

Hedtke, Reinhold (2018): Das Sozioökonomische Curriculum (The Socioeconomic Curriculum), Frankfurt am Main: Wochenschau Verlag. 464 pages. €41.99. ISBN 978-3-7344-0730-7.

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Teaching subjects that integrate the individual social science disciplines represent the norm in international contexts, with the connections between politics, history, economics, law, sociology and cultural studies generally regarded as productive for learning with reference to the didactic principles of orientation on lifeworld, situation and problem. The school subject of economics, however, ignores the inseparable interconnections between associated disciplines, provokes an irresolvable *exclusionary competition* between the individual social science disciplines, and in light of timetabling constraints represents a fiction (even leaving aside the reduction of regular secondary education to eight years at many grammar schools). Integrating various social sciences disciplines goes in line with the perspective that if economics is taught in a separate subject, schools will be teaching transient specialist knowledge. Economic education in a cocoon is the inevitable consequence.

Nevertheless, initiatives to improve knowledge of economics by introducing a dedicated teaching subject in schools are gaining momentum in Germany. The state of Baden-Württemberg launched “economics/orientation for study and career” (*Wirtschaft/Studien- und Berufsorientierung*) as a separate subject in its grammar schools in school year 2018/19, while the conservative/liberal state government of North Rhine–Westphalia has decided to shift the balance from politics to economics, symbolised in the renaming of the integrated subject of “politics/economics” as “economics/politics”. As well as diminishing the role of political education, the curriculum reform represents a turn away from multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinarity in political studies. Instead of learning to discuss economic and financial questions in their broader societal, political and historic contexts, for example, orthodox economic didactics – like mainstream economics as a whole – focuses on teaching students economic and management theories, paradigms and methods, generally to the systematic exclusion of sociological, historical, psychological, political and geographical aspects.

If school students are not to analyse economic matters exclusively in *model*, *mathematically typologised* or *idealised* form, but illuminate them in the context of social science-led education, this also has repercussions for questions of business and macro-economics. Economies are subject to economic, fiscal and social policy decisions and as such generally affected by *zeitgeist* and historical trends; business decisions are often influenced by psychological, cultural and social factors. Fundamentally, social coexistence is not best organised by everyone seeking *exclusively* to maximise personal gain at any price. “Economic man” (and woman), who views all and sundry – from what to study to which career to pursue to when to found a family – through the economic lens of utility, must not be held up as the paradigm for educational processes.

In that context of a highly disputed depoliticised economics teaching, *Reinhold Hedtke's Sozioökonomische Curriculum* (Socioeconomic curriculum) could not be more timely. With due respect for competing curricular interests, *Hedtke* contributes convincingly to continuously improve tried-and-tested integrated social science subjects. Drawing together a multitude of aspects of socioeconomic education, his monograph realises its ambition to lay out “the knowledge and skills in the field of economics that children and young people should command today and tomorrow” (p. 15). It also discusses the basic principles of a critical, reflexive understanding of education – with reference to the necessity for subject-specific didactical contextualisation under principles such as orientation on subject, situation, problem and experience – before applying them specifically to socioeconomic didactics. Building on a wealth of facts and facets, the Bielefeld- and Frankfurt-based professor of economic sociology and social science didactics demonstrates which educational objectives need to be pursued if political, social and economic developments are to be scrutinised from a socioeconomic perspective. He understands socioeconomic education as “the application of social science learning to the topic of economics” (p. 11).

Hedtke dedicates the first part of his book to an extensive treatment of the topics of socioeconomic education, which he names for years 7 and 8 “household and gender”, “business and production”, “consumption and environment”, “work and labour politics”, and “money and credit” (pp. 66–87). He characterises the central didactic problem of the identified year 9 and 10 topic of “work experience” with the pertinent observation that systematic tensions “between the selectivity and singularity of personal practical experience in a particular workplace vis-à-vis the breadth, diversity and representativeness of the insights generally required for an adequate career orientation” (p. 86) need to be resolved. In view of the steadily growing (curricular) significance of work experience in the statutory education context, that tension needs to be addressed in line with the objective of (socioeconomic) general education. The author’s observations indirectly confirm and underline the pedagogical, sociological and political problems associated with analysing, exploring and interpreting work-related phenomena through employer-driven initiatives (in Germany for example *business@school*, *Schüler im Chefsessel*, *Gründerwoche*, *Gründerkids* and *JUNIOR*). Citing the 2015 Shell-Jugendstudie (Youth study), *Hedtke* rightly emphasises that young people give “top priority to job security” ahead of “contributing their own ideas, pursuing a meaningful activity and doing something beneficial for society in second, third and fifth place” (p. 135).

The book offers a wealth of answers to the question *what* children and young people should learn in school and *why*. But the author regards the public debate over curriculum content as woefully inadequate. As far as his own proposals for the social science curriculum are concerned, he certainly meets his own criterion of backing assertions “systematically and comprehensively with empirical evidence and theoretical arguments” (p. 11). He rightly notes the presence of interpretations from social science in most curricula in the general school system, when he writes: “The social science principle accomplishes this interpretation for the lion’s share of school-specific domain knowledge codified in curricula, as most of the latter is couched in social-scientific and multi-disciplinary terms” (p. 238). Basing his arguments on a continuously growing socioeconomic literature, *Hedtke* succeeds in laying out a concept that characterises the needs of young people for an education “that fosters their personality development and examines the topic of economics from this subject-oriented perspective” (p. 11).

Hedtke shows that if economic knowledge is to be conveyed in a context of general education and lifeworld contexts, persisting with the various established versions of integrated

social science remains the only plausible way forward. Only this teaching subject, actively integrating adjacent disciplines, enables perspectives and findings of central associated disciplines of socio-economic education and knowledge to be more centrally elaborated, analysed and (critically) reflected. Classical macro-economic questions need to be placed in relation to findings from sociology, ethics and also politics, history and cultural studies, and discussed with respect to didactic aspects in order to enable learning that is networked and meaningful and thus satisfies the educational ambition of the general school system.

Exceptionally well-formulated and enriched with a wealth of graphics, this volume is recommended reading for anyone seeking arguments for integrating economic education with societal and political aspects in the curriculum.

Hedtke, who is also co-author of the widely respected German “Ranking Politische Bildung 2018” (<https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/download/2934293/2934488.pdf>), indirectly supplies numerous reasons why for example grammar schools in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia need more than just twenty minutes per week of political education for years 5 to 10. Regardless of its impact on education policy, the book represents a cornucopia of principles, concepts and methods for social-scientific exploration of “the economy”. Directing attention to the rich socio-economic tradition – and with it socio-economic education – it is another inevitable support for interdisciplinary thinking and research. This voluminous book is set to quickly become a standard work – both for educationally interested economists and social scientists, and for decision-makers in schools and ministries.