
Foreword

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1 Contents of the current issue

1.1 *Teaching economics*

Certainly, one of today's most urgent problems is climate change which threatens to "dwarf all other problems combined to become the *only* issue" [Flannery, (2005), p.8, emphasis in original] unless something radical is done. Some clamour for market solutions, others for greater planning, while others argue that capitalism's modus operandi conflicts with sustainability and we must develop other economic systems.

This is uncharted territory. At the same time, however, it is urgent for economists to discuss the future of capitalism along with the efficacy of other systems. A helpful repository is the history of economic thought, which can help us understand the present by understanding the past, especially how past thinkers dealt with the issues of their time.¹ Indeed, knowledge of the past [and especially economics, whose development is certainly not teleological] "helps us to challenge dogmatic statements and sweeping generalizations... it also warns of the dangers of assuming that there is only one possible way of looking at things, or only one course of action" [MacMillan, (2009), pp.165, 168]. It is this nexus of past, present, and future that can best enlighten and elucidate our current path, and how best to provision for all.

Such is the purpose of the article 'What would have been Keynes' position in the socialist economic calculation debate and why it matters', by Tiago Camarinha Lopes and Rafael Galvão de Almeida. Although Keynes did not directly participate in this debate on how resources are allocated and prices determined in socialism versus capitalism and which system is superior, the authors, in this interesting article proffer how he would have participated and what his well-nuanced and well-thought out positions would have been. Although ostensibly speculative, Lopes and Almeida pose this question as a springboard to fully develop Keynes' thinking on the efficacy of capitalism. An added bonus of this article: in addition to exploring Keynes, the ideas of Hayek, von Mises, and Lange (among others) come to light.

Since its inception, the *IJPEE* has advocated new and innovative teaching methods to move beyond the staid 'chalk and talk', and to promote pluralism and the understanding of heterodox economics. Although too numerous for even a partial listing, our articles effectively combine a 'how-to guide' with hands-on case studies. This issue of the *IJPEE* continues our tradition by publishing three such articles. The first, 'Unscripted

economics in an industrial community', by Marie Christine Duggan appears in our Teaching Economics section, and the other two in our Teaching Commons section.

Duggan discusses her aptly titled course, *de/reindustrialisation*, in which students actively investigate why local industrial firms are closing or reducing in size. She utilises a bevy of innovative pedagogies (including conducting oral history) in order to understand the reasons for the decline and the eventual rebirth of many New England towns like Keene, New Hampshire. Students get a good dose of economic theory and become intimate with the local community. This course makes them more knowledgeable, better citizens, and more caring and concerned with the travails of ordinary workers. For instructors interested in conducting oral history, Duggan provides numerous helpful suggestions. Duggan's article also adds to our growing evidence (albeit mostly anecdotal) that innovative pedagogies succeed for both student and professor. As for the latter, Duggan notes,

"An unexpected bonus of teaching economic theory courses where the professor interacts with the community is that the process compels her to focus on theories that have actual explanatory power. The quantity of the economic theory taught is necessarily diminished by the time required to develop human relationships for this course. Yet the quality of the economic theory improves in terms of its explanatory power."

The USA criminal justice system is plagued with a high incarceration rate, high total cost, high recidivism, and low post-release employment opportunities.² In her article, 'Why a pluralist economics education is important for incarcerated individuals', Jacqueline Strenio argues that,

"While not a panacea for [these] problems ... correctional education, broadly defined to include adult basic education, English as a second language (ESL) instruction, high school/general education development degree (GED), college-level instruction, and/or vocational training in prison, has been shown to positively address [them]."

Strenio uses her experience teaching an introductory college economics course (Economics as a Social Science) in a women's state prison to offer helpful content and pedagogy suggestions for college-in-prison economics instructors. But the course (and this should be no surprise) must be pluralist, which,

"Gives students the space to develop critical thinking and analysis skills. It trains them to be conscious consumers of information and enables them to apply those skills to critically compare different perspectives and methodologies. This is important for incarcerated students for two reasons. First, a diversity of content and authors helps ensure that students read work by someone with social identities similar to themselves. This is salient as incarcerated individuals are disproportionately minorities. Secondly, students on the inside do not have the same access to information as students on the outside; their ability to search out alternative perspectives and additional information is much more limited. Therefore, providing them multiple perspectives from the beginning is essential."

While contemporary economics uses the Edgeworth box to explain efficient resource allocation, Hideki Sato offers an interesting and effective alternative, equally familiar to economics students at all levels, in his article 'Teaching economics outside the box: using the circular-flow diagram to indicate efficient resource allocation in intermediate microeconomics'. And, at least for me, an additional advantage of teaching the circular

flow is its amenability to adding/discussing what is not included in the model but important in the real world such as sustainability. While Sato's article works well on its own, it can also be used as a foundational segue into heterodox approaches.

1.2 *The teaching commons*

In 'Teaching the tragedy of open access: a classroom exercise on governing the commons', Will Fisher notes that,

"The open-commons dilemma is an important misconception that many people in environmental instruction perpetuate, which unfortunately leads to incomplete conclusions regarding solutions to the tragedy of the commons. As a result, common property relations are seldom utilized as a solution. The open-commons dilemma prevents many students and instructors from realizing the important role of common property regimes in sustainably managing resources."

To navigate through this thicket and help students better grasp the importance of common property relationships, Fisher offers an online simulation exercise that is not only enjoyable and effective, but allows students to become active participants in the learning process while actively engaging with complex systems.

In his article 'Econ FilmMaking: an experiential, problem-based, multimedia project for microeconomics', Thomas P. Andrews describes an experiential, collaborative, problem-based, multimedia, Econ FilmMaking, whereby teams of students create short, entertaining videos with economic content. While the videos can be of any topic, Andrews requires his students to explain a firm's average cost of production. To do so, students gather background information on a firm's production process, build a spreadsheet cost model, and then work in teams to create a brief, educational and entertaining video summarising their results.

Based on his years of experience, Andrews offers useful tips on what works and what does not work. He notes that "constructing the video is both an exercise in effective, concise communication and creativity. In addition, students gain experience with group dynamics and benefit from the opportunity to apply classroom skills to a real-world problem", not to mention much-needed experience in developing spreadsheet skills. An added bonus is that Andrews provides a good literature review of using multi-media in economics pedagogy. In a plug for innovative and experiential learning that goes beyond the traditional chalk and talk, Andrews writes:

"Make a check list of buzzwords in economic education from active to experiential learning, add a list of desirable learning outcomes from critical thinking to effective communication and Econ FilmMaker projects will check most of the boxes. Better still, everyone involved will enjoy the process."

Rounding out the current issue is a review essay by Sebastian Berger of two important books by Helge Peukert, one of Germany's leading heterodox economists, based at the University of Seigen. One book on pedagogical microeconomics and the other on pedagogical macroeconomics. Both books ask if the economics textbooks used in Germany's universities (and the resulting economic instruction) are based on science or ideology. While Peukert's books are only available in German (soon to be translated into English), Peukert writes a pithy and informative statement explaining his books, and responding to Berger's critique. Taken together, Berger's essay and Peukert's rejoinder,

challenge the quality of Germany's economics education, and raise provocative issues that should concern all pluralists.

References

- Alexander, M. (2012) *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, The New Press, New York.
- Flannery, T. (2005) *The Weather Makers*, Atlantic Monthly Press, New York.
- MacMillan, M. (2009) *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History*, Random House, New York.
- Tavasci, D. and Ventimigli, L. (Eds.) (2018) *Teaching the History of Economic Thought: Integrating Historical Perspectives into Modern Economics*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK.

Notes

- 1 For helpful suggestions in teaching the history of economic thought, see Tavasci and Ventimigli (2018).
- 2 No statistics can do justice to the gravity of the situation. In a disturbing book, Michelle Alexander wrote, "It may be helpful to think of the criminal justice system ...not as an independent system but rather as a gateway into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization... The term mass incarceration refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison. Once released, former prisoners enter a hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion. They are members of America's new undercaste" [Alexander, (2012), pp.12–13, emphasis in original].