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## Pluralist Thinking in Economic and Socioeconomic Education

### Keywords

Pluralist thinking, economic education, socioeconomic education, homo oeconomicus

For more than ten years, pluralism in economics and in the education of economists has been a hot issue. Contemporary criticism of conventional economics education has started around the turn of the millennium with student initiatives for pluralist economics like the post-autistic economics movement – with a stronghold in France (autisme-économie) – and gained momentum after the financial crisis of 2007/2008. Students turned against the perceived one-sidedness of syllabi, textbooks and exams of their universities and against economists' and economics' lack of contact with reality. In consequence, economic plurality and pluralism in economic(s) education was put onto the public agenda, initiated controversies and triggered changes in policies of higher education.

Recent student movements, however, are not the first and only stage for the debate on pluralism in economics and economic plurality. On the contrary, methodological, paradigmatic and theoretical pluralism in economic research has triggered a controversial scholarly debate. It involves key questions of teaching economics and business studies in the right way, at universities as well as at schools. Citizens and voters, pupils and students are confronted with contentious issues concerning economic policies and their pluralist scientific rationales.

However, we do not know much about the impact of these debates on curricula, schools, textbooks, classroom practices and teacher training. Undergraduates, in principle, may be fortunate to find a more pluralist place for studying – as far as there are some heterodox professors left – and overcome economics' orthodoxy by changing the university or, at least, the department. Others may join ongoing protest movements for pluralist economics or educate themselves via pluralist platforms and webs of knowledge. In contrast, pupils and students of secondary and vocational schools as well as trainee teachers normally do not have these options. As a rule, they have to come to terms with the established curricula, content, textbooks and exams. The prevailing practices in teaching economics at universities may be described as more or less monoparadigmatic, often prejudiced against problems of the real world economy, frequently politically biased, mostly obliged to conservative viewpoints and

rather close to the interests of the wealthy classes. This, of course, does not present the whole picture because some pluralist niches did survive decades of mainstream pressure and counter movements of academics and civil society gain momentum.

Against this backdrop, the thematic issue of the JSSE addresses phenomena, findings, problems and educational approaches of economic plurality and pluralism in economic research at different levels and in different contexts of the educational system. The issue will focus on teaching and learning in schools and on teacher education at universities and colleges of teacher training.

Economics textbooks promise to be the key to the core of academic economic knowledge. In *"The market deals out profits and losses" – How Standard Economic Textbooks Promote Uncritical Thinking in Metaphors*, however, Silja Graupe and Theresa Steffestun emphasise the major significance of metaphors in economics education and their impact on political and economic discourse. Their analysis focuses on metaphorical semantics around the abstract and mostly empty concept of „the market“ which are, for example, spread in the standard economic textbooks of Paul A. Samuelson and N. Gregory Mankiw (for secondary school economics see Brant <http://jsse.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/1391/1533>, and for the use of “market” Blanchard and Coléno <http://jsse.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/1397/1547>, both in JSSE 4-2015). Graupe and Steffestun make use of textual analysis and conceptual metaphor theory to show how “the market” is (re-) interpreted and linked to ideological and political value judgments. Consequently, the textbooks not only prevent readers from a critical reflection of the metaphorical rhetoric but also display elements of subliminal persuasion and manipulation resulting in an intellectual overwhelming of the students. Against this background, the authors suggest some antidotes for teachers and students to foster a critical and conscious use of metaphors, in textbooks as well as in public discourse.

The next paper deals with a prevalent narrative which Neil Graham Shanks puts in a nutshell as “neoclassical economics is economics”. In *A Dominant Narrative in Economics? Preservice Teachers and Pluralism in a Social Studies Methods Class*, he analyses teachers' conceptualization of this narrative, the counter narratives they develop, and the importance of acquiring pluralist perspectives. Shanks presents an interpretative comparative case study of a teacher preparation programme in the United States which addresses dominant narratives throughout the social studies curriculum. Preservice teachers were able to describe the dominant narrative of unfettered capitalism and its effects and they brought in

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counter-narratives aiming at justice and equality. However, they mostly failed in criticizing neoclassicism's epistemology and its interconnectedness to policies they were critical of. Moreover, their pedagogical content knowledge in economics contained no pluralist elements. The author highlights the importance of teaching explicitly the critique of the epistemological foundations of neoclassical theory and argues for a systematic integration of pluralism into economics methods courses.

As pluralism in academic economic education is a longstanding cause of contest, the relationship of economics and other social sciences in school curricula is a well-known conflict area in a number of countries (see Willis <http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/1761/1718> and Lefrançois, Ethier and Cambron-Prémont <http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/1682/1719> in JSSE 4-2017, Löfström and van den Berg <http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/111/1189> in JSSE 2-2013). The French case is presented by Igor Martinache in his paper *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*. Previous issues of the JSSE discussed conflicts in and around the domain of social science subjects in French schools were (see Simonneaux, Tutiaux-Guillon and Legardez in JSSE 4-2012 <http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/1211/1126>, Chatel in JSSE 2-2010 <http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/1123/1026> and 4-2009 <http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/1101/1004> and Tutiaux-Guillon in JSSE 2-2002 <http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/article/view/457/373>). Martinache's study shows that pluralism is the heart of the problem with continuing controversies around this school subject. Based on interviews with teachers of Sciences Économiques et Sociales (SES) and key actors, on document analysis and participating observation, the paper carves out how SES-teachers became committed to the defence of pluralism, developed into a "mobilized group" and strengthened their individual professional practices. The author stresses the need of international comparison in this exemplary field of conflict – and the interconnectedness of teaching and learning economics and citizenship.

Sustainability provides a classic example for challenges of citizenship in political and economic contexts and for addressing uncertain, complex and controversial issues. In *Talking about Sustainability Issues when Teaching Business Economics – The 'Positioning' of a Responsible Business Person in Classroom Practice*, Pernilla Andersson presents a study of classroom approaches to sustainability in teaching business. She observed teaching practices after the introduction of the sustainability concept in the upper secondary school syllabus in Sweden. The paper shows how different rules and conditions for doing business are foregrounded in classrooms, especially with respect to contradictory expectations for business persons like adaptation to self-interest, response to customers' interests in sustainable products or sensitiveness

to the needs or interests of humans, animals and nature. Framing and the social construction of roles turn out to be of pivotal importance: talking about 'homo economicus' as realistic figure can obstruct, talking about customers in altruistic terms can foster sustainable decisions and taking the complexity of others' interests into consideration paves the way for doing business (more) sustainably.

Putting oneself in the position of business people expected to decide and act in a sustainable way does not seem to be far away from taking a citizen role in mock elections confronted with the expectation of voting responsibly. The thematically open part of this JSSE issue starts with Julie Ane Odegaard Borge's contribution "Am I a politics person?" *A Qualitative Study of Students' Perspectives on Mock Elections as Political Education*. Based on observation in Norwegian secondary schools, interviews and qualitative content analysis, Borge presents different identities of students' political participation which include different conceptions of their political selves: 'the politician', 'the party member' and 'the voter'. Students who are active members of political parties accept the three analytical categories of political identity, whereas the majority of students who are not reject 'the politician', but accept 'the party member' as their peers. All of them accept the identity of the voter which is, however, a consequence of mock voting as an assignment of the school. In sum, students take part in the mock election understood as a school duty and position themselves towards the different identities but the simulation of voting does not motivate them for participation on their behalf. As a measure of "top-down political education", mock elections seemingly fail in fostering bottom-up participation of young people.

Nora Elise Hesby Mathé and Eyvind Elstad focus on quite another field of participation and ask for a citizenship education which allows students experiencing "how it is very possible to influence political processes without access to formal channels of participation". In their paper *Students' Perceptions of Citizenship Preparation in Social Studies: The Role of Instruction and Students' Interests*, they explore how Norwegian students' social studies experience and appraisal as well as their own political online activities are related to their perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. The quantitative analyses indicate that enjoying social studies, discussions of democracy and politics, the teacher's contributions in lessons and students' online political communication are significantly associated with students' perceptions of citizenship preparation in social studies. The authors recommend focusing on students' interests and assuring quality instruction because both increase students' perceived value of the subject for civic and political engagement.

Social science education may not only (de)motivate students for participation but also foster specific political attitudes and support for concrete policies. In *Assessing the Effect of Social Science Education on Punitive Attitudes*, Michael Thomas Costelloe, Christine Arazan and Madeline Stenger present results from an online survey

of undergraduates majoring in the social sciences on support for punitive criminal justice policies. For a United States' university they show that students with a higher level of education – which is known as a strong and consistent predictor of punitiveness – and those studying social sciences are generally less punitive than others. Young people whose study programmes include issues of criminal and social justice are more distant to greater punitiveness compared to those from so-called “hard science disciplines”. (Higher educational) Framing, again, proves to produce performative effects and social scientists can contribute to develop a well-informed viewpoint through research and the education of the youth “to critical thinkers and thoughtful citizens”, thus aiming at a change in the framing of the crime problem and of criminal justice policies.

Disciplines and objects of study have a performative impact on political thinking of students. The study of *Ezinne O. Idika* and *Joseph C. Onuoha* shows that students' performance in the school subject of economics is influenced by people's personality. In *Influence of Economics Teachers' Personality on Secondary School Students' Classroom Performance* we learn about the impact of teachers' qualification, experience, subject matter knowledge and relationship to students on achievements in economics. Analysing a sample of 19 teachers and 326 students in Public Secondary Schools in Nigeria, the authors provide further evidence for the well-known positive effects of experienced teachers, teaching in a supportive environment, building a positive interpersonal relationship to students and leaning on solid knowledge of the subject matter. The authors recommend implementing policies which strengthen these factors.

