

Soderbaum describes key arguments demonstrating that traditional economics is inconsistent with sustainable economics and demonstrates his case using a comparison of orthodox and institutional economics. He argues that 'meeting the challenge of sustainable development requires new thinking' and that providing students with a range of perspectives on environmental issues sets the stage for them to 'make their own interpretations and judgments' (p. 195). Kennet argues that 'green economics is by its nature multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary' (p.256) and that as such it represents a new paradigm, ripe for realisation of pluralistic ideals. However, she suggests that the main message of green economics has been 'usurped and distorted' (p.258) and offers her interpretation of key core principles before addressing pedagogic implications.

While the wide range of methods used to offer insights into a pluralistic economics education may appeal to many audiences, most chapters fall short of discussing pedagogic practices. These chapters instead focus primarily on content, a trap into which many who argue for economic education reform fall. As argued elsewhere, reforms should not neglect pedagogic practice. (McGoldrick and Peterson, 2009; McGoldrick, 2009) Additionally, at times authors are so committed to their approach (one which often focuses on disparaging orthodoxy) that they may undermine the goal of engaging readers, no matter what their ideology' (p.6).

These criticisms notwithstanding, this collection of essays provides a much needed contribution to the pluralist economics education discussion. The organisational structure makes the volume accessible to those who are better versed in this approach to economics education as well as those who are novices. The arguments presented speak to both educators and students, expanding the realm of the conversation beyond its traditional participants. In short, everyone who is serious about undergraduate economics education should put this volume on their 'must-read' list.

## References

McGoldrick, KimMarie (2009) 'Pluralism and Economic Education, Promoting Change: Past, Present, and Future', in *Economic Pluralism*, Robert Garnett, Erik Olsen and Martha Starr (eds), Routledge: pp. 221–225.

McGoldrick, KimMarie and Janice Peterson (2009) 'Pluralism and Economic Education: A Learning Theory Approach', *International Review of Economics Education*.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of each of these skills, see Appendix A, AAC&U (2007).

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# Teaching Pluralism in Economics



By Groenewegen, John (ed.), Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, 2007. ISBN 9781845423056 (hb), £59.95 (hb)

*Teaching Pluralism in Economics* is an ambitious collection of 11 essays addressing the potential for more pluralistic and interdisciplinary approaches to economic education. The essays range from those addressing pluralism and interdisciplinarity at a theoretical level to case studies that apply these principles in particular courses and institutions. The first essay, by the volume's editor John Groenewegen, introduces and defines some of the key concepts and goals of the volume. He states that the volume is about 'different schools within the discipline of economics' (theoretical pluralism) and 'the relation of economics with other disciplines' (interdisciplinarity), and seeks to address the 'implications of pluralism and interdisciplinarity' for teaching economics (p.1). He believes the fundamental challenge is to present alternative theories to students in ways that are not confusing but allow for a better understanding of the 'possibilities and limitations of different schools in economics' and how to proceed when 'the boundaries of the economics discipline have been reached and a more interdisciplinary approach is needed' (p.14). To meet this challenge, the volume offers 'insights into the question of the content of such a revised curriculum and into the process of how to get there' (p.15).

Reflecting the fact that the literature on 'pluralism in economics' is itself a pluralistic one, the 10 contributed essays offer diverse views on what a more pluralistic/interdisciplinary economic education should look like and how it should be achieved. Evaluating the contributions of the volume from the perspective of economic education, several broad themes emerge:<sup>1</sup>

- In an increasingly complex and changing world, a more pluralistic/interdisciplinary approach to economic education is necessary to prepare properly and inform policy-makers.
- History, real-world economic processes and problems, and student engagement are key components of a more pluralistic/interdisciplinary approach to economic education.

- A pluralistic/interdisciplinary approach to economic education involves costs as well as benefits and therefore requires a serious commitment from educational institutions, faculty and students.

These themes, and the extent to which the volume achieves its stated goals, are briefly addressed below.

The volume opens with a set of essays addressing the question of why a more pluralistic and interdisciplinary economic education is desirable. Several authors point to a growing pluralism within modern economics, reflecting a 'notable diversity of approach' within mainstream economics as well as the evolution of non-mainstream approaches to the discipline (pp. 22–23). Further, real-world economies are 'open systems' and pluralistic by nature (p. 28), and practitioners in business and government face problems that are increasingly complex and interdisciplinary (p. 141). A more pluralistic and interdisciplinary economic education is necessary for preparing policy-makers to exercise 'judgement' and 'practical reason' (p. 34) and address complexity in a meaningful way.

A number of the essays emphasise the importance of grounding the teaching of economics in history and applications to real-world problems. Taking a historical approach facilitates the teaching of 'methodological awareness' (p. 35) and helps students put 'mainstream economics in perspective' (pp. 79–80). Explaining economics through historical processes also counters the 'de-contextualization of the economics curriculum' (p. 97) and promotes an economics that can 'not only explain itself but also explain the world we live in' (p. 100). Focusing on real-world economic processes and problems – 'confronting theory with practice' – promotes 'thinking twice' and keeping 'an open mind' with respect to alternative approaches (p. 58).

'Student engagement'<sup>2</sup> is deepened through these approaches, as students become engaged in the context of economics (through the consideration of multiple paradigms and disciplines), the practice of economics (through its application to real-world problems), and the consequences of economics (through answering 'the age old dilemmas of economics themselves', p. 58). Several essays call for changes in pedagogy as well content, illustrating how engaging students through active, experiential learning can support a more pluralistic, interdisciplinary economics curriculum. For example, introducing multiple paradigms through 'discovery-based learning,' where students 'actively and collaboratively participate in the problem solving process,' results in a 'deeper level of understanding' of both current economic problems and the pluralistic nature of economics (p. 133). The integration of multiple disciplines to address real-world business problems is facilitated through the use of case studies and role play

exercises, allowing students to 'apply the learning' and 'combine it with their personal knowledge and experience' (p. 149). Educating students in 'dealing with new knowledge in a meaningful way' through active pedagogies such as 'problem based learning' can help students 'learn how to learn' and thus 'increase the effectiveness of learning' (p. 178).

Promoting pluralism and interdisciplinarity in economic education involves costs as well as benefits. The introductory essay addresses the oft cited concerns about a 'trade-off between rigour and relevancy' (p.5) and finding 'space in the curriculum' (p. 14) for alternative perspectives. Other essays raise the concern that a pluralistic curriculum might 'do more harm than good' (p. 64) in terms of student understanding and attitudes. For example, 'excessive pluralism' may lead to 'bewilderment, disorientation and cynicism' (p. 73), and for some students, interdisciplinarity and active learning techniques may lead to a 'postmodern attitude' based on 'partial insights' and 'semi-truths' (pp. 184–185). Responses to such challenges include calls for continued debate about the meanings of pluralism and interdisciplinarity, in addition to recognising and pursuing the level of institutional, faculty and student commitment necessary to make such curriculum reform a success. While this is a large and daunting task, it is presented as a necessary one. As author Rifka Weehuzine concludes: 'So, either do it well or don't do it.' The latter however is no option. It is time that economists at universities take responsibility for what they send out into the world, both in terms of research and in terms of students and their thinking and acting as it is shaped by economics education (p. 185).

Does the volume achieve its goal of providing insights on a revised curriculum and how to achieve it, thus assisting economic educators who strive to teach in a more pluralistic and interdisciplinary way to 'do it well'? Yes and no. A careful reader with an interest and background in the 'pluralism in economics' discussion will find much that is interesting, insightful, perplexing and inspiring in this volume. However, a reader who is new to this discussion may well get lost in the independence of the various essays. The volume would be stronger in reaching a wider audience of economic educators with more consistent attention to the connections between 'pluralism in economics' and 'teaching pluralism in economics' across the different essays, in addition to more discussion of the essays' important similarities and differences in the Introduction (or perhaps a concluding essay). The volume is, nonetheless, an important contribution and recommended reading for economic educators concerned with the outcomes and consequences of their work.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is not to say that these 'themes' represent all of the views of all of the authors, but provide a way to think about the important insights into the content and pedagogy of a more pluralist and interdisciplinary economic education presented in this volume.
- <sup>2</sup> See Bowen, S. (2005) 'Engaged Learning Are We All on the Same Page?' *Peer Review*, 7(2): 4–7.

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