To understand the specificity of the former, it appears necessary to take a joint approach from the top of the controversies surrounding the legitimate definition of SES programmes and from the bottom by examining the trajectories and representations of a diverse sample of teachers. This makes it possible to understand firstly that, it is the very ambiguity of the founding project of the SES that has fostered these uninterrupted controversies. Secondly, that these recurrent attacks have even fostered the empowerment of this discipline, especially through the main professional association of teachers, which has developed into a "mobilized group". The latter has thus gradually built up a distinctive professional culture, made up of unifying myths and symbols, sufficiently vague for a majority of teachers to recognize themselves in it. The demand for pluralism represents a key element of this and serves both to defend a transdisciplinary entry through objects and as a tool to respond to criticism that portray SES teachers as antiliberal ideologues influencing students. Nonetheless, this commitment to pluralism also corresponds to the social dispositions that led SES teachers to this profession rather than another - many interviewees besides replied that they could not have taught anything other than SES - and to the concrete context of their practices, particularly the need they feel to adapt to an audience to whom too academic a teaching would not be appropriate. On the other end, the APSES dissidents who tries to legitimate SES by bringing them closer to academic disciplines remain very much in the minority, probably in large part because of the definition of professional excellence they embody, which involves mastering knowledge rather than pedagogical experience, and the "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) they then exercise on their colleagues, who sometimes had difficult relations with the academic sphere.

All in all, such observations suggest that conversely to some assertions (Buisson-Fenet, 2018), epistemological, pedagogical and political controversies around the SES curricula cannot be concretely separated. While attempts to reduce high school economics education to a celebration of the market economy are emerging in other countries (Szukala, 2015), it is the very representation of the economy as a (social) science that is at

stake: would it have become an indisputable truth that can be achieved, for instance, by randomized experiments, or is it a forum for debate between competing paradigms, which are based on irreconcilable assumptions. The question undoubtedly goes beyond high school education, but it includes it nevertheless.

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Endnotes

¹ The author is responsible for all the translations of French texts and interviews that are quoted in this text.

² Grammarian and historian, André Chervel promoted an approach to the history of school subjects as endogenous cultures, by establishing that the latter were not simply the transposition of knowledge developed by scientists, nor the application of proven pedagogical methods elsewhere, as we tended to imagine them. Without claiming to settle the debate here between didactic transposition and school culture, we rather endorse an intermediate position, such as the one that envisages teaching in terms of "transformations of knowledge" (Chatel, 1995a and b).

³ The teachers interviewed were approached following a snowball recruitment process (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). While this obviously does not allow for statistical representativeness, we have been particularly careful to meet the greatest possible diversity of teachers, in terms of age, experience, status, context of practice and activism. These interviews lasted between 1h30 and 3h30 and were structured around several major themes: the educational and professional trajectory (including social background); the relation with the various disciplines composing the economic and social sciences; the way of building courses; the relationships with pupils and colleagues; the cultural practices and sociability outside school. The interviews were conducted and analysed in accordance with the principles of comprehensive sociology (Kauffman, 1996), based on initial assumptions and sufficiently open questions and a thematic codification of the transcripts and observation notes to elaborate progressively a "grounded theory" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001).

⁴ In France, high school is traditionally divided between different sectors, where students orientate after Year 10. Some subjects, such as mathematics, literature or history-geography are taught in every sectors, but their content is adapted. Since 1994, Year 11 is common to all students following a general and technological cursus, and then they must orientate themselves towards a given sector (Scientific (S), Literary (L) or Economic and Social (ES) – the only one where they will continue to study SES - as regards the general ones). These must nevertheless disappear in September 2019 in favor of a common core curriculum accompanied by a choice of "specialties", among which the SES.

⁵ As one of his principal architects explains: "the idea was to create a section for people who were no longer literary, who were not interested enough in ancient languages, but who were not dedicated to Polytechnique" (Marcel Roncayolo, quoted interview).

⁶ It should be remembered that in 1967 only 15.4% of an age group obtained a high school degree ("baccalauréat") in France.

⁷ This epistemological ambiguity is important to notice: do the SES mobilize different tools from several social sciences or do they pretend to invent their own, overcoming the academic borders? It will be then be written "multidisciplinarity" but one must keep this ambiguity in mind.

⁸ The text of the instructions does not mention it and perhaps its editors are not yet aware of it, but there is also a major stake of social ine-

qualities, between the "heirs" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, 1970) and have a "cultural capital" that is adequate to develop the necessary intellectual tools and students of more popular origin on their own, instead of making "implicit pedagogy" (Bernstein, 1971).

⁹ These studies have among others shown there is a frequent gap between teachers' discourses and practices. Given our questioning here, we will nevertheless focus on the formers and can indeed note from our field work that there is still today an almost unanimous rejection of the lecture course among the teachers observed and interviewed, even if most end up admitting to using it.

¹⁰ The latter would later pursue a mainly political career by becoming senator from 1989 to 2014 under the major right-wing party label (RPR renamed Union for a Popular Movement (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* – UMP – under President Chirac).

¹¹ What has been confirmed by several different interviewees.

¹² The APSES is organized into regional associations corresponding to the official French academic districts. Each sends a number of representatives proportional to the number of its members to the national APSES Steering Committee. In a way, this represents the "parliament" of the association. It meets three times a year in addition to the national general assembly and elects from among its members the 11 members of the national bureau, which constitutes the executive body of the association.

¹³ Where academic economists, company leaders, journalists and high-level public servants come to speak with (or to be more accurate) in front of an audience of several hundreds of SES as well as management and economics teachers during two days with the official support of the National Education Ministry, despite its proximity with the MEDEF. Many inspectors not only attend to the event, but take part in its organization. Among the participants of the 2017 edition were for instance the Minister of Education himself, a deputy of the presidential majority who was also a high-level mathematician, the Banque de France Governor, as well as several business leaders (Danone, IBM, Engie, etc.), alongside several researchers, all of neoclassical obedience. Such a blurring of the lines between the origins of the speeches made contributes to a more general confusion as to the economic nature and thus contributes to naturalizing a "desocialized" approach to the economy despite the formal existence of discussion between the "experts" and the public. On this point, our own observations of this event join those made elsewhere on other meetings of this type (Angeletti, 2011).

¹⁴ The opposition between a standard economy and a heterodoxy deserves discussion, as does the heterogeneity of the approaches under this label, coined by Allan Gruchy in 1987. Nevertheless, the latter is a banner that brings together many researchers and students who have in common to criticize the unrealistic assumptions of the former that do not sufficiently take into account the social and institutional anchoring of agents. Their shared research agenda may lie upon a definition of economics as the "science of the *social provisioning process*", whose « explanation involves human agency in a cultural context and social processes in historical time affecting resources, consumption patterns, production and reproduction, and the meaning (or ideology) of market, state, and non-market/state activities engaged in social provisioning" (Lee, 2008).

¹⁵ However, it did not manage to exceed a hundred members, essentially teachers trained by Alain Beitone, and was dissolved after a few years of existence. For more details on this internal opposition to SES teachers since the last curriculum reform in the early 2010, see Harlé & Lanéelle (2015).

¹⁶ I warmly thank Cloé Gobert for having sent me the transcript of some of the interviews conducted for her master (Gobert, 2014), as well as for our rich exchanges.

¹⁷ The socialization of these teachers and in particular a particularly reverential relationship with science thus seems to play a crucial role in explaining their positions. A prosopography of these "dissidents" of the SES remains to be done.

¹⁸ There are in France two recruitment competitions to become secondary school teacher: the CAPES (whose holders are qualified as "certified") and the aggregation, more selective, both academically and socially.