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## Foreword

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### 1 Methodology

As a graduate student in economics at the University of Notre Dame I took Charles Wilber's course in economic methodology, which for me was quite interesting and thought provoking. We discussed a lot of issues that I still think about today, with many preparing me well for launching a new journal in economics education. One of the course's central objectives was introducing the wide range of methodologies available to economists. For me – a former physics major who switched to economics – this was a breath of fresh air.<sup>1</sup> While some educators might shy away from addressing/discussing methodology at the undergraduate level, and especially in introductory courses, for better or worse methodology is used, often unbeknownst to both textbook author and student. Methodology is important and should be openly discussed throughout the economics curriculum. de Muijnck and Tieleman (2021, p.237) for example, in their very influential book *Economy Studies*, write “We encourage discussing ontology, epistemology, and ethics with students. This helps them choose suitable methodologies for their own research projects. Research methods are a vital element in the modern economist's toolkit.”

Martin K. Jones, in our leadoff paper, ‘Methodology in theory, and practice, in economics textbooks’, agrees. Perusing 13 introductory and intermediate micro textbooks, he tests how consistent authors are in their chosen methodology in discussion/presentation throughout their books. The results are not encouraging,

“...textbook writers do not seem to take their methodological statements that seriously...Of the textbooks studied, only two have a methodological position that is coherent with results they themselves report, while others do not face up to the contradictions in results. It is hard to extrapolate from these textbooks further... but, since these textbooks are widely used, it suggests many other economists have not noticed the incoherence and that students of economics may not treat the methodology seriously enough to notice it.”

Jones makes an interesting (and necessary) point: “In the grander scheme of things, it could be argued that this [methodology] doesn't matter. The textbook authors are, after all, more interested in teaching economics, or more specifically microeconomics, rather than getting a specialised subdiscipline just right.” But Jones responds emphatically, “one could argue that judging the testing of theories is crucial to economics as a science and that teaching students that one can explain away such results, or otherwise ignore them, does not set a good example of scientific practice.” A typical objection from an economics educator might be that the opportunity cost of including methodology is too

high. Nonsense. Textbook writers are implicitly including methodology, although not getting it right. So why not present it correctly, while showing students how economists do economics?<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Pedagogy

In my first book, *The Handbook of Pluralist Economics Education* [Reardon, (2009), p.267], I wrote that “education is our most important function as human beings: it is an investment in ourselves, future generations, and the planet.” Not only is the acquisition of knowledge important but so is its dissemination. As a father, teacher, novelist, editor, and educator, I firmly believe this. Yet most economics PhD programs offer very little resources (if any) for teaching us how to teach. We are usually given the textbook, and told to go out and teach, as if absorbing the knowledge taught in our graduate courses will automatically make us adept at presenting it to tyros. But what makes a good teacher is not so much his/her fount of knowledge but how she/he connects and motivates the student. Some might say it is a gift, but I disagree – we are not born with knowing how to teach. Rather, teaching is a craft, one that must be continually learned and practiced.<sup>3</sup>

Michele I. Naples, in her article ‘Instructor as coach: strategies for engaging diverse students in introductory macroeconomics’, suggests combining coaching with instructing. This is very apropos since coaching for a lifetime of learning is effectively what we do; and from my perspective, the role of coach and instructor are inextricably linked. In her article, Naples intends to,

“Apply coaching strategies to the introductory economics courses frequented by non-majors. Coaching techniques hold out the promise of keeping students in the course past their first low grades, and improving learning outcomes in general. As higher education extends its reach to non-traditional students, it is only fair to develop teaching strategies that address their needs.”<sup>4</sup>

## 3 Economics and the arts

In Professor Wilber’s methodology course that I referred to earlier, I was quite apprehensive when I submitted my research paper, ‘Using fiction to understand economics’, knowing that I was either going to get an A or an F; there was no in between. At the time I was also working (or perhaps better to say dabbling) on my own novel (since finished), and I knew I was on to something: fiction makes reality come alive and can often distil quintessence better than any other form. Think of Madame Defarge’s vigilant knitting of condemned names as the French Revolution begins in Dickens’ *Tale of Two Cities*, “which captures the patient vengeance of the long-oppressed peasants far better than any historical narrative” [Reardon, (2015), p.104].

I have since retained my interest in fiction here at the *IJPEE* publishing a special issue on the novel;<sup>5</sup> several papers on poetry (Ziliak, 2009, 2014); and my own paper on using ‘Ivan Turgenev’s short story ‘The Loner’, to understand power, class, inequality, and property rights (2015).

For anyone who enjoys reading fiction, and is also interested in connecting economics, economics education, and fiction, the paper ‘A cultural interpretation of the world’s two most tragic dramas: *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Flower Princess*’, by

Fu-Lai Tony Yu and Diana S. Kwan is a wonderful must read. It juxtaposes *Romeo and Juliet*, one of Shakespeare's best-known tragedies, with the novel/opera/play, *The Flower Princess*, well-known throughout China. The paper does double duty: one, illustrating that economics "can be interdisciplinary involving sociology, psychology, philosophy, and politics; as well as traversing the humanity disciplines to include literature, opera, drama, fiction, and the arts." And two, it,

"Enable[s] us to compare English/American and Chinese culture under four dimensions: cultural diversity versus the Great Han mentality; individualism versus collectivism; Christianity versus Confucianism; and a liberal order versus social norms...This comparison allows us to understand the world we live in; and helps us understand why the United States clashes with China, and perhaps how to resolve it."

A tall order indeed, but it works. And today, with increasing economic, social, and ideological clashing between the USA and China, it becomes absolutely necessary to grasp the rock-bottom differences between the two nations.<sup>6</sup> Begin with culture.

In, 'Hooray for Bollywood: using Hindi language films to teach economics' Wayne Geerling, Eshan Arya, Nikhil Damodaran and Nicola Thomas, continue a popular tradition in economics education using movies to elucidate economic concepts.

"In recent years, many economic educators have moved away from the standard 'chalk and talk' lecture, challenging popular characterizations of economics as a 'dismal science'. This shift in teaching philosophy has coincided with the development of accessible classroom resources designed to enhance student engagement and facilitate a deeper understanding of subject material."

The authors point to an untapped resource for alternative economics education: Bollywood, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, India.<sup>7</sup>

A nice feature of their paper is offering specific techniques (including Bollywood film summaries, embedded links to video clips and articles, instructions, lesson plans, and assessment questions) to help illustrate a particular economic concept.

As a frequent lecturer in India, I have a long-standing and enthusiastic interest in all things Indian.<sup>8</sup> The audio-visual nature of the Bollywood films discussed here, along with their storytelling, can engage students in ways that 'chalk and talk' lectures cannot. Leveraging popular culture, especially via popular media, can enhance student engagement and participation. A paper nicely done.

I've always been a big fan of Taylor Swift ever since her first album, even daring to call myself a Swiftie [at the risk of conflating my childhood nickname Molasses – amongst others – bestowed at a very young age, in honour that I was (and still is) the world's slowest eater]. As Kelsey Halfen Dahlberg, Signè DeWind, Wayne Geerling and G. Dirk Mateer, note in their article 'Behind the billions: how Taylor Swift and MrBeast can be used to teach economics',

"Finding innovative ways to teach economics is a constant challenge for educators. Part of the problem lies with the highly abstract models and heavy emphasis on mathematics, which are still too often part of a chalk and talk strategy. But there has also been a generational shift in the last decade: from millennial to Gen Z. When using pop culture in the classroom, we believe it is best to meet students on their platform of choice: social media."

No better Gen Z icons than Taylor Swift, whom *TIME* named its 2023 person of the year,<sup>9</sup> and Jimmy Donaldson, the highest grossing Your Tube performer. Geerling et al. write,

“Pop culture helps us connect with our students because it serves as a learning hook to pique their interest and to help them understand complex ideas in a fun and accessible way. If we succeed, more students will study economics and help advance the discipline. Taylor Swift is an acclaimed music artist while MrBeast is a popular internet personality. Their business acumen offers a unique opportunity to adopt a creative approach for teaching economics to a new generation of students who are familiar with their music and viral videos, curious about their backstories, and want to learn about how to achieve financial success.”

For me, it is articles like this that make economics entertaining, palatable and fun.

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## Notes

- 1 I still refer to one of the books used in the course: Deising (1971), a superb introduction to the different methodologies that economists use. For a modern version mixed in pedagogy see de Muijnck and Tieleman (2021, pp.235–248).
- 2 de Muijnck and Tieleman (2021, p.246) exhort going one step further:
 

“...ask students to apply the methods you teach them. Students find it much more interesting that way, and much more memorable. Perhaps most importantly, it prepares them for how they will use the methods in the future in their careers, as most students will become practical – rather than academic – economists.”

- 3 As both an undergraduate and a graduate student, I've had the good fortune to enjoy many excellent teachers. Right up there at top was a gentleman, who called himself a non-academic sans PhD, who taught me Second-Year Calculus at Northeastern University in Boston, the summer before entering graduate school.
- 4 I do not disagree, but in addition, to more effective teaching styles, pedagogy must move away from overreliance on timeless, ahistorical, deductive reasoning, and steadily embrace real-world economics. After all, "Understanding the real-world economy should be the ultimate goal of economics. Luckily, this is a core motivation of students. Many chose to study economics because they wanted to understand the economic and social world around them" [de Muijnck and Tieleman, (2021), pp.80–81].
- 5 See *IJPEE*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2016.
- 6 This theme is developed further in 'China' my forthcoming book, Reardon (2025), which analyzes the myriad issues confronting America in this pivotal election year. In addition, for a superb discussion of today's China, and how it got there, see Yu and Kwan (2023).
- 7 See Bose (2020). While not exactly Bollywood, our 'Revival of Nautanki through the agency of North Indian youth to achieve planetary sustainability', published in the *IJPEE*, Vol. 14, Nos. 3–4, as part of our special issue, 'Bridging the gap between pluralist economics education and sustainability', discusses the historical connections between Nautanki (a popular India folk theatre), India's changing culture, and sustainability.
- 8 See our special issue on Indian economics education, guest edited by my good friend, Sudipta Bhattacharyya, who was at the time, professor and chair of economics and political economy at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, India. In my foreword to the special issue I wrote, "I have been very fortunate to visit India several times. I feel a strong attraction to India that pulls at me and increases after every visit. Is it the people, the culture, the history, the food, the wonderful diversity? Certainly a little of each..." [Reardon, (2013), p.325].
- 9 Jacobs (2023, p.40, p.41), *TIME*'s Editor-in-Chief, explained the magazine's choice, "No one else on the planet today can move so many people so well...For building a world of her own that made a place for so many, for spinning her story into a global legend, for bringing joy to a society desperately in need of it, Taylor Swift is *TIME*'s 2023 Person of the Year." And according to *The Economist* (2024, p.71), "Taylor Swift has a strong claim to being the most popular entertainer of the 21st century – and perhaps of all time."