



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Review of Economics Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/iree



How should economics curricula be evaluated?☆

Andrew Mearman*

Department of Accounting, Economics and Finance, UWE, Bristol, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 February 2013

Received in revised form 17 June 2013

Accepted 9 July 2013

Available online 7 September 2013

JEL classification:

A20

A22

B4

B5

C80

C9

Keywords:

Case-based evaluation

Realism

Experimental method

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the evaluation of economics curricula. It argues that the dominant approach in economics education, experimentalism, has serious limitations which render it an unsuitable evaluation method in some cases. The arguments against experimentalism are practical, ethical and also rest on a view of the world as a complex, open system in which contexts are unique and generalised regularities are unlikely. In such an environment, as often found in educational contexts, alternative methods are advisable, at least as part of a suite of approaches in a realistic, case-based, mixed-methods approach to evaluation. Thus, economics curricula should be evaluated using a method or set of methods most appropriate to the particular object case. As such, there is no single answer to the question posed.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This paper addresses the question of how to evaluate economics curricula. Evaluation is central to educational practice and improvement. As a reflective practitioner, the educator will try different combinations of content and delivery, in an effort to achieve their particular goals. Increasingly, also, there are demands from the educational literature (for example, [Hargreaves, 1997, 1999; Oakley, 2007](#))

☆ A version of this paper was a plenary address to the conference of the International Confederation of Associations for Pluralism in Economics (ICAPE), University of Massachusetts-Amherst, on 11 November, 2011, and a subsequent version was delivered as a UWE staff seminar on 15 March, 2012; I should like to thank participants of both for their comments. A subsequent version was published as a UWE Discussion paper 12/03. Thanks to Peter Davies, Tony Flegg, Mary Hedges and Don Webber for comments. I should also like to acknowledge the comments of anonymous referees.

* Tel.: +44 0117 3283201.

E-mail address: Andrew.Mearman@uwe.ac.uk.

and from the literature on economics education in particular (Davies and Guest, 2010) that claims of effectiveness of teaching innovations are supported by field evidence. This paper is part of a response to these calls. Its argument draws on the wider literature on education and research methods.

The paper argues that the dominant approach in economics education, experimentalism, has serious limitations, such that it is unsuitable as the evaluation method in many cases. The arguments against experimentalism are practical and ethical, but also ontological: they rest on a view of educational milieu as complex, open systems in which contexts are unique and generalised regularities are unlikely. In this environment, alternative methods are advisable, at least as part of a suite of approaches in a realistic, case-based, mixed-methods approach to evaluation. Thus, economics curricula should be evaluated using a method or set of methods most appropriate to the particular object case. As such, there is no single answer to the question posed in the paper's title. The paper is structured according to that argument.

2. Context

Teaching practice may be said to develop via trial and error. Teachers experience the need to innovate, often in response to an evaluation that prior practice did not 'work' as well as hoped. Such an evaluation might be based on student feedback or achievement – informal or formal – or simply on the reflections of the teacher that students were not inter alia engaged, learning effectively and/or attending. The reflective teacher also contemplates why something has been (in)effective. That teacher may try to attach their practice to some educational (or other) theory. Finally, they might try their innovation on another group of students. In some cases, they try to evaluate their innovation formally, via a research project.

The economics discipline has recently experienced a marked increase in publications on developing effective teaching and its evaluation. Possible drivers for this are, inter alia, a greater intrinsic interest in teaching and its effectiveness; a global recruitment crisis of economics students in the 1980s and 1990s; a growingly competitive global marketplace for students; greater scrutiny and quality assurance from layers of governance, governmental and institutional; and an increasing focus on achieving high scores in student experience or satisfaction surveys published in league tables.

More broadly, there have been specific calls that evaluation of curricula and other areas of innovation should be grounded in systematically conducted research (Davies and Guest, 2010). Some calls have been for educational reform and policy to be *evidence-based* (Hargreaves, 1997) or *evidence-informed* (Hargreaves, 1999); for counterarguments, see Elliott (2007), Gage (2007) and Bassey (2007). Overall, teachers are asking themselves *some variant of the question 'what works?'*

Assuming educators ask 'what works?' they must consider two things: their criteria, and their evaluation processes. This paper will focus on the latter, but it is essential to consider the former, as there is a link between the educator's aims of education, and thus their criteria, and the tools they choose to evaluate their practice. These aims will vary between educators and may vary in terms of many dimensions.

Some aims are externally imposed, for example by the educator's institution or profession, or by the state. Individual institutions may demand that courses have pass rates or mean marks which exceed a threshold. Academics usually believe that disciplines have core understanding that students should demonstrate. Some disciplines – although not economics – have strong professional body requirements to deliver specific skills or other content. State bodies such as the UK Quality Assurance Agency place some conditions on practice. Additionally, all instructors – or in a programme, each team of instructors – have their own aims, even if they do not know this.

Therefore, curricula have plural aims. Clearly with multiple aims it is possible that an innovation could lead to one aim being achieved more successfully, while another is achieved less well. Thus: curricula could 'work' in numerous ways, only some of which are consistent with each other. That suggests that there are no universal standards by which teaching efficacy can be judged.

Further, some aims may be difficult to evaluate – they are deeper, generative; not superficial. Clarke and Mearman (2004) borrow the analytic separation of aims into liberal and instrumental.²

² Hargreaves (1999) offers a similar dichotomy between engineering and enlightenment education.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/357505>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/357505>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)