

Teacher Perspectives on Economic Education

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Statement of Problem.....	2
Research Question.....	3
Purpose and Significance of Study.....	3
Limitations.....	3
Methodology.....	4
Organization of Study.....	4
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature.....	6
The Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Approach.....	7
Service Learning Approach.....	8
An Interactive (Role Playing) Simulation Approach.....	10
The Inverted Classroom Approach.....	11
Experiments, Demonstrations, or Dramatizations.....	12
Technologies Based Teaching Methodologies.....	13
Lecturing plus Student Centered Technologies.....	15
Summary.....	16
Chapter Three: Methods.....	17
Participants.....	17
Data Collection.....	19
Data Analysis.....	20
Chapter Four: Findings.....	22
Questionnaire.....	22

Summary.....	30
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	32
Conclusions.....	32
Recommendations.....	33
Appendix A.....	35
Questionnaire.....	35
References.....	37

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Economic education is extremely important because it is vital to the future health of our nation's economy. The purpose of Economic education is to create responsible citizens and effective decision-makers. According to James Calderwood in the article "What is Economic Education," these two qualities require students to be able to understand and make reasoned judgments about major economic questions facing society and themselves as members of that society (Calderwood, 1981, p.33). Many of the current economic problems that we face could be resolved if students are required to complete a course in Economics and become economically literate.

Economic education is a very crucial subject that many of our nation's schools tend to overlook. According to a survey compiled by the National Council of Economic Education titled "Survey of the States Economic and Personal Finance Education in Our Nation's School 2007," there is still much that needs to be done in terms of implementing Economic education into our nation's schools. Currently, there are 49 states as well as the District of Columbia that include Economics in their standards. Iowa and Rhode Island are the only two states that do not include Economics in their standards. Of the 49 states, 41 states (83% of those with standards) require implementation of Economic standards. Seventeen of those states (35%) require an Economic course to be offered. There are just 17 states that require students to take an Economics course as a requirement for graduation. Only 22 states require testing of student's knowledge in Economics and this is three fewer than in 2004 (National Council of Economic Education, 2007). It is very clear that progress has been made in the teaching of Economics over the

past several years, but much more work still needs to take place in emphasizing Economics in our K-12 curriculum. Steps that need to be taken include; requiring separate, stand-alone courses in these subjects as part of high school graduation requirements, and testing student knowledge levels (National Council of Economic Education, 2007).

One of the current problems with economic education is the strategies teachers use to teach the subject. The majority of teachers are stuck on traditional methods that have been in practice for many years. A specific example would be the chalk and talk method, which is defined as a traditional method of education in which the teacher addresses the students and uses the blackboard to provide examples or illustrations (Encarta, 2007). Another example that is very similar to chalk and talk is lecture, another method of direct instruction. Many students who take Economics classes get very bored and uninterested in the material taught because of these outdated teaching methods. If teachers were able to use more effective methods in the Economics courses they teach, their students would be able to better comprehend the information making them better citizens of not only the United States but the world as well.

Statement of Problem

Economic education is a growing subject in secondary education. The current teaching strategies that are implemented by economic teachers at the high school level are outdated and do not pertain to the ways in which students best comprehend economic content.

Research Question

Based on the statement of the problem, this master's research project seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the purpose and importance of Economic education?
2. What teaching strategies does the literature suggest should be implemented by teachers that teach Economics courses and will best benefit the ways in which students learn economics?

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the effective teaching strategies that can be used in the Economics classroom and that will ultimately help students better comprehend the economic content through their different learning styles. The significance of this paper is that it addresses a serious and applicable issue in Economic education today. Through this review, Economic teachers will be able to gain an understanding of several different teaching strategies and how these strategies pertain to student's different learning styles. Educators will be able to better plan their lessons according to the teaching strategies that benefit their students learning styles and that pertain to the content being presented.

Limitations

Major limiting factors for this master's research project are:

1. Much of the research done on Economic education teaching strategies has been done at the College Level. At the secondary level, the research is limited.
2. Articles found through various electronic search engines was only used if they were available on-line or at the main branch of the Alden Library.

3. The participants selected for the research study filled out an interview questionnaire that was sent to them via email. They were not interviewed orally. This is considered a limitation because in the event of a misunderstanding, participants could not immediately be asked to clarify. Instead, follow-up emails; asking for further insight, greater detail, and/or clarification, were sent to participants when necessary.

Methodology

The methodology for this research project consisted of a literature review using the electronic sources provided through the Alden Library at Ohio University. The primary search engines included JSTOR, Educational Resources Information Center Search Engine (ERIC), Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar. The search focused on the key words “Economic education,” “teaching strategies,” “teaching methodologies,” and “high school economics.” The search was then limited to those articles that addressed Economic education at the secondary level and those that were available in full text electronically or in print at Alden Library. Next, abstracts were reviewed to narrow down the literature and to identify the most relevant.

Organization of Study

Chapter One of this study includes an introduction to Economic education. The main problem and the research questions are outlined. The purpose and significance of the study, along with the limitations are also included in this chapter.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature conducted for this study. Themes will be identified and supported by finding in the literature.

Chapter Three includes a comprehensive summary of the research, and an analysis of the findings. Any limitations that played a role will also be discussed.

Chapter Four summarizes the previous three chapters and offers conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Economic education serves the purpose of educating students so that they will become responsible citizens and effective decision-makers in society. Economic education provides students with the real-life skills they need in order to succeed. Ultimately, economics will educate students so that they will be able to think and choose responsibly as consumers, savers, investors, citizens, members of the workforce, and effective participants in a global economy (NCEE, 2008). As the President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, Anthony Santomero, states “Economic and financial education is the best investment we can make to strengthen our nation’s economy” (Santomero, 2003).

Prior to looking at the many different teaching strategies, we must first look at why educators struggle with the teaching of economics through the many different strategies available. First and foremost, educators aren’t adequately educated themselves in terms of economic education. Social studies educators are generally the ones who are responsible for teaching high school economics courses and the typical social studies educator on average has only completed four to eight credit hours of economics course work. This represents no more than seven percent of the total social science hours required for certification (Joshi & Marri, 2006). How can we expect these educators to effectively teach our youth the knowledgeable skills and content of economics when they in fact do not have the requisite knowledge and skills themselves?

To overcome this, economics education must become a priority in secondary social studies preservice teacher education programs with the end goal of producing active, economically literate citizens (Joshi & Marri, 2006). Social studies educators should be required or take responsibility upon themselves to attend workshops in order to enhance and update their knowledge and skills in effectively teaching economics and to become aware of new teaching techniques available. There is a wide variety of workshops available at the various Centers of Economic Education located at universities, which are affiliated with the National Council of Economic Education (Joshi & Marri, 2006).

Researchers have looked at many different teaching strategies that are implemented in the economics classroom. It is obvious that every student has a particular learning style from which he or she benefits most. With that said, one specific teaching strategy should not be the sole means of presenting the information to the students in the classroom. Rather teachers should utilize a variety of teaching methods. This allows the students to be actively involved in several different ways without boring them with the same repetitive routine as well as focusing on every student's learning style. This has proven to be a successful teaching strategy (Wentland, 2004).

The Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Approach

According to Wentland (2004) there are two ways to try to improve how economic information is communicated to students: problem-based learning as well collaborative learning. Problem-based learning deviates from more conventional instructional strategies by reorienting traditional teacher-student interaction toward active, self-directed learning by the student, rather than didactic, teacher-directed instruction

(Maxwell, Mergendoller, & Bellisimo, 2005). In problem-based learning, students formulate and pursue their own learning objectives by researching a situation, developing appropriate questions, and producing their own solutions to the problem. Teachers coach students with suggestions for further study or inquiry but do not assign predetermined learning activities (Maxwell et al., 2005).

According to Smith and MacGregor (1992), collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual efforts by students, or students and teachers together. Usually students are working in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Collaborative learning activities vary widely, but most center on students' exploration or application of the course material, not simply the teacher's presentation or explication of it (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Collaborative learning fosters the developments of improved communications and teamwork skills.

Together, the two components, problem-based learning and collaborative learning, make up the collaborative problem solving approach to teaching. Through the implementation of this strategy students will be forced to be actively involved, work with others to comprehend the information, and think critically about the information.

Service-Learning Approach

Service-learning is a method of experiential learning that links the classroom with the local community. Service-learning can be viewed as a project for the economics classroom and when administered properly, will help student's recognize links between experience and learning while enhancing their problem solving and creative/critical thinking skills. The service learning project requires students to volunteer in a local

business and then relate their experiences to the educational theories they learn in the classroom. Throughout the service-learning project, students are expected to identify economic issues, explore economic theories, and provide evidence relating their experiences to these economic theories (McGoldrick, 1998). Service-learning is an ideal approach to active learning.

A more specific example of the service learning project is described by McGoldrick (1998) describes service-learning in an Economics course.

Students volunteer to provide services for a community organization and through these experiences they discover economic principles at work in the real world. Example of the economic issues that may be developed in this way include externalities, price ceilings and floors, unemployment, poverty, and many other policy issues. Writing assignments and class discussions promote the sharing of observations and reflections, which students are then responsible for linking with the theories presented over the entire course. Finally, students are asked to share these experiences with their peers through group or individual presentations. This step allows students to recognize the applications of these theories and principles to various situations, completing the cycle of learning” (p. 367).

Service learning is an ideal active approach to learning economics in the high school classroom. Research on service learning in high school economics is very limited and much of it has been committed to college level economics courses. This is obvious for a number of reasons; it depends heavily on the school and community resources available, length of the economic course, and students’ availability to volunteer their time. If the service learning approach is not suitable for certain high school economics

classrooms, it does not have to be implemented in its entirety. Adjustments could be made so that it can be applicable. For example, businesses can be contacted and if interested, they can provide the necessary information so that students can do everything within the classroom. The key concept of service learning is learning through the linkages of the classroom and the local community.

An Interactive (Role Play) Simulation Approach

The interactive (role play) simulation approach engages students directly in the economic process, so that their understanding of economic principles is based on, or reinforced by, their own experience, observations and analysis. By placing students in a market situation and asking them to interpret their behavior and observations and to analyze the market results, they are able to move from abstraction to reality (Myron, 1970). This teaching approach can be implemented in the classroom through the use of the many available economic games/simulations.

Examples of economic games that have proven to be beneficial include; “The Summit of the Americas,” and “The Stock Market Game.” “The Summit of the Americas” is a macroeconomic behavioral game in which students act as trade representatives negotiating trade agreements on behalf of their respective countries. The simulation challenges students to process information efficiently and quickly, to apply economic analysis, to sharpen decision-making skills, and to improve their negotiation skills with the ultimate goal of developing and implementing a plan to enhance their country’s economic and political well being (Wentland, 2004). “The Stock Market Game” gives students the chance to invest a hypothetical \$100,000 in an online portfolio. While students think they are just playing a game, they are actually learning economic

and financial concepts they will use for the rest of their lives. This game helps teach and reinforce the essential skills of critical thinking, decision-making, cooperation and communication, and independent research (Stock Market, 2007).

An interactive (role play) simulation approach enables a learning experience that can help students understand basic economic concepts through their own involvement in a market. Its strengths are derived from the fact that the students learn by analyzing their own behavior and observations in a situation that taps their competitive drive (Myron, 1970). This approach, through the use of role play and simulations/economic games, is a powerful method that actively engages students in the learning process, taps into students' interests, and forces them to participate as opposed to letting students be passive recipients.

The Inverted Classroom Approach

The inverted classroom approach means that events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom can now take place outside the classroom and vice versa. The use of learning technologies, particularly multimedia, provides new opportunities for students to learn. For example, the use of the World Wide Web and multimedia computers enables students to view lectures outside the classroom, whereas homework assignments can be done in class, in groups. The general principle of this method is to provide a menu of options for the students to use in learning (Lage, Platt, & Teglia, 2000).

This approach makes students responsible for their own learning. Students would be expected to come to class prepared by viewing and/or listening to a lecture or reading assigned material prior to class, so when they do come to class, they will be able to discuss the relevant material. This allows class time to be used for open ended

discussions, experiments, demonstrations, and group activities which would ultimately help student gain a better understanding of the material.

One of the strengths of this method is that it provides an opportunity for better student-teacher communication. This interaction is beneficial in two ways: the student is able to clear up any confusion immediately, and the instructor is able to monitor performance and comprehension (Lage, Platt, & Teglia, 2000). A communication or discussion board could be set up on the school's website or the teacher's website so that communication can easily be extended outside the classroom and school.

With the many different learning styles students display, the inverted classroom approach implements a strategy of teaching that engages a wide variety of learners. It allows students of all learning styles to use a method or methods that best suit them. This approach will give the teacher more time within class to spend on activities that will actively involve the students as opposed spending it on lectures. Overall, the inverted classroom method allows instructors to present options that appeal to most learning styles while still maintaining control over course coverage and content.

Experiments, Demonstrations, or Dramatizations

Experiments, demonstrations, or dramatizations offer teachers another teaching method that can effectively help communicate economic concepts to students. Experiments and demonstrations provide students with an opportunity to see the economic principles in action. A simple experiment might consist of holding an auction for a can of cola. Bidding could begin at five cents and increased in five-cent increments; count would be taken of how many people wanted to buy the can at each price.

Eventually, the can would be sold to the only student still willing to pay. A simple graph of the data would give the students their first demand curve (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000).

Experiments, demonstrations, or dramatizations can be utilized by teachers as an effective teaching strategy in any economics classroom. By using this method, teachers can turn the classroom into a laboratory format with the purpose of providing a more active learning environment in which the students can be meaningfully engaged by the material, with other students, and with the instructor (Cardell, Fort, Joerding, Inaba, Lamoreaux, Rosenman, et al., 1996).

Technology Based Teaching Methodologies

Many of the previously mentioned teaching methods have either incorporated the use of technology in one way or another or could easily incorporate it, if not already. With the many changes that have occurred in instructional technology, in particular the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web, teachers have been provided with new opportunities that can improve the way they teach and the way students learn. Incorporating technology into the classroom, even with traditional teaching methods, can enhance learning for students with a variety of learning styles, and at the same time make economic content more relevant, more interesting and more fun for teachers and students.

Simkins (1999) stresses the importance of utilizing technology, such as the Internet, in the classroom and ways that it can be beneficial to teachers and students.

The Internet is a rich source of economic news, data, and information that can make economics relevant and understandable for students in ways that lectures and textbooks alone cannot. Instructors can use up-to-minute

data and examples to illustrate economic concepts and provide additional sources of information from across the world. Students can view news clips, listen to speeches, and access on-line economics resources from a variety of Web sources. These resources provide the basis for a wide variety of active-learning exercises. For example, students can use information from the web to compare the economic and political characteristics of various countries, to develop a Web-based magazine (e-zine) analyze current economic policy issues, or to make economic predictions based on economic theory and current economic conditions. These types of activities directly involve students in the learning process and make economics come alive, promoting broader interests in economics and provide a richer learning experience that traditional teaching methods can (p. 279).

The Internet is not the only technological tool that can account for effective teaching methods. There are several technology-based teaching/learning approaches that can be utilized in economic education which include: videotapes, DVDs, films, television programs, simulation programs such as games, electronic textbooks, and class discussion boards (Wentland, 2004). It is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that whatever teaching method he or she uses, in terms of technology, actively involves the students and enhances their learning and comprehension of economics material.

Overall, technology can be used to assist teachers in their attempts to encourage and motivate students to become active participants in the learning process. The Internet, along with many other technological resources, provides new opportunities for improving

teaching and learning in economics. Educators are faced with the challenge of coverage and depth of material while enhancing the classroom experience with meaningful in-class experiences; technology is just the key to help them accomplish this.

Lecturing plus Student Centered Activities

Lecturing is a teaching strategy that does not seem to be the most beneficial for the many different learning styles students have. It puts the students in a passive role by forcing them to sit and write down notes on the topic that the teacher lectures on.

However, when lecturing is combined with student-centered activities, while still perhaps not the most desired approach, it can be an effective teaching strategy for the economics classroom.

The student participation component has many variations including selecting students at random during a lecture and then asking them to paraphrase or comment on what was just stated (Wentland, 2004). Another example would be to organize students into groups in order to orally review the content of each lecture. Each group would then submit summary write-ups that can ultimately be compiled into a course review document (Wentland, 2004). A third example would be asking students to write a “minute-paper” which is assigned during the last minutes of class. Each student would be required to respond to two questions: (1) what was the most important thing you learned in class today and (2) what questions are unanswered (Wentland, 2004).

The goal of this method is to actively involve the students in the lecture through some sort of discussion and/or activity. Other forms of the traditional lecture combined with a student-centered learning activity include: lecture discussion, lecture-laboratory, lecture-recitation, lecture with problem sets, and lecture demonstration (Wentland, 2004).

The students need to be proactive rather than passive so that learning will result in comprehension.

Summary

Each of the teaching strategies suggested in the research literature actively involves the students and takes into consideration their many different learning styles. Teaching strategies that actively engage students in the learning process increase their academic performance and generate more positive attitudes about learning. Educators need to put methods into practice that encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

It is apparent in the research literature that there are many different teaching strategies teachers can use in the economics classroom. It is up to them to implement the many different strategies and use them in such a way that best presents the content to be learned and that best meets the many different learning styles of their students. Overall, effective teaching styles provide an effective learning environment in the classroom and enable students to apply classroom learning to real-life situations.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Participants

I conducted my research by interviewing five educators that were either current social studies teachers or had been at one point in their career. I purposively selected these social studies teachers throughout the state of Ohio by reviewing Ohio High School websites and obtaining social studies teachers' email addresses. I then contacted these social studies teachers and explained the purpose of my research project and asked them how many years they had been teaching, how many years they had taught economics, and whether they would be willing to participate in completing a questionnaire. I received seven responses and ended up selecting two social studies teachers that were currently teaching economics and one social studies teacher who had no experience teaching economics but had interest in doing so. Another participant I selected had recently graduated from college with a degree in integrated social studies. I chose this participant primarily because his point of views would not yet be affected by any particular school district's curriculum. The final participant I selected is a professor who teaches economics at the college level. I chose this participant due to the fact that he has a wide range of experience in economics. I felt his input would be beneficial because of his experience teaching economics at the college level and because he has taken many more credit hours of economic courses in his college career than that required of social studies teachers. My goal was to select participants who had different levels of experience in the teaching of economics. Their answers to the questionnaire and expressed points of view

gave me a broader understanding of their experiences. All schools and teachers in this study have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

The first participant, Mr. Archer, was a social studies teacher at Milton High School located in Southeast Ohio. He has been a teacher for six years and has taught Economics for three of those years. Mr. Archer also has experience teaching Advanced Economics.

The second participant, Mr. Crystal, had recently graduated from college with a degree in integrated social studies and expected soon to become a teacher at a high school located in Southwest Ohio. Mr. Crystal had no prior experience teaching economics but was interested in teaching the subject.

The third participant, Mr. Lock, was a social studies teacher at Lost High School located in Central Ohio. Mr. Lock has been a teacher for sixteen years and while he currently does not teach the subject, he has had Economics in the past.

The fourth participant, Mr. Jones, was a social studies teacher at Express High School located in Central Ohio. Mr. Jones has been a teacher for five years and is in his second year of teaching Economics.

The fifth and final participant, Mr. Summer, is currently an economic professor at Smallville University. Mr. Summer received both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in economics and therefore, has taken many more credit hours of economic courses than that of social studies teachers. Mr. Summer has experience teaching a variety of economic courses, including introductory economic courses.

Data Collection

I collected my data through an interview questionnaire. The questionnaire contained six open-ended questions. The six questions on the questionnaire included:

1. Should students be taught economics at a younger age or grade level? Do you think students would be able to comprehend the information? What are the benefits/disadvantages for students to learn economics at a younger age, if any?
2. What are your teaching strategies for economics or what teaching strategies would you use if you are not currently teaching economics (direct instruction, PowerPoint, group work, individual work, etcetera.)? Which do you think is most/least effective? Why?
3. Do you believe economics should be taught according to the textbook or some other means or what combination[s]?
4. Would it be beneficial for students if you as the teacher incorporate economic current events/situations/problems? How?
5. How can we make the subject of economics more interesting for students?
6. Why do you think it is important to teach economics to secondary students?

I emailed each of the five participants the questionnaire (see Appendix A). I asked each of them to take their time and fill it out as thoroughly as possible. I also asked each participant to give reasons and justification for any opinion he had while responding to the questions. I explained that doing so would allow me to better compare and contrast their responses. Each of the participants completed the questionnaire within a week and sent it back to me via email. Each participant encouraged me via email to contact him in

case I had any further questions or if their responses to the questions were not clear or specific enough.

In the event a participant's response to the questionnaire was unclear, I sent a follow-up email for clarification. I also sent follow-up emails when I sought further insight into and/or more detail for a particular response. Of the five participants, three participants required follow up emails. One of the participants, Mr. Crystal, was asked to clarify and expand in greater detail his responses to three of the questions. Two of the participants, Mr. Jones and Mr. Lock, were asked to provide an example for a specific response they each submitted. Mr. Jones was also asked in his follow-up email to clarify a response he submitted to one of the questions.

I asked Mr. Crystal to clarify his responses to Question 2-4 by expanding upon the teaching methods he referred to and offering an example of how he would specifically incorporate current events. I asked Mr. Jones to expand upon the examples he provided in Question Five for making economics more interesting to students. Mr. Lock was asked to offer an example of the teaching method he suggested in Question Two. Each participant thoroughly responded to the follow-up email within two days.

Data Analysis

All five participants in this study completed the interview questionnaire. The questionnaire contained six open-ended questions. I read through each of the questionnaires to discern common themes and differences between the participants' responses. The participant's responses were detailed and hence easy to analyze. I analyzed each individual question separately in order to obtain an accurate analysis.

While analyzing each participant's responses, I specifically categorized their answers based on similarities and differences with notable regard to their varying levels of experience in teaching economics. The responses to the questions by the participants with more years of teaching experience were more detailed than those of the participants with fewer years of experience. In addition, the participants with more experience explained their answers more in-depth. The participants with fewer years of experience or no experience teaching often responded to the questions from a hypothetical ideal situation as they lack "real life" context. The findings of this research will be presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Five educators participated in this study. Their age, years of experience teaching, years of experience teaching economics, and their location all differed. This chapter presents the analysis of the questionnaires that were completed by each participant. Each of the six questions on the questionnaire will be examined individually. Common themes and differences will be discussed while examining each individual question. At the end of the chapter a summary will be provided synthesizing overall ideas, themes, and difference.

Questionnaire

Each of the five participants thoroughly answered all six of the questions that were on the questionnaire. The first question asked;

1. Should students be taught economics at a younger age or grade level? Do you think students would be able to comprehend the information? What are the benefits/disadvantages for students to learn economics at a younger age, if any?

All five of the participants responded very similarly to this question. Each participant responded that economics should indeed be introduced to students at a younger age but not as a formal class. They all stated in one form or another that the basic principles of economics should be implemented into the existing curricula. All participants agreed that more complex areas of economics would be difficult for younger students to comprehend and therefore would not be beneficial to the students and could possibly discourage them from expressing an interest in economics later on. Each of the participants felt that an advantage of being introduced to the basic fundamentals of economics at an early age would prepare the students for a deeper understanding of the information later on in their

schooling. By having some prior knowledge of economics students could possibly move at a more accelerated pace in the learning of economics once they reach high school. Also, teachers would be able to explore economics more in-depth, as opposed to focusing on basic knowledge.

Mr. Archer, who is a social studies teacher at Milton High School and has had extensive experience teaching economics, offered a detailed justification for his reasoning:

I don't necessarily think that I'd be a big proponent of teaching Econ to younger age students as a formal class, though I think that the basic fundamentals should be worked into existing curricula. Students understanding some basic principles (concept of supply and demand; notion of incentives affecting behavior; opportunity cost; etc.) could be broached early, but I feel that going too far with it too early could discount the usefulness of the material later on. By the time my students come in as juniors, we can approach relatively complex topics and apply an economic analysis to them. The students haven't formally worked through much of this in the past, so they consider it more "adult" than many other topics. As an example, I spend a semester wrestling with my sophomore American History students, as they tend to frequently remark "but we've already studied this in 8th grade." They don't remember much of the material, but their association with the topic matter becomes related to 8th grade, and many have a difficult time getting past that.

Mr. Archer provided an intriguing example in his response to the first question.

Introducing economics formally to students at an older age could interest students even

more in economics than if formally introduced at an earlier age because of the notion that economics is more “adult” than many other topics. Also, being formally introduced to economics for the first time in high school could interest students merely based on the fact that it is new to them.

The second question asked;

2. What are your teaching strategies for economics or what teaching strategies would you use if you are not currently teaching economics? Which do you think is most/least effective? Why?

Each of the participants’ responses to this question were similar in some aspects but differed as well. Their responses were similar in regards to active learning. Each of the participants advocated teaching strategies that actively involve students in the subject matter. However, their responses differed with regard to the actual methods they implement in the classroom.

Mr. Crystal, who recently graduated from college and will be a first year teacher, stated that he would implement multiple teaching strategies in order to reach the many different learning styles of each student. Mr. Jones, who is a social studies teacher at Express High School and in his second year of teaching economics, responded to this question by providing his specific methods of instruction that seek to address the many individual learning styles of his students. Mr. Jones stated:

“I teach it like I teach other subjects. I like to introduce information using PowerPoint and progress into group activities. I think, especially within economics, that group work is effective. Think about business and corporate work, it is always group oriented, why not do the same in school.”

His response was traditional in the sense that he would first introduce the information to the students and, once the basic concepts and ideas were understood, move into group oriented activities that actively engage the students. Mr. Jones's method of teaching is highly recognized in much of the research literature. It is imperative that students gain an understanding of basic economic concepts so that they may eventually explore and comprehend more complex economic theories and principles. This method of teaching, if done properly can be very effective.

Mr. Lock, who is a social studies teacher at Lost High school, and Mr. Archer both mentioned that they like to use simulations and role playing as an instructional method and both believe that it is a very effective way of teaching. Mr. Archer went into further detail about the use of simulations in the classroom. He states, "Students have very limited understanding of economic concepts and when using simulations, we need to make sure they reach students in a true conceptual way instead of just a 'hey that was kind of fun and interesting' sort of way." Mr. Archer also mentioned that direct instruction is also a teaching method that he uses. However, he clearly stated that it is not his preferred method of instruction, but it is sometimes necessary in order to introduce a topic or certain concepts to students.

Mr. Summer, who is currently an economic professor at Smallville University, stated that for many of his college economics courses, direct instruction is often favored to introduce new topics and concepts, but not the only means of instruction. Depending on the course, Mr. Summer also likes to use simulations and activities that actively involve his students. He also likes to have his students work together in groups. He stated that having students work in groups, forces them to converse with each another,

which will ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of the material. Mr. Summer suggested that at the high school level, teachers should use methods that actively engage the students, such as cooperative learning, simulations, and role playing.

The participants referred to several different teaching strategies in response to this question. Most strategies actively involve students in the classroom. The teaching strategy mentioned by the participants that does not actively involve the students was direct instruction. However, when the participants mentioned direct instruction, they clarified that it wasn't their preferred method or that it wasn't their only method of instruction. These four participants felt direct instruction was occasionally necessary to use because in some instances, it was the best way to introduce economic concepts and principles, but the participants stated that direct instruction should not be the sole means of instruction.

The third question asked:

3. Do you believe economics should be taught according to the textbook or some other means or what combination[s]?

All five participants responded to this question in a very similar manner. The overall consensus among the participants was that economics should be taught through a combination of methods. All participants argued that while the textbook should serve as a guide for the students other instructional methods should be used as well. Mr. Jones responded by saying, "Both, the textbook should help guide the students, but I think that creative thinking and teaching help motivate the students." Mr. Crystal stated, "The textbook should serve as a foundation or standard for guidelines, but other means of teaching should be the primary method." Mr. Lock said, "The textbook is a base for the

facts, it's the teachers job to implement methods of instruction that add further information and that help students gain a better understanding of that information.”

Mr. Summer said that his use of a textbook depends on the particular economics course he teaches. In most cases he does not use the textbook in class unless it is needed for solving problems and completing exercises. He indicated that he does like for his students to have a textbook because it serves as a resource they can use outside of class and it's helpful in preparing for exams. Mr. Summer also commented that he uses textbooks at the high school level much like he did at the college level. He said that textbooks are great resources for high school students because it gives them something to take home, and they can resort to it for further information if something is being discussed in class they don't understand.

Mr. Archer stated that economics should be taught through a combination of methods and provided a specific example as to why he felt this way. He suggested that he tried to break away from the textbook entirely, but found that some students who wanted additional ways of preparing for tests had a hard time with material that was developed without the structure of a textbook curriculum. So now, although Mr. Archer uses many teaching strategies he uses the text as a resource often enough to let the students know how they can turn to it when in need.

The fourth question asked:

4. Would it be beneficial for students if you, as the teacher, incorporate economic current events/situations/problems? How?

All five participants responded to this question by saying, “Absolutely!” Each argued that incorporating current events would be extremely beneficial for their students’

comprehension of the economics material. This is primarily because current events make the information relevant to students as it allows them to connect to the information on a personal level.

Mr. Summer stated that, “Current events, particularly with the state of the economy in the national news media today, are invaluable.” He went on to reply that current events serve as a credible teaching tool that helps students form a better understanding of information by making a direct connection with the information.

Mr. Jones felt the same as the other participants about incorporating current events in the classroom. He expanded by referring to specific current events that he uses for topics of discussion, group activities, and group presentations. The examples he presented include: how many Americans are in severe debt, the current U.S. economic situation, the devaluation of the American dollar, gas prices, the national debt, and the housing crisis. He indicated that gas prices happen to be a very popular topic among students because they can directly relate to the topic due to the fact that many of them are just getting their driver’s license.

The fifth question asked:

5. How can we as educators make the subject of economics more interesting for students?

In response to this question, four of the participants, Mr. Jones, Mr. Crystal, Mr. Lock, and Mr. Summer all shared very similar responses. They all felt that teachers can make the subject of economics interesting for students by making the information relevant as well as by creating real life/world connections. Mr. Jones provides two suggestions of how to make economics more interesting to students. His first suggestion was having

students participate in the stock market by allowing students to buy and sell fake stocks. This suggestion is much like the Stock Market Game. His second suggestion is allowing students to create their own businesses and then give them economic scenarios to which they need to adjust.

Mr. Archer responded to this question differently than the other participants by putting direct responsibility on the teachers themselves:

“We can make economics more interesting for students by the way in which we present the material, and making sure it is taught by teachers qualified and interested in teaching it. Many people graduate from school with just one or two classes in introductory economics. Their lack of experience and familiarity with the subject matter makes it uncomfortable to teach, and so they do so with little passion and fall back on textbooks and worksheets as the main source of instruction.”

Mr. Archer’s point that many teachers do have insufficient experience and familiarity with economics because of the lack of economics courses in college is supported by the research literature (Parag & Marri, 2006). One of the major problems with teachers who are responsible for teaching economics is that they are not experienced in the subject themselves, yet they are still required to teach it.

The sixth and final question asked:

6. Why do you think it is important to teach economics to secondary students?

All five participants’ responses similarly suggested that economics education should provide students with the knowledge they will need to live a successful life. For example, Mr. Jones stated:

Many students will move on to college, where basically every degree requires you to take some sort of introductory economics. By introducing the subject to the students at the high school level, they will be better prepared for these courses when they get to college. Also, especially for those students that do not attend college, they need to learn how to manage their money, understand how to spend and save, and understand national economics because they are coming to an age where they can vote in local, state, and federal elections. I believe that the best way to avoid massive debts and economic problems in the future is to teach it now! Mr. Jones makes it clear that it is important to teach economics at the high school level because it will prepare those who seek a higher education and as well as prepare all students to become responsible citizens and decision makers. Mr. Jones' response reflects a dominant theme in the research literature (Calderwood, 1981; Marri & Parag, 2006; Wentland, 2004; Santomero, 2003).

Mr. Archer's response was alike the other four participants' in regards to his opinion on the importance of economic education. He further stressed his opinion by stating, "Very few classes will be used on a daily basis more than fundamental economic understanding."

Summary

The responses of all five participants had many common themes. Economics should not be taught formally to younger-aged students although the basic fundamentals of economics should be included in the existing curricula as advocated by the Ohio Academic Content Standards. The teachers in this study advocated using a variety of teaching strategies to actively involve students and address their different learning styles.

The textbook should not be used as the primary means for teaching economics.

Economics should be taught through a combination of the textbook use and methods that actively engage students. In order to make economics more relevant to the students, current events should be included as it allows them to make a personal connection.

The participants' responses suggest that economic education is critical in preparing students for a better life and that teaching strategies which involve active learning are most effective. The research literature suggests two major tenets. First, economic education is important to a student's development in becoming a responsible citizen and an effective decision-maker (Wentland, 2004) (Marri, Parag, 2006) (Calderwood, 1981) (Santomero, 2003). Second, there are multiple teaching strategies to meet the many different learning styles of students and that actively involve them in learning economics (Wentland, 2004). The findings of this study support these two suggestions.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The review of the literature explained the importance of economic education and suggested many strategies for teaching economics in the classroom that would be beneficial for students' comprehension of economic concepts and theories while taking into consideration the many different learning styles they have. The National Council on Economic Education states that economic education helps students develop the real-life skills needed to succeed: to be able to think and choose responsibly as consumers, savers, investors, citizens, members of the workforce, and effective citizens of a global economy (NCEE, 2008).

The literature suggests several teaching strategies that actively involve students in the content, including collaborative problem solving, service learning, interactive role-play and simulations, an inverted classroom, experiments/demonstrations/dramatizations, technology-based teaching strategies, and lecturing accompanied with student-centered activities. It is imperative that teachers utilize many teaching strategies and not just limit themselves to a specific one. This will allow them to target the many different learning styles their students have as well as create a learning environment that will keep their students actively involved as opposed to the same daily routine.

The literature suggests that traditional teaching techniques, such as lecturing, are outdated and do not allow students to make true connections between what they learn and the real world. By implementing teaching strategies that allow students to make these connections, students will gain an enduring understanding rather than memorizing

information for a test and simply forget it afterwards. The main goal in teaching students economics is to help them truly comprehend the information so that they will go on to live a successful financial life, as well as become responsible citizens and effective decision makers in our economy.

Recommendations

Five educators participated in this study. Their teaching background varied, ranging from a first year teacher to an experienced economics professor at the college level. Each participant lived in a different region in the state of Ohio and each completed a questionnaire that contained six open-ended questions. The participants' responses to the questions on the questionnaire constitute the findings of this study which revealed many common themes that are found in the research literature as well. These findings include that:

- Economics for younger students should not be taught as formal discrete class but rather that its fundamental concepts should be incorporated into the existing curriculum.
- It is essential to teach economics at the secondary level. Teaching economics to high school students should ultimately result in students becoming responsible citizens and effective decision-makers in a global economy.
- A variety of teaching strategies should be used that actively involve students and cater to their many different learning styles. One specific teaching strategy should not be the sole means of instruction.

- Current events should be used as a valuable instructional tool in the economics classroom. Current events make economic information relevant to students and allow them to make a connection between the material and themselves. More research should be conducted to determine the actual effectiveness of each recommended teaching strategy through student feedback.

Thus, in accordance with the literature, this study reaffirmed the importance of implementing a variety of teaching strategies that actively engage students in the economics classroom by actively involving them in the material, helping them develop the skills they need to work cooperatively with their classmates, and encouraging them to think critically and creatively.

Economics teachers, especially at the secondary level, should consider the findings of this study and the suggestions made in the literature when they decide what the instructional strategies they will use in their classroom. Furthermore, any educator at the middle school or high school level can find use in the findings of this study and the suggestions made in the research literature. Each of the suggested teaching strategies can easily be incorporated in other subject areas and benefit student comprehension. Finally, the most important issue to consider is to implement a variety of strategies that actively engages students and takes into consideration their many learning styles.

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