A Practice-Based Theory and Practical Applications of How to Teach Economics at the Secondary Level

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Cheryl A. Ayers, MBA, PhD
Virginia Tech Center for Economic Education
Virginia Council on Economic Education
Council on Economic Education
U.S. Economic Empowerment Project
NAEE National Economics Pedagogy Scholar
Session Objectives

Discuss key findings of a research-based article grounded in decades of economic education literature on how award-winning secondary economics teachers demonstrated their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)—that is, what makes teaching economics different from teaching other subjects

❖ Including practical applications for teaching economics at the secondary level
Effective Disciplinary Instruction

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)
“ways of representing and formulating a subject that make it comprehensible to others”
(Shulman, 1986)
Effective Economics Instruction

Curriculum connections across grades, subjects, and economics courses

- Integrate multi/interdisciplinary instruction (math, English, entrepreneurship, other social studies subjects), albeit with caution
  
  Pre-test graphing skills before teaching supply and demand graphs

- Promote cross-curricular, higher-order thinking (issues are multidimensional)

- Create and activate prior knowledge via intradisciplinary instruction—strategic foreshadowing (opportunity cost and PPF)
Active learning instructional practices

- “Do” economics by utilizing constructivist, student-centered instructional practices (simulations, role-playing, games, and technology-related activities such as Webquests and Stock Market Game™)
- Debrief activities to explicitly connect simulated experiences to economic content and real-world contexts
  - InvestWrite Essay Competition – Real-world investment strategy
- Align assessments to active learning, skills-based learning objectives (performance-based assessments with rubrics)
  - CEE/VCEE National Personal Finance Challenge Case Study
Emphasis on student relevance and scaffolding

- Implement culturally relevant instructional practices (scarcity, trade-offs differ for students) – Anonymous surveys for examples
- Incorporate real-world examples and analogies that relate to students’ everyday lives as the focal point of lessons (cars = micro/macro; weather = economic predictions)
- Student Relevance Journals
- Identify and address difficult economic content and misconceptions (opportunity cost)—Pre-tests
Frequent and practical applications of economic reasoning tools

- Instill accurate disciplinary knowledge in economics by “thinking like an economist” regularly
- Drill productive economic decision-making on a personal and societal level with many units
- Emphasize economic reasoning skills using supply and demand graphs, production possibilities frontier graphs, circular flow of money in a market economy models, cost-benefit analysis charts, PACED decision-making models, and economic way of thinking principles
  
  Qualitative and qualitative instruction and assignments
Critically-minded, reflective citizenship preparation

- Connect current events to the economy and students’ personal lives
- Utilize economic current events to assess content understanding; develop critical literacy, critical thinking, and multiple perspectives; and articulate sound economic opinions and arguments
- Include authentic discussions that co-construct understanding of economic and controversial issues
- Demonstrate how to cast informed votes based on economic policy positions (think aloud)
3 Economic Reasoning Skills & Tools

1) State FOR or AGAINST raising minimum wage to $15/hour.

2) Share arguments through the lens of Economic Reasoning Tools.
Student Learning Outcomes

1) sharpening critical thinking and critical literacy skills
2) entertaining multiple perspectives
3) gaining a deeper, nuanced understanding of subject-specific content
4) making students’ thinking explicit for assessment purposes
5) achieving an interdisciplinary understanding of current events
6) using evidence to draw conclusions and make generalizations
7) articulating and defending positions using content vocabulary
8) laying the groundwork for authentic discussions and civil debates
9) casting informed votes
10) analyzing and synthesizing primary and secondary sources
11) comparing and contrasting historical, cultural, and political perspectives
12) explaining cause-and-effect relationships
13) practicing citizenship skills such as collaborating, compromising, and reaching consensus
14) thinking like an economist for authentic disciplinary learning (like historical thinking)
15) making more productive and prosperous workplace and everyday life decisions

3 Economic Reasoning Skills (Ayers, 2019)
Other Instructional Examples?

Ayers, C. A. (2025)
A second step toward a practice-based theory of pedagogical content knowledge in secondary economics
THANK YOU!

Cheryl Ayers
cheryl42@vt.edu

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