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Economics In The Secondary School—A Fusion Curriculum

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by Burt Saxon

I. Introduction

Why teach history and the social studies? Better yet, why study history and the social studies? Most of the hundreds of texts and curricula produced each year answer these questions only implicitly. Before presenting my outline and lesson plans, I will explicitly discuss the assumptions which underlie them.

A brief review of the last two decades of social studies curricula is in order. The story begins in the late 1950's when American educators in all disciplines became seized with panic. Russia's Sputnik convinced the American public that American education had become soft and flabby. The natural sciences were singled out for special criticism and the proposed solution was to have professional scientists cooperate with the best secondary school teachers to produce vigorous, demanding curricula. Thus were born PSSC, BSSC, and other scientific curricula. The social studies soon followed; social studies/history reform focused on teaching students "the structure of the discipline." Instead of merely memorizing concepts, students were to be trained to think like historians, economists, and sociologists. Objectives of this reform effort were purely cognitive.

This reform was short-lived as students in the late 1960's began demanding more relevant curricula. Traditional subject matter was replaced with courses on race, drugs, sex, crime, prejudice, and the environment. Objectives became more affective. Students were encouraged to clarify their values and "get in touch" with their feelings. Teachers had a new role model—the encounter group leader with beads and dungarees. His predecessor, the senior professor with the tweedy sport coat, was put out to pasture.

Then came the inevitable consequence of the sixties' reforms. The social studies became confused in their mission and appeared to be adrift. Restoring a sense of direction has become vitally necessary.

I believe there is a way to proceed; my blueprint for the social studies is not original. It calls for a reexamination of the works of John Dewey and the application of many of Dewey's principles.

Dewey was first and foremost a cognitivist. But he believed human experience, not reason alone, was the basis of knowledge. Thus, Dewey wanted human experience to be the basis of the social studies. The social studies would then be related to the life experiences of the learner. This does not mean the social studies would abandon theoretical rigor. It simply means rigor would be achieved inductively rather than deductively.

Following Dewey, I advocate social studies curricula which are both rigorous and relevant. These two objectives can be realized not by discarding the traditional social studies disciplines, but by teaching these disciplines differently.

Economics is the topic of my unit. The course I am developing is one semester in length. The objectives for this course are both cognitive and affective. On the cognitive level, students are expected to master basic economic concepts and apply these concepts to current economic problems. In short, students are expected to learn to think like economists.

This course differs from a traditional economics course in that each unit, chapter (three related lessons), and lesson has affective objectives related to the corresponding cognitive objectives. Affective and cognitive objectives are fused to produce a curriculum which is both rigorous and relevant to the personal concerns of late adolescents.

Let me provide examples of fusion curriculum from history, sociology, and psychology before presenting my material.

Suppose the topic is World War II. Most history teachers focus on causes, battles, and alliances. This is important, but so are the personal concerns of the students in the class who may enter the service upon graduation or who may be drafted someday. These students may be wondering, "Would I fight in a way I believed was wrong?" This affective concern may be stated more generally, "When do I obey authority and when do I follow my own conscience?" Thus, cognitive and affective objectives fuse naturally.

Or suppose the topic is ethnicity in sociology. A possible cognitive objective would be to chart ethnic populations in a given community. Another cognitive objective might involve discussing several theories of assimilation. A related affective objective asks students to consider, "How much does my ethnic identity mean to me?"

In psychology courses, students usually discuss defense mechanisms. A cognitive objective, written behaviorally, might be, "The student shall list and define six defense mechanisms." An affective objective would be, "The student shall become aware how defense mechanisms influence his/her personality." A natural fusion.

These are examples of the fusion curriculum I am attempting in economics. The following course outline lists the topics for each lesson and the corresponding affective objectives. In Section III of this paper, I will use three lessons to illustrate in detail how a fusion curriculum works.

II. Economics Outline

I. Introduction to Economics

Chapter 1: The economist's view of the world

Lesson 1: Scarcity: unlimited wants vs. limited resources

Lesson 2: Choice-making: opportunity costs and trade-offs

Lesson 3: The questions economists ask

Chapter 2: The nature and types of ideal economic systems

Lesson 4: Traditional systems

Lesson 5: Command systems

Lesson 6: Market systems

Chapter 3: An overview of the American economy

Lesson 7: Tradition, command, and market elements

Lesson 8: Specialization, division and labor, and interdependence

Lesson 9: The role of economic institutions

II. Microeconomics

Chapter 4: Understanding a market economy

Lesson 10: Consumption-demand

I. How is my sense reflected in my choices?

Chapter 1: What choices do I make?

Lesson 1: What do I want and what can I have?

Lesson 2: How do I decide when I want conflicting things?

Lesson 3: How do I see the choice?

Chapter 2: What choices can I make?

Lesson 4: How does tradition eliminate my choices?

Lesson 5: How do (I let) others make choices for me?

Lesson 6: What choices do I make freely?

Chapter 3: What factors influence my choices?

Lesson 7: How free are my choices?

Lesson 8: How are my choices shaped by others' choices?

Lesson 9: How are my choices shaped by (my) past experiences?

II. How does my group identity shape my choices?

Chapter 4: How can I survive alone?

Lesson 10: What are my needs and how can I satisfy them?

Lesson 11: Production-supply

Lesson 12: Equilibrium-price

Chapter 5: Competition and market structure

Lesson 13: Pure competition

Lesson 14: Monopoly and imperfect markets

Lesson 15: Factor markets

Chapter 6: "Market Failures"

Lesson 16: Information costs, resource immobility, and externalities

Lesson 17: Discrimination

Lesson 18: Equity and efficiency

Chapter 7: Government intervention and regulation

Lesson 19: Enforcing the "rules of the game"

Lesson 20: Regulations and controls

Lesson 21: Production of "public goods"

Chapter 8: Income distribution and government redistribution

Lesson 22: Sources of income

Lesson 23: Government tax and transfer policy

Lesson 24: Nongovernmental-modifications

Lesson 11: How do others' needs influence my actions?

Lesson 12: How can I coordinate my needs with those of others?

Chapter 5: How is my identity shaped by my group memberships?

Lesson 13: How does working for the group promote my self-interest?

Lesson 14: What power do we get from group membership?

Lesson 15: How do our groups define ourselves?

Chapter 6: How does our group confine us?

Lesson 16: What limits does the group impose on its members?

Lesson 17: What are members' obligations to the group?

Lesson 18: How am I different from members of my group?

Chapter 7: How can I become a member of society?

Lesson 19: How is the society different from the group?

Lesson 20: How can society free me from domination by family and peers?

Lesson 21: What choices (do I let) (does) my society make for me?

Chapter 8: How do I choose when my loyalty to a group conflicts with my loyalty to society?

Lesson 22: How does my group fit into the society?

Lesson 23: How are my loyalties divided between my group and society?

Lesson 24: What do I lose or gain by seeing myself as a member of society?

III. Macroeconomics

Chapter 9: National Income Accounting

Lesson 25: Gross national product

Lesson 26: Adjusting GNP for price and population changes

Lesson 27: What GNP does not include

Chapter 10: Aggregate demand and aggregate supply

Lesson 28: Explaining total economic performance

Lesson 29: Economic goals: full employment and stable prices

Lesson 30: Economic problems, unemployment and inflation

Chapter 11: Money and Monetary Policy

Lesson 31: The forms and functions of money in the U.S.

Lesson 32: How money expands and contracts

Lesson 33: The federal reserve system and monetary policy

Chapter 12: Fiscal Policy

Lesson 34: The tools of fiscal policy

Lesson 35: The multiplier effect and the acceleration principle

Lesson 36: The national debt

III. Ideology

Chapter 9: How do I judge myself?

Lesson 25: By what standards do I measure myself?

Lesson 26: How do I adjust my standards?

Lesson 27: What do I do when my standards are inadequate?

Chapter 10: How does society judge me?

Lesson 28: How does society define success and failure?

Lesson 29: How does society's standards shape my standards?

Lesson 30: What happens when society's goals conflict with my needs or standards?

Chapter 11: How do society's standards relate to its actions?

Lesson 31: How do a society's institutions reflect its standards?

Lesson 32: How do society's institutions influence its standards?

Lesson 33: How do people judge their society's actions?

Lesson 34: How do my standards influence my actions?

Lesson 35: How do my actions influence my standards?

Lesson 36: How do I judge my actions?

IV. Change

Chapter 13: Economic Growth

Lesson 37: Increased population, increased investment, and increased productivity

Lesson 38: Advantages and disadvantages of economic growth

Lesson 39: Public policy and economic growth

Chapter 14: The Public Sector

Lesson 40: Expenditures and taxes

Lesson 41: Progressive, proportional, and regressive taxes

Lesson 42: Criteria for an equitable tax system

Chapter 15: The World Economy

Lesson 43: Comparative advantage and gains from trade

Lesson 44: Trade restrictions their effects

Lesson 45: The multinational corporation and the future of the world economy

Chapter 16: Current Public Policy problems of the American Economy

Lesson 46: Meeting energy requirements

Lesson 47: Making cities livable

Lesson 48: Preserving the environment

IV. How do I see my changing self in a changing world?

Chapter 13: How am I growing?

Lesson 37: How am I becoming increasingly independent, invested in others, and capable?

Lesson 38: What are the advantages and costs of this psychological growth?

Lesson 39: How can I manage the conflicts generated by this growth?

Chapter 14: How am I developing from society's point of view?

Lesson 40: What do I give and take from society?

Lesson 41: What different expectations does society have for me?

Lesson 42: What can society legitimately expect from me?

Chapter 15: What opportunities exist for me in the world?

Lesson 43: How can I choose a lifestyle that lets me do what I do best?

Lesson 44: What limits are imposed on me when I choose this lifestyle?

Lesson 45: What new possibilities might the future bring?

Chapter 16: How do I as a growing individual relate to a changing world?

Lesson 46: How can I efficiently use (my) resource in order to contribute to society?

Lesson 47: How can I find or create a community which supports who I want to be?

III. Three Sample Lessons

I have chosen to present three lessons to illustrate how a fusion curriculum works. Each lesson takes approximately three days. The first day students discuss traditional economic principles. The second day students discuss a reading related to these principles. The third day students perform an activity illustrating the related personal objective, which is affective in nature.

The economic theme for these lessons is, “What are the types of economic systems and how does each operate?” Each economic system—traditional, command, and market—leaves a certain amount of decision-making to the individual. Thus the related personal objective for the three lessons is, “What choices can I make?”

A separate lesson is devoted to each system. The lessons illustrate how each system answers the following basic questions:

1. What is produced?
2. How much is produced?
3. For whom is it produced?
4. Who needs it?

Each system to be discussed is an ideal type. Economists use ideal types because they recognize the futility of studying each real economic system in detail. Thus ideal types are useful, even though no real economic system corresponds to an ideal type. This should be pointed out to the students in advance.

A. Lesson One—Traditional Economic Systems

Introduction —This lesson shows the unique ways in which traditional economies limit the choices that are available to people. An analogy is then made to tradition in one’s family or society. Thus the affective focus of this lesson is on the way tradition can determine and even eliminate certain life choices. Students are asked to consider, “How does tradition limit my choices?”

Day One —Students are introduced to the three types of economic systems—traditional, command, and market. These terms were developed by the economist Robert Heilbroner in his book *The Making of Economic Society*.

Students should understand the following principles after doing the reading:

1. Tradition is by far the most widespread form of economic life.
2. In a traditional economy, answers to the “for whom” and “how much” questions are fixed by custom, habit, religion, or law.

3. Traditional economies change very slowly.

Day Two —Students will read a short selection from a book by Joe E. Pierce entitled *Life in a Turkish Village*. The selection describes work and marriage in a traditional economy. After doing the reading, students will discuss the following questions:

1. How does tradition answer the basic economic questions in this society?
2. What alternatives do Mahmud and his family not have because of their traditions?
3. What traditions eliminate choices for you?

The reading serves as a bridge between the cognitive and affective aspects of the lesson.

Day Three —Like people living in a traditional economic system, Americans have accepted some family traditions without question. This role-play focuses on the origins of holiday traditions within the family and on the possibility of creating new traditions.

Students are given the following directions:

- Split into two groups. The first group meets briefly to devise a role-play about what a family would do at a
1. gift-giving holiday. Be sure to include specific holiday traditions that have been observed by group members' families.
 2. The second group observes the first group's role play and analyzes it by answering the following questions:
 - a. What traditions were observed?
What was the purpose of each tradition?
 - b. Where did the traditions come from?
 - c. What was the purpose of each tradition?
 - d. Could these same purposes be better fulfilled in other ways?
 - e. How are people limited by these traditions?
 3. The second group meets briefly to devise a role-play about another family at a gift-giving holiday. The goal of this role-play situation is to think up different customs that would fulfill the same purposes behind the traditions in the first role-play.
 4. The first group watches this second role-play and analyzes it using the questions listed in point 2.
 5. Both groups share their observations and discuss the following questions:

- | | |
|----|--|
| a. | Which traditions would be easiest to accept? |
| b. | Which traditions permit the most freedom? Which the least? |
| c. | Which traditions strike you as having most meaning? |
| d. | What other purposes could different traditions fulfill? |

B. Lesson Two— *Command Systems*

Introduction—This lesson explains how a command system answers basic economic questions. It looks at the pros and cons of the command system, noting that non-command economies rely on this system at certain times. The closely linked personal development questions is “When do I let others make decisions for me?”

Day One —Students should understand the following principles after doing the reading:

1. In command economies, the basic economic questions are answered by a group of planners. These planners answer the “what to produce” and “how to produce” questions.
2. By setting wages, planners also answer the “for whom” questions. Wealth is usually, though not always, more evenly distributed in command than in non-command economies.
3. Shortages and surpluses of goods are common in command economies.
4. Command economies are able to act quickly.
5. A command economy does not have to be a dictatorship.

Make sure students are given an adequate opportunity to express their feelings about command economies.

Day Two —Students will read a brief selection from *The Russians* by Hedrick Smith. The story is about queues, or lines. It shows how consumers shop in the Soviet Union, one country with a command economy. After reading the article, students should discuss the following questions:

1. Why are consumer goods so scarce in the Soviet Union?
2. Why are Russian consumers willing to wait in such long lines, with so little choice about what they buy?
3. When do you let others make choices for you?

Day Three —This activity has been designed to recreate some of the experiences of working within a command economic system.

- Split the class into groups of five or six students each.
1. Each group would look upon itself as a planning committee, with full planning responsibility for the class.
 2. Each group must select a goal for the class to reach. The goal can be in any of the following areas:
 - a. class trips
 - b. academic achievement
 - c. ways in which students relate to each other
 - d. raising money for class projects, or deciding what is most important for the class to do.
 - e.
- After a goal has been chosen, the group must decide on
3. the means for achieving that goal. These should be described as a series of steps toward the goal.
- Keep in mind that each group is a planning committee for the entire class. For the purposes of this activity, assume that the class is a command economic system.
4. In other words, everyone must follow your plan. Each committee has a chance to share its plan with the rest of the class.
 5. After each plan is presented, answer the four basic economic questions:
 - a. How did each of the plans answer the four basic economic questions?
 - b. Which groups did each plan benefit?
 6. Discussion questions:
 - a. How would these plans be carried out in a command system?
 - b. How did you react to being planned for?
 - c. What did you gain? What did you lose?
 - d. How did you feel about planning for others?

C. Lesson Three— *Market Systems*

Introduction —This lesson discusses the economic model of a market system. It presents an ideal model of the market system. It relies on Adam Smith’s classic explanation of the “invisible hand” to describe the interaction between producers and consumers as the free-choice system in operation. The personal development issue looks at the free qualities of choice making.

Day One —After doing the reading, students should understand the following economic principles:

1. In a market economy, the basic economic questions are answered by the interplay of buyers and sellers.
2. The “what to produce” question is answered by producers competing for the business of consumers in order to earn profits.
3. Prices in a market economy are set by supply and demand.
4. In order to work, a market system requires the presence of private property, freedom of exchange, the profit motive, and competition.

Day Two —Students will read a brief selection called “The True Story of Horatio Hiss.” The story sketches the career of a man who came to the United States early in the twentieth century and became a success. After reading the story, students should discuss the following questions:

1. What free choices did Horatio make in his career?
2. What assumptions does the idea of a pure market economy make about people’s relations with one another?
3. What economic choices do you make freely? Which choices will you make freely when you enter the labor market?

Day Three —This research activity is designed to test the hypothesis that there is a market economy in retail foods in the United States. Give students the following directions:

1. Make a shopping list of six or seven of the food items your family uses most often. Enter them in the chart in the Workbook or copy the chart in the text onto a separate sheet of paper.
Assume that there is a market economy in the United States. Imagine that you check the prices of these items at a number of different stores. How similar or different would you expect the prices of these items to be? Why? Keep your guesses in mind as you do your research.
2. Test the hypothesis that there is a market economy in the United States. Visit two local
3. supermarkets and two small neighborhood stores to compare the prices of the six or seven items. Fill in the chart with your findings.

(figure available in print form)

4. Share your findings with the class. Then discuss these questions:
 - a. Do the data you gathered support the hypothesis that there is a market economy in the United States? Why or why not?
 - b. What other hypotheses could your data be used to support?
 - c. How do you explain the differences in price between national brands and house brands of the same item?

- d. How do you explain the differences in price between the stores?

The second part of this activity will help students explore the economic choices open to them and to decide which ones they make freely. Give students the following directions:

- Each of the categories in the chart below describes a place where food can be bought. Within
1. each category, you have a number of choices, in terms of price, brand, quality of product, and convenience of shopping.
Begin with the supermarket and list the choices you have in terms of the four categories given. List also the advantages of shopping in a supermarket and the choices that are not available when you shop in only one supermarket. Use the chart in the Workbook or copy the chart in the text.
 2. When certain choices are not available to you in your usual supermarket, you might decide to shop in a competing supermarket. Fill in those choices, along with the advantages and choices not available.
 3. As you write the choices not available in a given situation, go on to the next category until you have filled in the entire chart.
 - 4.

(figure available in print form)

- When you have finished, discuss as a class the following questions:
5. a. What choices are realistically available to you and your family when you purchased food?
b. What considerations are most important in shopping for food? How might you change your habits to better meet your needs?
c. Are you free to choose the kind of food you buy? Are you free to choose how you obtain food?
d. What other choices do you make freely?

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