

TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATION IN ECONOMIC EDUCATION:
A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF SECONDARY ECONOMIC CURRICULUM
STANDARDS

by

WHITNEY WATTS

(Under the Direction of Todd Dinkelman)

ABSTRACT

Though most often seen in theory or in higher education, the use of critical theory in analyzing US public education becomes a viable approach towards fostering critical pedagogy in the classroom. The application of critical theory in secondary economic classrooms becomes important due to economic education's unique content and methods, a neoclassical, capitalistic model that forwards claims of truth and validation. This model proves problematic because it leaves virtually no room for alternate views.

As standards-based educational reform permeates all aspects of US public schooling, it becomes necessary to understand the meanings and intentions behind the prescribed curriculum. Economic education's inclusion in state standards provides a succinct document that allows further analysis of the curriculum taught in economic classrooms. By bringing together economic education, standards-based educational reform, and critical theory, this research, through a critical textual analysis, works to reveal the hidden curriculum of the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics.

INDEX WORDS: Economic Education, Critical Theory, Standards-Based Education Reform, Georgia Performance Standards, Critical Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This study will describe and analyze state standards for economic education in Georgia. The theoretical framework guiding this study includes critical theory. The research design will involve a critical textual analysis of the Georgia Performance Standards in order to understand the intentions and meanings of the document. The main purpose driving this research includes gaining insight into putting critical theory into practice --- in this case, by analyzing what is included and excluded within the highly relied upon curriculum standards for economics. Thus, this research will help fill a gap in the literature on economic education, standards-based educational reform, and critical theory by providing a focused examination of a document intended to influence classroom discourse and practice.

The Problem

In this increasingly diverse age, schools need to prepare students to critically navigate our intricate society through an exposure to varied social ideas. Critical ideas and a social justice-oriented curriculum as a means of authentic learning have become popular and viable options for the classroom environment (Dewey, 1938; Gay, 2004; Giroux, 1994; Kellner, 1997; Tyler, 1949; Willis, 2005). Such criticalness, the act of being critical, in education not only works to meet the complex needs of students but also prepares them for active engagement in our society. Unfortunately, areas of critical education lack an analysis of specific standards that affect classroom practices on a daily level --- particularly in the realm of economic education. Examining economic education, social studies, and standards-based educational reform from a critical theoretical lens fills a missing gap in the current literature. Thus, the efforts in this research merge economic education, standards-based educational reform, and critical theory to

understand the meanings and intentions behind state standards --- specifically the Georgia Performance Standards. This research also analyzes these economic education standards in hopes of fostering an increase in critical theoretical research and actual practices of critical pedagogy in the economics classroom.

Purpose and Research Questions

Currently, many students graduate from high school without knowledge of alternative perspectives regarding social, political, economic, and educational realities (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1995; Tatum, 1992; Zinn, 2003). However, there is hope. Students can learn to “decode dominating machineries of representation, their own locations and social formations;” thus, fostering a discourse and a sense of what Borsa terms “the political which ultimately leads to a consideration of power” (as cited in Giroux, 1994, p. 48). Critical educators argue that students must have an opportunity to understand and learn that individual action and consequences are products of social conventions and constructs (Apple, 1978). This knowledge can give students the confidence to challenge society’s intricate concepts of power through a critical perspective (McLaren, 2003). Likewise, it is important for students to examine all subjects, including economics, through a critical lens.

Economic education, as it currently stands, promotes traditional notions of economics that are ubiquitous in US thinking such as free-market ideology, neoclassicism, capitalism, individualism, competition, and systemic models (Feiner & Roberts, 1990). Many researchers believe that economic education has the ability to provide students with a new language of analysis (economic models) as well as a greater economic understanding of the world around us (Buckles & Watts, 1997; Sumansky, 1985). Unfortunately though, economic educational content in its present state does not foster critical approaches that can challenge the dominant

ideologies found in the traditional scope and sequence of economics materials (Feiner & Roberts, 1995). As a result, students find economics boring because the content in question leaves virtually no room for issues relating to their real lives (Allen, 1959). Nevertheless, economic education, through a critical theoretical lens, has the space to help students examine their world in an alternative way. Bringing critical theory into economic education can provide a rich opportunity for students to reconsider the possibilities of economics.

Similarly, students need to learn how to “separate themselves from the unconditional acceptance of the conditions of their own existence” and prepare themselves for a “critical re-entry into an examination of everyday life” (Keesing-Styles, 2003, p. 1). These conditions include visible and invisible social inequalities and power structures that exist in society, social studies, economic education, and curriculum standards. By knowing and understanding the hidden structures in society, education, and economics from a critical theoretical perspective, students and teachers will have the ability to challenge and work to change the status quo of social inequalities. Shedding light upon educational standards through this bottom-up perspective will also help policymakers, theorists, and practitioners understand what is further needed in this research area as well as what will contribute to the literature in a meaningful way.

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on economic education by responding to the following research questions:

What is the extent to which the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for economics encourage critical examinations of economic topics?

How might critical pedagogy influence economic education and its standards?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Economic Education

Economics encompasses a myriad of ideas included in the academic discipline, where as economic education refers to the teaching and learning of economic content and curriculum. The vernacular use of economics is different from the discipline of economics. When I speak of economic education, I am discussing the prescribed ideas outlined in introductory textbooks and content standards. Since this research concerns economic education, when I refer to economics I mean the economics seen in economic education.

Various views of economic education exist. At its most basic level, economic education is the teaching of economics and the promotion of economic literacy. The National Council on Economic Education's mission is to assist students in building "real-life skills" in order to "think and choose responsibly as consumers, savers, investors, citizens, members of the workforce, and effective participants in a global economy" (National Council on Economic Education, 2007d, p. 1). On the other hand, George Stigler, one of the leaders of the Chicago School of Economics, defined economic literacy as the knowledge held by professional economists (Stigler, 1983; Treyz, 1971). O'Sullivan and Sheffrin's definition, however, seems most appropriate in the realm of teaching economics: "the study of choices made by people who are faced with scarcity" (as cited in Aerni, 1999, p. 92). Through the study of choices and decisions, students of economics have an opportunity to better understand history, social studies, and the world around them (Buckles & Watts, 1997). With these definitions in hand, we now turn to understanding the history of economic education in order to position economics within a US public schooling context.

Economic Education History

Economic education began its career in the United States during the late eighteenth century when Bishop James Madison, the president of William and Mary College at the time, used Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* as a text in his social studies program --- specifically under the title of political economy (Allen, 1959; Hinshaw & Siegfried, 1991). For a century though, economics remained subsumed under the study of politics and history.

In 1885, the American Economic Association (AEA) formed with a unique interest in public economic education. Reflected in the scholarship of Frederick Clow, in 1899, an awareness of economics on the precollege level developed. After many scholarly debates among political economists, Clow determined that economics had a definite place in a high school setting --- as long as teachers had the preparation and skill level to teach such a daunting subject (Hinshaw & Siegfried, 1991). While economics thrived at universities, expanding to the secondary level, however, proved a much greater challenge.

In hopes of creating order in the broad field of social studies, the National Education Association provided a framework for secondary schools in 1916 as follows: "Grade 7 – European History and Geography, Grade 8 – American History, Grade 9 – Civics, Grade 10 – European History, Grade 11 – American History, and Grade 12 – Government and Problems of Democracy" (Duea, 1995, p. 408). This sequencing, though, neglected to specifically include economics. Thus, a void existed and did not have an immediate remedy for nearly four decades.

In 1942, various business leaders met with college and university presidents to found the Committee for Economic Development. This committee, partnered with the School of Education at New York University, formed the Joint Council on Economic Education (JCEE) in 1948 (Allen, 1959). The JCEE wanted to "create a strong enough interest in preparing competent

teachers of economics to lead to evaluation of state certification requirements for social-studies teachers” and “to encourage college and university teachers to co-operate with elementary- and secondary-school teachers in preparing materials appropriate for students at all grade-levels” (Allen, 1959, p. 98). Unfortunately, these goals did not immediately materialize.

Into the 1950s, studies showed that economic interest levels remained low among high school students and approximately “70 per cent of the teachers of the social studies in our country have not had so much as a one-quarter course in economics” (Allen, 1959, p. 96). These under-prepared teachers attempting to impart economic knowledge in classrooms lead to severe shortcomings in economic literacy. Though, because economists and social studies researchers (Clark & Barron, 1981) believed economics to be of great importance, faculty and staff at teacher colleges worked to increase the presence of economics in various preservice teacher education courses. Unfortunately, preservice teachers found economics courses “dull, abstract, and unrelated to life” (Allen, 1959, p. 97). This adverse attitude towards economics from both teachers and students nevertheless continues to date. Even though preservice teachers resisted the adoption of economic education, in academia, economic education remained a vital subject.

Academics published works in various journals throughout the 1950s espousing the need for economic education. Their advocacy resonated with growing attention to an apparent American intellectual battle with the Soviet Union. Many argued that economics education was an important player in the “struggle” to best a perceived Soviet menace in education (Allen, 1959; Baer, 1975). Allen (1959) asks: “How can we expect sophisticated conduct of economic and political affairs of world-wide import when we have traditionally neglected the study of economics in our schools and colleges?” (p. 94-95). This question proved important to academic organizations as well.

Many associations also took action to increase economics literacy. In 1953, the American Economic Association (AEA) appointed the first standing Committee on Economic Education. This organization held annual meetings and proceedings addressing economic issues at hand. In an effort to diversify its interests, the AEA Committee on Economic Education partnered with the JCEE to deliver annual programs. Through programs such as DEEP (Developmental Economic Education Program), the JCEE made a commitment to develop systematic programs in the economic education curriculum (Becker, 1997; Brenneke, Highsmith, Soper, Walstad, Watts, 1988).

Continuing into the 1960s, AEA appointed a group of economists to a National Task Force on Economic Education. This independent group reported in 1961 that high school students had the ability to obtain a minimal yet fundamental understanding of economic concepts (Bach & Saunders, 1965). Another AEA committee started precollege programs and developed a national test (the Test of Understanding of College Economics, or TUCE) in order to measure the skills students learned in the program. In the fall of 1969, the Journal of Economic Education began in order to provide a method of communication of research and materials on economic education (Becker, 1997). Thus, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed an expansion of organizations and scholarship in economic education intended to contribute to public economic understanding. In addition to the AEA, the JCEE had an enormous influence on curriculum programs as well.

The first actual curriculum framework for classroom implementation at the secondary level occurred in 1977 with the JCEE's master curriculum, task forces, and guidelines from DEEP studies. With assistance from the government and big business funding, the JCEE developed *A Framework for Teaching Economics: Basic Concepts*. This framework emphasized

once again the importance of economic education especially for America's youth. Though these reports did not *show* teachers how to put its ideas into practice, economic education began to find its place in US public schools (Armento, 1983; Sumansky, 1985).

President Reagan's *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 brought widespread and public attention to the importance of economic education stating, "lax standards in American schools had led to a unilateral disarmament of the nation in world economic competition" (Levin, 1998, p.4). Such leniency concerned economic education scholars as well. They felt that the economics in secondary classrooms did not live up to the expectations on the university level. The economics taught in high schools included seemingly "unsophisticated" topics such as budgeting finances and understanding the stock market when instead, scholars wanted economic education to include more rigorous and traditional content (Armento, 1983; Buckles & Watts, 1997). This lack of rigor required remedy --- one that we now see as an increase in standards.

The 1990s saw a similar trend in promoting educational standards. The enactment of federal education reform legislation --- specifically the 1994 *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* -- intended to fund states and reinforce programs within the previous legislative requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (originally enacted in 1965 and reauthorized every five years to date and is now known as *No Child Left Behind*). Economics is especially important in *Goals 2000* as it found inclusion in this legislation (Duea, 1995; Fuhman, 1994). With this federal approval, economics education acquired more leverage to solidify its place in the modern school curriculum. The National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) utilized this opportunity and built a coalition of organizations in order to compose voluntary content standards. These standards, based on the fundamental principles of economics, hoped to guide economic instruction K-12 by specifying the economics content and skills students should learn

(Siegfried & Meszaro, 1997). Today, the National Council for the Social Studies, as well as the NCEE, assist states with the scope and sequence of economic curriculum standards both on national and state levels.

As seen in this succinct look at the history of economic education in the U.S., the inclusion of economics in precollege education is relatively recent. With efforts in increasing the awareness and inclusion of economic education, many have responded by promoting and adhering to legislation and reform. Such reforms often encourage the use of a standardized content and curriculum. However, in order to comprehend economic educational reforms, an understanding of economic content and methods is necessary.

Contemporary Economic Content and Methods

Economics is most often taught as a means to expose students to fundamental economic concepts and lightly touch upon other issues. The fundamental curriculum standards remain quite the same across most introductory economics courses (seen on the high school and beginning college levels). Walstad (2001) described the framework for teaching the basic economic concepts (subdivided into four categories). These concepts included fundamental notions of

scarcity, opportunity cost, productivity, economic institutions and incentives, and money and exchange. In the microeconomic category are markets and prices, supply and demand, competition and market structure, income distribution, market failures, and the role of government. The macroeconomic category includes aggregate demand and supply, unemployment, inflation, fiscal policy, and monetary policy. In the international economic category are comparative advantage, barriers to trade, the balance of payments, exchange rates, and economic growth. (pp. 198-199)

Such concepts are oriented towards higher-level academics focusing more specifically on microeconomics and macroeconomics. From this curriculum framework, the goal is to train students to “think like economists” (Siegfried et al., 1991). Thinking like economists, however,

can have countless meanings. All economists do not prescribe to the same economic ideal. Economic knowledge is not stagnant. Even though economic knowledge can span a variety of different perspectives, a small amount of ideas become included in economic *educational* knowledge. Therefore, in preparing students to “think like economists,” once codified in curriculum materials and textbooks, economic education practically becomes a particular set of economic knowledge and not others. The aim of economic thinking and inquiry become lost in translation in favor of imparting specific ideas of economic knowledge to students. Now that we see that differences exist in the notions of knowledge for economics and economic education, it is important to also understand the methods utilized in imparting such knowledge.

Theorists such as Bonwell & Eison (1991) promote active learning as a way of fostering the teaching of economics; however, “chalk-and-talk is the dominant pedagogy” in most economic education situations (Becker & Watts, 2001, p. 447). Chalk-and-talk includes teachers writing information for students to copy and then talking about economic knowledge. This method of teaching economics is prominent at the university level. In preparing high school students for college level courses, “chalk-and-talk” also becomes a part of the secondary curriculum. Often though, both high school teachers and university professors realize that students require more than just “chalk-and-talk” in order to effectively learn economics.

Economics teachers, especially on the secondary level, utilize resources to aid in their teaching efforts. Many use educational guidebooks from the National Council for Economic Education as well as other organizational websites for lesson plans, in-class activities, and projects as a supplement to lectures (National Council on Economic Education, 2007c). Other resources include the use of computers, games, simulations, and videos. Such resources often have a goal in promoting active student engagement. This goal works to foster student

enjoyment of the content at hand and increase student performance (Marlin & Durden, 1993). Even with various efforts towards engaging students in economics, quite frequently though, economic education is taught just like the rest of social studies --- rote memorization of predetermined facts usually coming from textbooks and content standards (Goodlad, 1984; Newman, 1992; Thornton, 2000).

Textbooks and content standards have become one of the main resources used by teachers to promote economic understanding. These sources of knowledge often reproduce a traditional framework of economics and limit diversity of opinion (Helburn, 1985; Siegfried & Meszaros, 1997). Bartlett & Feiner (1992) argue that not only do these sources not reflect “the economic realities of women and minorities,” but they also celebrate the privileged and deny both teachers and students alternative views of economics (p. 561). Textbooks and standards, therefore, reflect a dominant opinion that most teachers, and subsequently students, would never know to critique. Additionally, educational standards, on both national and state levels, profoundly influence textbook content (Ansary, 2004). Since economics teachers rely so heavily on textbooks, and subsequently standards, to frame their instructional decision-making, we must examine educational standards in order to have a clearer picture of the criticalness of the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics.

Standards-Based Education Reform

Standards-based education reform deals with the issue of promoting content standards and high stakes tests in order to produce data as a way to measure and hold accountable students, teachers, and schools (Chatterji, 2002; Vinson & Ross, 2001). The issue of “standardization” works to define sameness and efficiency and upholds the status quo of who succeeds and who is

being left behind (Gitlin & Peck, 2005). Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing today, standards-based education reform has become ubiquitous in classrooms in the United States.

The 1960s issued in huge changes in the consciousness of Americans with an overall activist culture centered on the Vietnam War and social issues. On the one hand, radicalism, liberalism, and activism raged on, while on the other, conservatism worked hard to grab hold beginning with Nixon's presidential victory in 1968. This conservative movement, in the transition from the late 60s to the 80s, brought a decrease in many social provisions such as unions, affirmative action, civil rights, and urban renewal. Conservatives also welcomed educational theories and reforms including: career education, back to the basics, literacy crises, vocational training, fact-based knowledge, and standards-based education (Shor, 1986).

All of these factors came together as the "conservative restoration" --- promoting itself as the "defender of 'excellence' and 'high standards'" (Shor, 1986, p. 7). Instead of pointing to social inequalities such as poverty and racism, restoration themes during this time period blamed the individual (teachers and students) for the "current school decline" stating "equality is in competition with excellence" (Shor, 1986, p. 8). These themes advocate individualism and competition under the auspices of excellence. Today, we feel the conservative restoration in full effect with educational legislations such as *No Child Left Behind* as well as greater standardized testing requirements and its influence on the curriculum from national and state levels.

In 2005, a report by the Georgia Public Policy Foundation reiterated how the passage of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in 2002 reinforced the standards-based education reform movement. NCLB strives to set high standards for all students in order to close the "gap for those students historically left behind" (p. 23). Similarly, President George W. Bush stated that the high standards of NCLB challenge the "soft bigotry of low expectations, and its cornerstone

is strong accountability measures” (p. 23). These standards determine what knowledge is of most worth and holds students and teachers accountable (through high-stakes testing) in hopes of motivating schools (with rewards and punishments) towards progress (“exceeding”) in educating each child. This agenda for higher standards and accountability comes to define standards-based reform.

The belief that standards, as an effort towards reforming education, provide a useful guide for teachers to communicate important concepts to students is included in most educational contexts (Becker, 1964; Levin, 1998; Siegfried & Meszaro, 1997). Content standards offer direction for teachers in order to assist students in understanding and mastering specific concepts in a certain amount of time (Futrell & Brown, 2000). Hansen (1998) describes the guidelines behind developing standards --- standards must be parsimonious, provide a consensus in discipline, allow for public understanding of standards, have a correct notion of the subject matter, challenge students, and have an opportunity to be measured. In regards to economic education, the standards reform is no different.

In an economic educational setting, teachers and school administrators use content guides and standards to decide “what economics should be taught and how it should be taught” (Walstad, 2001, p. 198). These standards revolve around mastery of economic concepts with an emphasis on analytical and rational approaches to decision making (Walstad, 1992). Siegfried, Buckles, & Hinshaw (1994) believe that students could learn more if teachers “taught less” and instead helped students “*master* the concepts” through repetition (p. 354). This focus on mastery of content through repeated memorization of concepts assumes that challenging standards lead to higher student achievement. Achievement, as based on aligning standards with what is tested, comes to define what knowledge is of most worth, seen here in an economic education context.

In contrast, numerous theorists (Conrad, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Eisner, 1993; Helburn, 1985) believe that the mastery approach towards standards is detrimental to the needs of students. As NCLB strives for success for all, this notion counters the basic logic of standardized testing. In order for the system of high stakes testing to work, someone has to fail. Similarly, not all individuals' learning, no matter how test driven the curriculum, will have the same output. In his 1976 work, Elliot Eisner states the problems of this system clearly,

The standardized test is standard; it is the same for all students. It not only standardizes the tasks students will confront, it standardizes the goals against which they shall be judged. These tests, de facto, become the goals. When this happens, uniformity becomes an aspiration; effectiveness means, in practice, that all students will achieve the same ends. ...Standardized achievement tests do not now provide the means for assessing the significant personalization of teaching and learning. (p. 338)

As Eisner suggests, such a rationale for standards fails to address the individual learner and does not take into account the role cultural capital plays in relation to test scores. Standards, and the standards-based educational reform movement, equate knowledge with accountability.

In regards to standards, students are seen as “empty vessels” that can be filled without “meaningful intellectual interaction” with the material (Frankel, 1999, p. 402). One must then wonder, will these types of standards transform schools for students or will it just “reify existing inequities?” (Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 480). Specifically though, Conrad (1998) contends that economic standards:

stress the general principles to be taught with little or no information to teach them. As a result, the economics standards are likely to be less controversial than the history standards but also less interesting and more difficult for teachers to implement. (p. 168-169)

Conrad's argument builds on the case against less controversial knowledge-recall defined by both standards and standardized tests. Teaching economics in a way that does not provide meaning leads students and teachers to feel bored and uninterested in economic content. Since students' boredom and teachers' difficulties often stem from economic content and methods, this research works to examine economic standards. The view of mastery as success on high-stakes

testing also is evident through Georgia's response to standards-based educational reform --- the Georgia Performance Standards.

Standards-Based Education Reform in Georgia

By replacing the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) intends to provide a more clear and concise version of what teachers should teach and students should learn. In 2001, a team from Phi Delta Kappa International, a professional association for educators, audited the QCC and found it "bulky, lacking rigor, and out of alignment with national standards" (Jacobson, 2004, p. 27). Instead, the new GPS are seen as "rigorous, clear and measurable and based on national and international research" (The Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2005, p. 23).

The GPS for Economics, written and revised by numerous "national experts, college professors, school system social studies coordinators, representatives of state curriculum associations, and classroom teachers" specifically Dr. Glen Blankenship from the Georgia Council on Economic Education and Dr. Diane Ravitch, intend to strengthen the curriculum and "drive both instruction and assessment" by allowing teachers to "teach to a curriculum" thus helping to take the "guesswork out of teaching" (Georgia Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). Even though the economic concepts in the GPS echo those in the QCC, the GPS provides a more detailed overview of the "economy as a whole" (Wilson, 2006, p. 4). By aligning the curriculum and the end-of-course assessments, the writers of the GPS claim to help provide accurate scientific data regarding what students know and what teachers teach (The Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2005).

As Georgia responds to the standards-based education reform movement, the requirements from NCLB becomes a fundamental goal --- every child will meet or exceed their grade level by the 2013-2014 school year (The Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2005). The GPS will officially begin its implementation on the high school and middle school levels in 2007 and in 2008 for elementary schools (Wilson, 2006). As a result, the GPS work to align with testing, comply with mandated guidelines on the federal, state, and local level, and “meet the needs of Georgia’s students and teachers” (The Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2005, p. 33). Such tests include achievement-based assessments whose results bring about serious consequences for both the student and the educator (AERA, 2000).

Unfortunately, high-stakes testing is not only testing students, but it is also testing teachers, principals, and whole school systems. If a student does not pass certain high-stakes tests, they will not receive promotion to the next grade level regardless of other (albeit very important) variables such as yearly progress of their assignments as well as their grade in the course. Just as stressful, if test scores of a class do not reach a certain benchmark, a teacher’s job may be on the line. Similarly, if a school fails to meet certain standards, public embarrassment --- from score publishing in local newspapers to sanctions --- can easily occur (AERA, 2000, p. 1). These high-stakes add increasing pressure to an already arduous position for students, teachers, and administration. Their reputations are at stake! Because of demands from the state regarding funding and the public as well, principals have come into the practice of encouraging teachers, both explicitly and implicitly, to “solve” the problem of low test scores by teaching test preparation. Also, teachers come under so much pressure regarding these high stakes that in some cases they have been found to help students cheat on various standardized tests (Donsky, 2005). This focus on test preparation and the tests’ alignment with the curriculum standards

along with the many aspects of standards-based education reform permeate all areas of content within schools due to its ties to accountability.

The new GPS, and its alignment to high-stakes tests, prepare to set the norm for teaching and learning in economic classrooms in Georgia. Through this standardization goal, and the well-documented relationships among standards, the high stakes test that accompanies them, and social studies classrooms as a whole, there is a real need to consider the extent to which these standards create space for alternative perspectives in regards to the learning of economic issues.

Social Studies and Economic Education Traditions

In social studies, several different traditions have developed to provide answers to basic curriculum questions of how and what to teach. While the organization of social studies has remained relatively stable, a variety of ways exist to describe the purpose, content, and methods of teaching social studies. Barr, Barth, & Shermis (1977) provide a well-used description of social studies under the traditions of citizenship transmission, social science, and reflective inquiry (see Figure 1).

Citizenship transmission focuses on the acquisition of information. This information supports democratic and Western traditional values in order to produce “good citizens” (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977; Vinson & Ross, 2001). Content becomes steeped in factual, back-to-basics information pre-determined by a “consensus of authorities and experts” (Vinson & Ross, 2001, p. 43). Methodologically speaking, citizenship transmission promotes description, without interpretation, and persuasion, the normative values, in order to “guarantee” the “survival of society” (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977, p. 60). In economics, we often see this as the uplifting of capitalism and free-market values (Vinson & Ross, 2001). Conservatives such as Diane

Ravitch and E.D. Hirsch often advocate citizenship transmission and their ideological views influence specific state standards.

Social studies as a *social science* understands and masters the specific problems dealt with by individual disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, geography, economics, psychology, and political science. By acquiring the knowledge of specific social studies disciplines and thinking “the way social scientists think,” students learn to make personal and policy decisions and understand the structure and processes of society (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977, p. 71). This need for a more scientific approach comes out of an effort of educational reform to enhance student abilities during the intellectual race of the Cold War (Allen, 1959; Vinson & Ross, 2001). Social studies as a social science entails a positivistic notion, treating social issues scientifically, and promotes mastery of concepts. From social science and citizenship transmission, Barr, Barth, & Shermis (1997) contrast these two traditions with a more reflective method towards teaching social studies.

Coming out of the work of John Dewey (1938), social studies as *reflective inquiry* emphasizes relevant problem solving and meaningful decision making for students. Dewey argues for a more student-centered approach in order to increase democracy in classrooms. Through the reflective inquiry tradition, students can learn not only the basics but also how to

read between the lines, being aware of, locating, and using information from many sources; sensing and identifying problems and learning how to frame hypotheses; selecting and interpreting data; and being able to identify value conflicts and learning how to weigh and assess value claims.
(Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977, p. 65)

Specifically, reflective inquiry promotes interpretation of knowledge and ideas as well as action. Ideas such as social change and conflict are revealed within this tradition. Even though Barr, Barth, & Shermis’ (1977) approach provides a more critical outlook, overall this tradition remains within the realm of the predetermined curriculum. Understanding where knowledge

comes from or who creates the knowledge to be learned in the classroom is not analyzed in this tradition. However, the tradition of reflective inquiry does show that space can exist for more social and critical ideas within social studies.

Barr, Barth, & Shermis' (1977) three traditions of citizenship transmission, social science, and reflective inquiry have influenced the field of social studies enormously. Utilized in various teacher education courses, these traditions helps social studies educators understand and organize what social studies “‘really’ ought to be about” (p. 139). To allow for more understanding of how and what to teach, economic education can also be organized into three traditions. Even though a broad consensus believes that the goal of economic education includes every person having economic competency, differential approaches have emerged (Bienvenu, 1958). These economic educational approaches correspond to Barr, Barth, & Shermis' (1977) three broad field social studies traditions: a focus on democracy and capitalism (citizenship transmission), an emphasis on training students in the neoclassical traditions of the free-market (social science), and a step towards critical approaches (reflective inquiry) (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

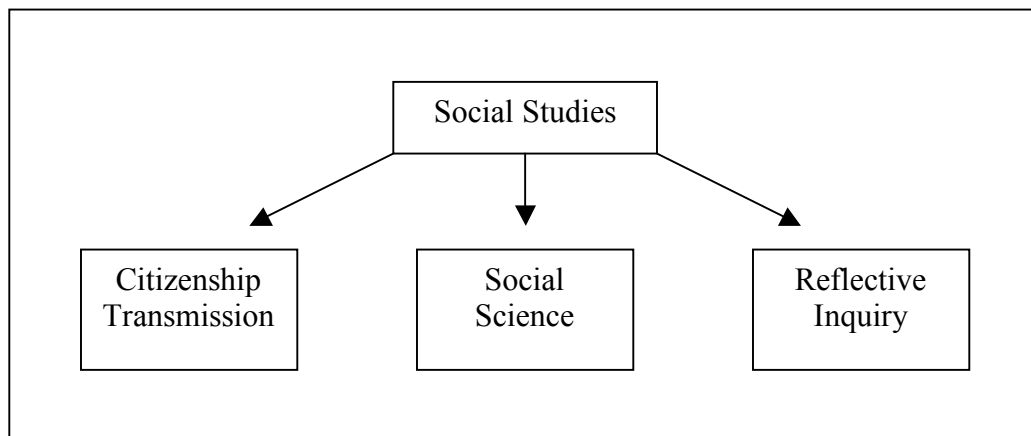


Figure 1: Barr, Barth, & Shermis' (1997) Social Studies Traditions.

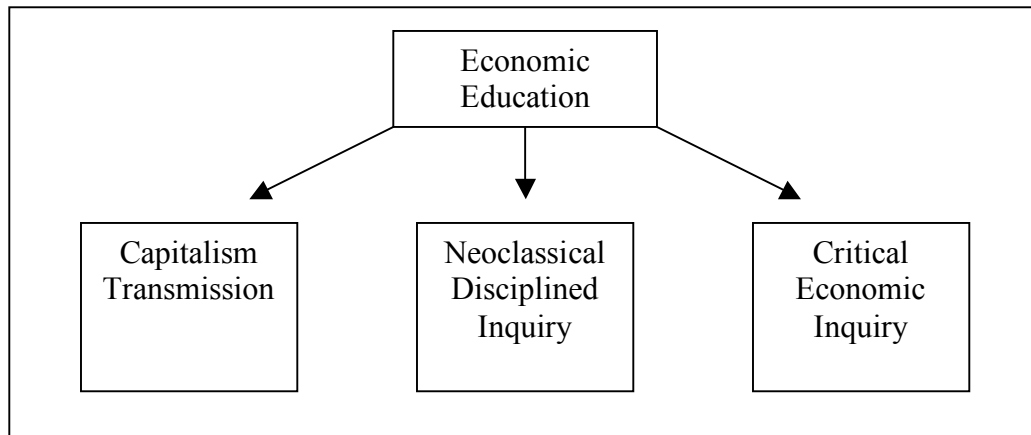


Figure 2: Economic Education Traditions.

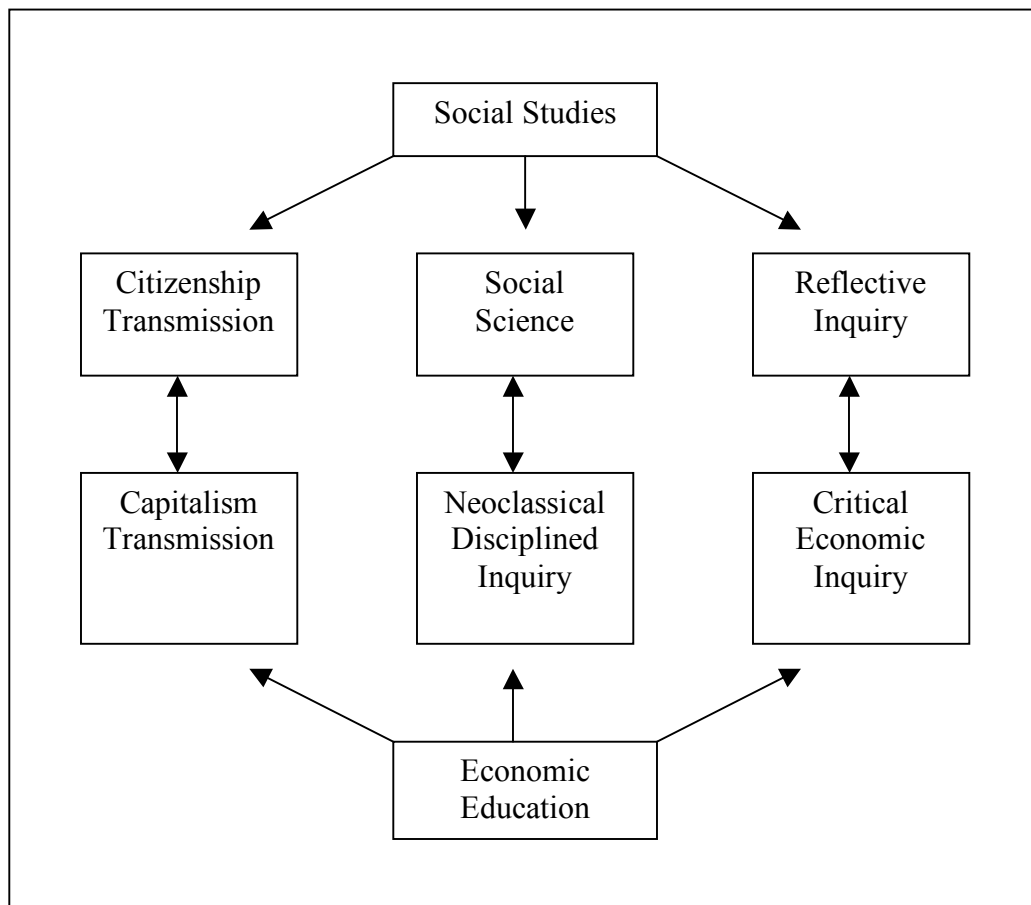


Figure 3: Social Studies Traditions and Economic Education Traditions.

Capitalism Transmission

Democracy in education assumes an enormous position in the social studies tradition as well as economic education. Economic understanding became a priority for Americans because of its unique ties to fostering democracy (Allen, 1959; Howe, 1994; Stigler, 1983; Walstad, 1997). This especially revealed itself as academics saw economics as an ameliorating factor in the struggle against communism. As Allen (1959) and Baer (1975) suggest, if American citizens could recognize the intricacies and the “goodness” of capitalism through an economic understanding, then the ideological and intellectual war could end in favor of democracy and freedom.

Economic education has been considered a means to strengthen capitalism by preparing students for the labor force (Levin, 1998; NCEE Survey, 2005). Such notions of “self-government, considerable personal freedoms, the necessity for hard work, the values of achievement, tolerance and acceptance of differences, and the right to make a profit from one’s labor or investments” (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977) align with US notions of citizenship and democracy in the economics classroom (Allen, 1959; Clark & Barron, 1981; Galbraith, 1980; Morton, 1987). Because the rhetoric supporting standards-based educational reform so often uses the language of “citizenship” and “democracy,” its ties to economic education almost become unbreakable. Intensified by the ideology of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, federally approved by *Goals 2000* in 1994, and supported by organizations such as the American Economic Association and the Joint (now National) Council on Economic Education, capitalism transmission has become a subject of interest in the social studies nation-wide (Becker, 1997; Brenneke, Highsmith, Soper, Walstad, & Watts, 1988; Fuhman, 1994; Hinshaw & Siegfried, 1991).

Corporations also have a unique and often unseen impact on the standards and curriculum materials found in most economic classrooms (Maier, 2002). Used in both many ways and backed by hefty grants, organizations (such as Junior Achievement, the Foundation for Teaching Economics, and the National Council on Economic Education) provide lesson plans and resources for economic classrooms that lean towards a capitalistic, free-market, and pro-corporate ideology. For example, Junior Achievement, a non-profit organization supported by Microsoft, MasterCard, Best Buy, FedEx, ExxonMobil among others, attempts to provide students with a “free enterprise message of hope and opportunity” (Junior Achievement Online, 2007). In the same way, the leading professional advocacy organization in the field, the National Council on Economic Education, has well-documented corporate ties. Maier (2002) stated that

Bank of America pitched in over \$3 million for the NCEE's Financial Fitness for Life, attractive teaching materials coauthored by accomplished but decidedly conservative economics educator Mark Schug.

The first lesson plan tempts students, "How to Really Be a Millionaire," based on the content of two bestsellers, *Getting Rich in America* and *The Millionaire Next Door*. The "millionaire" approach reinforces unrealistic expectations among many youth. A recent poll by Junior Achievement found that nearly one quarter of teens believe they will have \$1 million in assets by age 40, while 15 percent think they will earn more than \$1 million a year. Aside from being unlikely (the actual proportion of current million-dollar earners is about one in a thousand) the curriculum downplays the impact of inheritance and the earnings of corporate executives, both important starting points for understanding the U.S. economy. (p. 1)

By aligning money, power, and tradition, this hegemonic stronghold of capitalism prevails in introductory economic classrooms across the country. Another accepted and widespread economic education tradition includes neoclassical disciplined inquiry.

Neoclassical Disciplined Inquiry

Not unlike the social studies tradition of social science, grounded in idealized notions of disciplinary inquiry and validated by empirical evidence (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977), the neoclassical model for economics deals with a positivistic view of traditional market based ideas.

Neoclassical disciplined inquiry involves thinking like neoclassical economists. This method and content revolves around the decisions made in relation to scarce resources as well as a “reverence for ‘natural’ market forces and [a] reluctance to interrogate social factors” (Feiner & Roberts, 1990, p.162). Based on the works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, this neoclassical school of thought has become mainstream --- especially in economic education (Armento, 1983; Bach & Saunders, 1965; Bienvenu, 1958; Salemi & Siegfried, 1999). This discipline of economics gained a foothold and established its presence in the academy because it reflected a worldview of positivism and a growing sense that science could be turned to social concerns. Once established and in power, neoclassical economists remain safe within the status quo.

Though many academics oppose the neoclassical tradition, those that do utilize such an approach remain impervious to change due to their many alliances (Feiner & Roberts, 1995). Neoclassical disciplined inquiry supporters in the academy influence organizations such as the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) as well as national and state standards commissions. For example, the NCEE includes various economics professors from top-tier universities, such as Harvard, New York University, Vanderbilt, as members of the board of directors (National Council on Economic Education, 2007a). The NCEE utilizes knowledge from many university neoclassical economists to provide resources for classroom teachers. Because of the supporters of neoclassical disciplined inquiry, such traditions regarding introductory economic lessons have become an industry standard (Walstad, 1992).

With tradition as its backing, neoclassical disciplined inquiry is often seen as the unbridled truth in teaching introductory economics courses (Bartlett & Feiner, 1992; Ferber & Nelson, 2003; Feiner & Roberts, 1990). Many instances of economic education focus on mastery of neoclassical content in order to promote the knowledge of economists, similar to what

George Stigler envisioned (Siegfried, Buckles, & Hinshaw, 1994; Stigler, 1983; Soper & Walstad, 1988; Treyz, 1971). Subsequently, textbook and educational standards writers utilize this traditional yet one-sided method to instill a set ideology without objection in most US classrooms from kindergarten to beginning college courses. As a result, neoclassical economic inquiry becomes validated as it appears in standards for educational institutions. The domination of neoclassical economic thought also does not provide adequate attention to issues of individuals in regards to race and gender (Bartlett & Feiner, 1992; Ferber & Nelson, 2003; Feiner & Roberts, 1990). In this context, a critical view of economics comes to the forefront.

Critical Economic Inquiry

As a corresponding model, critical economic inquiry comes out of the historical roots of Harold Rugg and the social reconstructionists. Rugg's progressive vision included improving the quality of American life, redemption of the arts through social engineering, and reforms in social studies textbooks (James, 1995). His textbooks reflected this liberalism in discussions of economic inequities and criticisms of capitalism. Similarly, social reconstructionists of the 1930s and 1940s promoted a reform of the socioeconomic system as a core topic in the social studies education curriculum. The intended aim was a deepening and extension of democratic values into the economic and social relationships through participative planning. Such progressive thinking focused on national and global economic concerns and advocated public awareness of economic assistance and planning. The 1940s brought a global perspective to the social and political agenda of society and education in the context of social reconstructionist theory (James, 1995).

As a minority tradition of pushing boundaries of specific economic issues, critical economic inquiry also advocates an understanding of social and political issues of the economy. Unlike social reconstruction, critical economic inquiry, with critical theory as a framework and critical pedagogy as an outcome, promotes more than just reflection or “critical thinking.” Similarly, though parallels exist between critical economic inquiry and Barr, Barth, & Shermis’ reflective inquiry, the essence of critical economic inquiry is not strictly of a methodological or disciplinary in nature. Instead, critical economic inquiry can help students to more accurately understand the world around us (Morton, 1987). A critical look at economics makes it possible for students to “confront competing theories,” such as a neoclassical or capitalistic take on economics, as *theories* rather than “immediate appropriations of reality;” thus, challenging the current neoclassical, positivist school of economic thought (Feiner & Roberts, 1995, p.367). Students will then learn to question the structures of society through the use of economics in a critical way.

Feiner & Roberts (1995) state that economics, seen in capitalism transmission and neoclassical economic inquiry, has become “preoccupied with analytical and empirical technique” and in the process has become “more homogeneous and less open to the...dialogue of different voices” (p. 371). In contrast, a more radical or critical perspective becomes necessary even if it has an appearance of being strictly normative --- something that ought to occur but does not in practice. Allowing for a more open and dialectical pedagogy, an organic reconstruction of economic methods, content, and pedagogy becomes possible within the economic educational framework (Bartlett & Feiner, 1992). In my research, I will focus on an analysis of state standards through this critical lens.

Overall though, Vinson (1998) argues that a need exists for theoretical standards research from a critical perspective. Highlighting “characteristics most offensive to the radical Left,” critical standards research has the potential to reveal aspects of standards that Freire would call “oppressive,” what Dewey would term “undemocratic,” and what Foucault would deem “régimes of ‘truth’” (p. 24). Understanding hidden meanings and intentions of standards documents, such as the GPS for Economics, and utilizing a critical approach towards economic education helps answer the questions: Whose knowledge is valued in economic educational standards? How might critical pedagogy influence economic education and its standards?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Theory

In everyday speech, theory comes to mean a sort of educated guess; however, in academia, theory is a framework of ideas that strives to examine and describe events. In the social sciences, theories usually explain human behavior and society in either aggregated groups or as individuals. In critical theory, however, this type of analysis strives to go further than merely explaining phenomena --- it works to understand and implement the merging of theory and practice as praxis.

At the time of critical theory's inception, Marxism and Freudianism remained the dominant theoretical frameworks. Critical theory, though, worked to provide an alternate view. Critical theory looks at the conditions of the world in a way to understand and liberate oneself from oppression (Jay, 1973; Lemert, 2002). Some of the first theorists to reconsider Marxism through a critical and dialectical lens came out of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, founded by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and other scholars in the 1930s. Though each scholar had specific interests, the general consensus revolved around the promotion of dialectics --- engaging in dialogue as a way to foster an understanding of culture through the questioning of the reproductive structures in society (Jay, 1973).

Through the use of dialectics, going further than mere descriptions, critical theory works to explain the causes of oppression and strives for a change (Peters, 2003). With an influence coming from Marxism, critical theory addresses societal issues of oppressed groups of people and their subsequent false consciousness. However, unlike Marxism, critical theory does not reduce its analyses to economic factors. Rather, critical theory delves into *cultural* analyses of power and false consciousness. Less deterministic than Marxism, critical theory refuses to solely

focus on class issues and instead stresses dialectics and negation as a way of understanding and critiquing the structures of society.

The critical theory of today, especially seen in the educational sphere, also questions in order to get at and challenge the power structures of society. Power structures include the visible or invisible hegemony that works to provide or deny privilege to people, places, or things socially, politically, and economically. Apple (2004) suggests that by considering these structures, “a more thorough and honest appraisal of educational issues can be gained by placing them within a framework of competing conceptions of justice, of social and economic equality, and of what is and who should have legitimate power” (p. 13). Such questions, as trying to understand truths defined by power and privilege (or the lack thereof), include: whose interests are served? Who benefits from these standards? Whose culture is represented? Whose culture is left out? How does knowledge represent the dominant interests in society? How do schools legitimate knowledge as unquestioned truth?

Critical theory also fosters an enlightened sensibility and an alternate way of knowing by exposing structures that often remain hidden in commonsense, the normative values of society (Gitlin & Peck, 2005). Therefore, critical theory reveals below-the-surface meanings and intentions of various situations and texts. Specifically in education, these meanings and intentions are also known as the *hidden curriculum* --- “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years” (Apple, 2004, p. 13). Everything that occurs in the classroom, including the use of national and state mandated standards, as well as the teaching of economics, has an impact on student learning. In order to foster authentic or truthful learning, teachers must remain cognizant of the overt and covert

ideology inside the classroom. The hidden curriculum also has application outside of formal educational settings as aspects of everyday life are implicated in knowledge production. Thus, critical theory provides a lens for both students and teachers to understand and critique society in an honest and intelligent way. Critical theory, especially with the idea of the hidden curriculum, frames this analysis of the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics.

More generally, critical theorists of recent years, such as Michael Apple (2004), Henry Giroux (1994), Peter McLaren (2003), and Ira Shor (1986), continue this tradition of critical consciousness in order to work to transform and empower both teachers and students. In this overarching school of thought, many other theoretical frameworks touch on aspects of educational critical theory such as postmodern/poststructural (McLaren, 1994), feminist (hooks, 1994; Lather, 1994), critical race (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Tyson, 2003), postcolonial (Mostern, 1994; Trend, 1994), critical cultural (Giroux, 1994), multicultural (Mohanty, 1994), and queer (Leck, 1994; Watney, 1994) theories. The literature that applies critical theory to education, however, lacks information regarding specific state standards in relation to critical economic education. Hence, this research centers on critical theory in order to analyze state standards for economics.

Although specific state standards have not been addressed, examples do exist in the literature explicating the use of critical theory in analyzing a variety of other texts. For example, Feiner & Morgan (1987) and Feiner (1993) examined economics texts and recognized the need for a more critical pedagogical approach that would not only include but center around social issues such as race, ethnicity, and gender. In *Race and Gender in the American Economy: Views From Across the Spectrum*, Feiner (1994) compiled a volume of works by authors such as William Darity, Jr., Cornel West, Susan Faludi, and many others in order to make social issues

visible when studying economics. Educators can use these readings as supplemental texts or as main pieces to structure economics courses. In this text, Feiner recognizes the hidden curriculum in economic education, the fact that issues of race and gender receive a stereotypical treatment and “socioeconomic experiences” are seen as “anomalous or deviant” (as cited in Feiner & Roberts, 1990, p. 159). This hidden curriculum along with Bloom’s taxonomy of educational cognitive objectives drives Feiner’s reasoning for putting together such resources. It is not enough to just acknowledge race or gender (specifically in the field of economic education), but one needs to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate such issues.

Understanding and including such issues of race and gender, Feiner (1994) argues, may seem

far removed from the world of supply and demand, marginal productivity, preferences, price indices, demand multipliers, and the myriad other tools and theories studied in economics classes. But the distance is not so great at all. Ultimately, economic tools are always used within conceptual frameworks, and the conceptual frameworks of economics, like economists themselves, interact with and help to produce the world in which women and men of all colors and ethnic backgrounds struggle to make life meaningful. (xv)

Feiner (1994) wants to bring meaning to economic education by highlighting the fact that economics, as most often taught, rarely even skims the surface of pressing issues regarding women and minorities. Omitting these important viewpoints renders race and gender invisible and silent (Feiner & Roberts, 1990). Therefore, a limited economic educational framework requires a more dialectical and heterogeneous perspective in order to bring meaning and understanding to the way the world really works (Bartlett & Feiner, 1992).

Critical Theory and Textual Analysis

Mohanty (1994) explicates the need for a critical theoretical critique in an educational setting:

Education for critical consciousness requires a reformulation of the knowledge-as-accumulated-capital model of education and focuses instead on the link between the historical configuration of social forms and the way they work subjectively. This issue of subjectivity represents a realization of the fact that who we are, how we act, what we think, and what stories we tell become more intelligible within an epistemological framework that begins by recognizing existing hegemonic histories (p. 148).

These hegemonic histories, or power structures, find themselves in various aspects of classrooms both visible and invisible. Power structures also include widely sanctioned content standards and in this case, economic educational standards. In utilizing critical textual analysis to examine these economic standards, I hope to promote agency by uncovering the meanings and challenging how texts represent the specific interests found in society and how they (re)produce structures of power (Luke, 1996).

By questioning as a way of understanding hidden curricular aspects, this research design will consist of a critical textual analysis of the Georgia Performance Standards. Textual analysis in this research is synonymous with the terms literary analysis and discourse analysis. Likewise, Beringer states that a literary analysis involves “reading source material and drawing evidence from that material to be used in supporting a point of view or thesis” (as cited in Alridge, 2006, p. 664). In detail, my research will include reading the literature, noting the themes, discussing the themes, and supporting my conclusion by example. Comparably, Abowitz & Harnish (2006) utilize “discourse analysis” in examining texts. By focusing on

- (a) the claims and evidence forwarded by the author(s);
- (b) the rhetorical choices (vocabulary, slogans, style) made by the author(s);
- (c) the moral and political values advocated by the text; and
- (d) the context from which, or in which, the text was produced,

they work towards answering critical questions such as

What is the author advocating, and what are the terms/expressions used to identify political membership, identity, values, participation, and knowledge? What kinds of moral, civic, and/or educational values does the author defend? (p. 656).

This method of analysis provides a focused inquiry into economic content standards through the lens of critical theory.

Luke (1996) describes the pairing of critical theory and discourse analysis as a “critical sociological discourse analysis” --- understanding everyday “formations of discourse and power” and the “patterns of social reproduction and cultural representation” in classroom life (p. 11). This unique way of combining critical theory and textual, or discourse, analysis, as a way to illuminate aspects of power and privilege within texts, proves useful in my research.

Knowing what is included and excluded as well as the meanings and intentions behind a text is of utmost importance. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) will, as Blommaert & Bulcaen (2000) state, uncover the ways that social structures

impinge on discourse patterns, relations, and models (in the form of power relations, ideological effects, and so forth), and in treating these relations as problematic, that researchers in CDA situate the critical dimension of their work. It is not enough to lay bare the social dimensions of language use. These dimensions are the object of moral and political evaluation and analyzing them should have effects in society: empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs. CDA advocates interventionism in the social practices it critically investigates. Toolan (1997) even opts for a prescriptive stance: CDA should make proposals for change and suggest corrections to particular discourses. CDA thus openly professes strong commitments to change, empowerment, and practice-orientedness (p. 449).

Likewise, issues of power stress the political nature of society in which schools reside. Finding agency and emancipation in regards to the power relations of society comes to aid in the

ability to ‘see’ the actual functionings of institutions in all their positive *and* negative complexity, to illuminate the contradictions of extant regularities, and, finally, to assist others (and let them assist us) in ‘remembering’ the possibilities of spontaneity, choice, and more equal models of control (Apple, 2004, p. 153-154).

In fostering such a critique, it is necessary to mention that I do not advocate low or no standards. Vinson (1998) contends that the problem with standards exists in the meanings and

the details rendering questions such as: Whose knowledge is privileged? What political values get included into the text? What knowledge gets excluded from the text? Specifically, I will utilize critical theoretical themes of ideology, hegemony, and the selective tradition to further understand and analyze the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics.

Terminology

Hegemony, in the sense of the sociology of education, is a lived experience of totality and domination (Apple, 2004). Therefore, hegemony refers to the

maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family. (McLaren, 2003, p. 202)

By encompassing the notion of power, hegemony can be made and remade in a way that (re)produces structures. Hegemony secures power and privilege through the representations and practices of social life that often remain invisible (McLaren, 2003). For example, the holder of power is important in understanding hegemony. In the classroom setting, teachers hold a certain level of power over students due to the structure of the educational system in general. Societal structures (such as the government, corporations, “correct” social and cultural practices, as well as the legislation, textbooks, and content standards) also have hegemony. The power that structures hold and the beliefs behind hegemony also work, in turn, with ideology.

Ideology includes systems of beliefs seen as normal (Apple, 2004). It is a way of “viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals, and representations that we tend to accept as natural and as commonsense” (McLaren, 2003, p. 205). As with everything, a set of ideas can find favor among groups of people. This dominant ideology is complex in the fact that people see such beliefs as just that, “commonsense” --- the “broad-based normative value systems and local discourses that emerge from the interaction of

contextual priorities and cultural participation” (Gitlin & Peck, 2005, p. 219). In everyday social and cultural practices, dominant ideology is often invisible. We see it as a normal opinion, what ought to occur. While ideology portrays the status quo and hegemony uplifts such ideals, the selective tradition gives such notions of ideology and hegemony even more authority.

Coming from the theorist Raymond Williams (1980), the *selective tradition* entails tradition --- what has already occurred as well as a continuation of the norm --- in regards to the dominant culture. Though similar to commonsense, the selective tradition, however, delves into the notion of selectivity. Williams states that this selective tradition chooses and emphasizes certain “meanings and practices” from the “whole possible area of past and present” (as cited in Apple, 2004, p. 5). This suggests that other meanings and practices are excluded. Most importantly, Williams continues,

some of these meanings are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms, which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture.

The process of education; the processes of a much wider social training within institutions like the family; the practical definitions and organization of work; the selective tradition at an intellectual and theoretical level: all these forces are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture, and on them, as experienced, as built into our living, reality depends.
(as cited in Apple, 2004, p. 5)

Schools, as well as content standards, also can work within this selective tradition by promoting and (re)producing the dominant culture. In this research, I will look at the “meanings and practices” of economic education in the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics. As a text, these Georgia Performance Standards command authority and we must try to understand their power as agents of “cultural and ideological hegemony” (Apple, 2004, p.5). The selective tradition defines what knowledge is of most worth (Apple, 1992). However, because what counts as knowledge is a social construction (McLaren, 2003), I have the flexibility to analyze and critique the GPS by looking at its own hidden curriculum and analyzing the standardization process in education.

Thus far, I have examined the literature on economics education, standards-based education reform, social studies, and the conceptual framework of critical theory. These ideas assist in understanding the meanings and intentions behind the new Georgia Performance Standards for Economics. In this study, the main goal is to consider the GPS for Economics from a critical theoretical perspective, specifically through the themes of ideology, hegemony, and selective tradition, as a way to challenge the status quo and work towards change.

METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this research is to examine the economic standards for Georgia through a critical theoretical lens. Again, critical theory entails revealing social norms and power structures in a way to increase knowledge awareness and critically analyze such structures. In this research, the main questions include: What is the extent to which the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for Economics encourage critical examinations of economic topics? How might critical pedagogy influence economic education and its standards?

Text Selection

The choice of literature to examine occurred because the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) have recently replaced the former state standards known as the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) and thus has room for new research and analysis. As Georgia is the home state of the attending research university and I have classroom experience with economic standards, the GPS for Economics became the logical choice for this research. These standards also typify economic education standards established in other states as well.

The GPS for Economics (see Appendix) is a four-page document that includes five standards sections, a total of twenty-two sub-standards (SSEIN1, SSEIN2, SSEIN3, etc), and sixty-seven itemized sub-standards (seen as “a,” “b,” “c,” and so on). These standards reflect a traditional scope and sequence of introductory economic content. The standards sections, common among most economic courses, consist of fundamental concepts, microeconomics, macroeconomics, international economics, and personal finance. By honing in on these standards through a critical theoretical lens, we have the ability to examine what grounds the entire economic course.

Method

To begin, I obtained the Georgia Performance Standards by downloading the portable document file from the Georgia Department of Education website (2007). From this document, I read the standards for the course entitled “Economics.” Each standard has an abbreviation for greater reference and usage. The first two letters “SS” stand for social studies. The next letter “E” represents economics. The following letters and numbers indicate a specific standard. For example, SSEF1b represents social studies economics fundamental concept 1b. “F” stands for fundamental concepts, “MI” for microeconomics, “MA” for macroeconomics, “IN” for international economics, and “PF” for personal finance. Once I understood the categorization system, I then examined the economics standards to get a general understanding of the scope and sequence of the topics included.

Once this initial procedure occurred, I noted the themes (Alridge, 2006) of the document using a critical theoretical perspective. I looked at the rhetorical choices (vocabulary, slogans, style), the claims and evidence forwarded (whether the standards imply methods of capitalism transmission, neoclassical disciplined inquiry, and/or critical economic inquiry viewpoint and why), and the moral and political values advocated by the text (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). Next, I applied critical theory to the text by using key critical theoretical concepts as discursive lenses for coding categories. I coded the noted themes of the document with the following coding categories: hegemony (H), ideology (I), and selective tradition (S) based on the terms’ definitions and the standards’ applicability to such categories. Lastly, I explicated in detail what these codings mean for my research in economic education and standards-based educational reform from a critical theoretical perspective.

Sample Description

An example of how I utilized a critical theoretical lens to examine the GPS follows. The first standard includes SSEF4a, a fundamental concept that discusses economic systems. This consists of comparing and contrasting different economic systems such as command (socialism / communism), market, and mixed. However, the framework for this sub-standard still revolves around a neoclassical and capitalistic model:

SSEF4 The student will compare and contrast different economic systems and explain how they answer the three basic economic questions of what to produce, how to produce, and for whom to produce.

a. Compare command, market, and mixed economic systems with regard to private ownership, profit motive, consumer sovereignty, competition, and government regulation.

b. Evaluate how well each type of system answers the three economic questions and meets the broad social and economic goals of freedom, security, equity, growth, efficiency, and stability.

(Georgia Department of Education, 2007, p. 1)

By comparing economic systems to that of characteristics of free-market capitalism, this standard promotes a specific view without explicitly stating this fact. Language such as “private ownership” and “competition” reflects the hegemony of capitalism --- seen as the correct way of understanding all other economic systems. Similarly, the use of the terms “compare” and “evaluate” suggests a pre-determined answer (S) that advances a specific economic system (I) without revealing the power structures (H) defined within the actual concept of economic systems and capitalism. Thus, coded as all three (H, I, and S), the basis for learning of different economic systems becomes positioned as an “other” in relation to the status quo.

From this example of my methods in this research, my intentions are apparent. I want to make it clear that educational texts such as the GPS are not neutral. Their biased content relates to the structural inequalities in both educational settings as well as in society as a whole. My intentions may influence my research, however, I try to remain objective by realizing and understanding my subjectivities.

Subjectivity Statement

As an African American female growing up in a predominantly white middle class environment, I have always possessed a critical inquiry or curiosity. In high school, I understood the inequality of dominance; however, I lacked the language for describing such issues. Being engulfed by a culture grounded in the ideals of white suburban middle class, I would often deconstruct messages from society and the media without even realizing that I was “deconstructing.” This teenage curiosity became a necessary component in my life --- a survival skill. In order to understand my feelings and society, I had to critically analyze my surroundings.

Through my undergraduate and graduate experiences (academically and socially), I have acquired a language to critically analyze society. Similarly, my current interest in this subject comes from the work of Peter McLaren (2003), who discusses critical pedagogy from critical race and Marxist theoretical perspectives. I recognized and understood the vast social inequalities dealing with race, class, sexual orientation, and gender because it directly affected my life. Subsequently, I applied this knowledge to a commitment to critical consciousness raising and activist educational efforts.

This interest too stems from the fact that as a college student, I often wondered why I never learned aspects of critical knowledge in my high school setting. This knowledge has such importance that it drives my thinking daily. Now at twenty-four years of age, I can still recall my high school days and often critique such knowledge learned from that time through a critical framework. I wish that I had had an opportunity to learn of critical viewpoints in my secondary studies. From this perspective, I am concerned for the current middle and high school demographic. Similarly, as a pre-service teacher education graduate student, I long to help students gain a critical consciousness that will foster their worldview. I also hope that students

can obtain an understanding of the unequal and dominant structures of our society and become empowered to work towards change.

Thus, my strengths in this study include my first hand knowledge of the position of a student learning critical theory and critical pedagogy. My weaknesses, however, come from the fact that I align myself so much with the liberatory practices of critical pedagogy that I long for students to come out with an increased knowledge set. Just as Ansell (2002) states, there is a “tendency in the critical pedagogy literature to portray students as either complicit in the reproduction of hegemonic power, or engaged in active resistance” (p. 180). Of course, becoming critically aware is a process. Students rarely become positioned in such a dichotomous fashion --- there exists a middle ground.

Therefore, I address my subjectivities through this understanding and realization of where my position lies. Through this research, I want to shed light on the use of standards as a method towards classroom empowerment and understanding of critical consciousness in economic education. By analyzing economic educational standards from the perspective of understanding my subjectivities, the integrity of this research will remain intact.

RESULTS

The entire document of the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics (see Appendix) had a code of (H) because of its inherent power as a body of text and its mandatory use in all economic classrooms in Georgia. Each specific standard had a code of (I) for ideology because such knowledge is seen as correct and normal. The document is also a part of the selective tradition (S) due to the fact that such knowledge is preselected and subsequently becomes the norm in regards to teaching economics. Beyond this broad categorization, my analysis revealed an interpretive framework for unpacking the GPS for Economics based on four specific themes --- rhetorical choices, the idea(l) of capitalism, and the invisibility of the poor.

Rhetorical Choices

Looking at the rhetorical choices used in the standards, the language includes that of simple and easy to understand statements. Students must “explain,” “define,” “give examples of,” and so on, of various economic information. Table 1 shows the breakdown of how many times each statement appears in the Economics GPS document.

Table 1. Statements in the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics.

Statement	Number of Times Used
Explain...:	34
Explain how:	11
Explain the:	9
Explain that:	6
Explain why:	5
Explain:	3
Define:	14
Describe:	8
Give examples of:	7
Illustrate:	6
List:	5
Identify:	5
Compare:	5
Evaluate:	4
Create:	1
Interpret:	1

Clearly, the standards require students to “explain” concepts. Even though “explaining” includes explaining how and why economic concepts exist (thus potentially prompting higher levels of thinking), this focus still remains within the dominant ideological (I) framework of economics. Likewise, using the term “explain” assumes that the knowledge in this standard is already predetermined; a “correct” answer exists (S).

For instance, SSEF2 (see Appendix) details more fundamental concepts of economics in a way that does not overtly promote a critical perspective. SSEF2 requests that students give examples of, illustrate, and explain issues regarding decision-making. Utilizing graphs, students have an opportunity to work with visual and mathematical skills in order to understand the production possibilities curve and the notion of tradeoffs. Unfortunately, these standards do not push further into more critical ways of applying such graphs. Students are only required to illustrate the graph (S) towards a known answer.

SSEF1b, specifically, asks students to “define and give examples of” rather than explore and understand economic resources. Likewise, SSEF1c focuses on listing strategic ways of allocating scarce resources. By solely listing, students do not have an opportunity to understand that being able to allocate scarce resources is a privileged (I, H, S) position --- one that has power and status. The task of decision-making and allocating resources in most countries reside within an elite group of elected officials. These decision makers promote an ideology that is not neutral. Unfortunately, students in economics courses rarely have a chance to discuss this view, nor do they have an opportunity to ask questions such as: who makes decisions? Whose values are privileged?

The term “evaluate” however, conjures up a more open approach to learning economics. Using the term “evaluate” indicates the potential for critical analysis to take place. Evaluate, as seen in standards SSEF4b, SSEIN2e, SSEPF2d, SSEPF4, has the opportunity to foster questioning and understanding of the dominant position (H) of certain economic educational information. Students can also critique information given in an economics course from perspectives that includes issues of race and gender. However, a critical approach towards these standards depends upon the teachers’ knowledge and willingness to delve into critical issues such as the politics of free trade, economic systems, investment options, and the effects of credit. Thus, such critical notions are not *explicit* in the GPS where instead a set of beliefs (I) is already set in stone (S).

Lastly, the uses of the phrases “explain” and “give examples of” make up the bulk of the standards found in the GPS for Economics. These types of surface questions may prompt and perpetuate an uncritical look at economics. The GPS expects students to produce knowledge rather than synthesize or creatively learn such concepts. By using the term “explain why,”

instead of discover why or understand why, students lose out on an opportunity to question the status quo of economic education (H).

As economic education currently stands, under the auspices of capitalism transmission and neoclassical disciplined inquiry (I), room for questioning and considering alternate views does not exist. Examining rhetorical choices helps to understand how language affects the meanings and intentions of standards documents. Rhetorical choices, highlighted here as key statements, reveal the criticalness, or lack thereof, of the GPS for Economics. Rhetorical choices, as signal phrases, also become apparent within the next noted theme of the dominance of capitalism.

The Idea(l) of Capitalism

By noting the themes, I identified thirty-seven out of the sixty-seven itemized sub-standards as signal phrases that promote capitalism as the ideal political and economic system. Signal phrases include notions of “competition,” “private ownership,” “production,” and many more (Georgia Department of Education, 2007, p. 1-4). These phrases are the language of capitalism and allow the reader to consider the dominance and the portrayal of the idea(l) of capitalism --- striving to promote private ownership of the means of production through a free and competitive market motivated by profit. From the beginning, the dominance of free-market capitalism is well established within the standards. The title of the entire text is “Economics.” This title might be interpreted to mean that a student will learn aspects of economics from differing perspectives. Instead of a broad look at economics, the GPS for Economics outlines a course more aptly titled “The Economics of Capitalism.” Therefore by analyzing specific areas of the GPS for Economics, such as economic systems, fundamental concepts, microeconomics,

communism, and international economics, the ubiquity of free-market capitalism comes to the forefront.

The portrayal of economic systems within the GPS for Economics is another example of the dominance of capitalism. The first standard includes SSEF4a, a fundamental concept that compares and contrasts different economic systems such as command (socialism / communism), market, and mixed. By comparing economic systems to that of characteristics of free-market capitalism, this sub-standard promotes a specific view of capitalism as natural without explicitly stating this view (I). Language such as “private ownership” and “competition” discursively strengthen the hegemony of capitalism --- seen as the correct way of understanding all other economic systems (H). Similarly, the use of the terms “compare” and “evaluate” suggests a pre-determined answer (S) that advances a specific economic system (I) without revealing the power structures (H) defined within the actual concept of economic systems and capitalism.

The framework for SSEF4 revolves around the traditions of neoclassical disciplinary inquiry and capitalism transmission (S). This is especially seen in the use of economic goals such as “freedom, security, equity, growth, efficiency, and stability” (Georgia Department of Education, 2007, p. 1). These goals perpetuate a hidden curriculum that extols the goodness of capitalism seen in western countries such as the US and the UK. Even though most economic education books and standards label the US as a mixed economy, texts favor the market side of the economy over command features (S).

After dismissing other economic systems as a viable perspective in SSEF4, SSEF5 reinforces the “correctness” of a market economy through the mere presence of the standard (I). Thus, the basis for learning about different economic systems is formed around its status as an “other” --- contrary to the “correct” free-market capitalism (H). Using the phrase “explain why

government provides...,” this standard can purport the unquestioned ideology behind free-market economics (I). SSEF5a also does little to trouble the idea that governments indeed provide such services and accomplish this job well. Because of capitalism’s dominance in these standards, students often do not have an open opportunity to value or explore different economic views (S). Similarly, this standard sees citizens as consumers and producers rather than actual human beings.

Microeconomics, as seen in the GPS, utilizes market models to describe households and economic activities (S). The political implications here contribute to the uplifting of capitalism without any consideration of alternative ways of analyzing economic concepts (I). Within this microeconomic framework, the standards emphasize supply and demand through methods of defining, identifying, and explaining. For instance, issues of supply and demand assume that markets remain perfectly competitive without considering the importance of real world examples. Similarly, the standards do not promote an analysis that falls on the power and privilege of who and what influences prices and the flow of goods and services (H). Thus, by following the select ideas embedded in this economic model, one leaves out a myriad of possibilities that could foster a critical analysis of economic issues.

Under the heading international economics (specifically SSEIN1), the standards focus on American capitalism in relation to trading with other countries. By defining and listing information, the standards require that students learn about international trade separate from the historical or moral significances of such actions (I, H, S). The only standard in international economics that overtly provides space for a critical analysis of the content at hand includes the evaluation of “arguments for and against free trade” (Georgia Department of Education, 2007, p. 7). Again, working towards a critical analysis here would require time and dedication from the

educator as a critical pedagogue. Such possibilities of critical economics are not explicitly stated within the standards. As the GPS for Economics favors a specific market based economic system over others, it becomes clear that this type of unquestioned behavior requires reproach.

Lastly, this free-market capitalism approach to economics finds itself in a privileged position --- western, white, and wealthy (I, H). Take for example standard SSEF3. The notion of specialization and voluntary exchange promotes a business model solely out for profit without consideration of individuals. This implies a sort of agency that arguably does not exist in this standard. As the dominance of capitalism continues, advocating an idea(I) economic system for students without explicitly stating that it is an ideology (I), the voices of people in developing countries as well as poverty stricken individuals and minorities from all over the world remain virtually nonexistent (H).

Invisibility of the Poor

The last theme in the critical analysis of the GPS includes the idea of the invisibility of the poor. As mentioned above, the voices of the poor do not receive much weight or recognition in the standards (H). The GPS for Economics makes reference to but does not consider the voices of individuals in forty-three out of sixty-seven cases. The economics that the GPS portrays reduces individuals to producers and consumers, as simply one among several types of productive “resources.” Discussing issues such as “full employment,” “specialization,” and “trade barriers” create a theoretical economic discursive environment in which individuals are abstracted from existence.

SSEF6 can render powerless the voices of the poor both within and outside of the US. This standard looks at the productivity of inputs and outputs and capital investments. Investments, however, often result in a situation where one country or person benefits more than

another (H). When companies outsource their labor and factory workers in other countries work for pennies a day, the concept of productivity becomes skewed (I, S). As labor is cast as merely one among several inputs, the lived realities of workers are lost. Thus, when asked to define productivity solely in relation to inputs and outputs, humanity is taken out of economics.

Taking another look at SSEF3 proves useful as it conveys this issue of marginalization as well. By stating that both parties gain as a result of exchange, SSEF3 in turn marginalizes the voices of people in countries laboring for meager wages to produce goods bought and sold by developed countries such as the US (Bernstein, Shari, & Malkin, 2000). This standard also does not take into consideration definitions of “satisfaction.” SSEF3 suggests that the levels of satisfaction for both parties of the exchange will increase (S); however, in the exchange of goods and services, more often than not, someone gains more in the situation. When examining the specifics of class positions, even within one country, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (H). As the income gap in the United States grows, often people fault the educational system when in reality we should look at the societal structures (I, H, S) in place that provide power and privilege (H) to some and poverty and misfortune to others (Hill, 2005).

SSEF1 also works within this one sided framework (I). Focusing on scarcity as an economic necessity, SSEF1 details that individuals, businesses, and governments must balance resources and wants. These economic ideas of opportunity cost, scarcity, and trade offs, however, do not represent all individuals, especially those in poverty. Due to their lack of power and financial means, many individuals have limited access to the resources necessary to meet both their wants and needs (H). Such disparities are not taken into account when looking at the notion of scarcity and instead are seen as fact (S).

Through this analysis of the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics, we can now see that the hidden curriculum for economic education promotes ideological notions of capitalism transmission and neoclassical disciplined inquiry. As noted above, standards, assumed as truth (I), assert dominance (H) through its validation in a state utilized document (S). Students are asked to explain, describe, and identify issues (I) already defined (S) by those in power (H) who make educational decisions regarding economic content in the classroom. Understanding the meanings and intentions of the GPS for Economics from a critical theoretical perspective requires further discussion, as well as recommendations for change.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Bringing together economic education, standards-based educational reform, and critical theory, this study examined the meanings and possible intentions behind the Georgia Performance Standards for Economics. Using coding categories of ideology, hegemony, and selective tradition, a critical theoretical lens guided my analysis of the GPS for Economics. I presented the results of the study in thematic groups under the titles: rhetorical choices, the idea(l) of capitalism, and the invisibility of the poor. Understanding the hidden meanings from a critical theoretical perspective has shaped my research questions: What is the extent to which the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for Economics encourage critical examinations of economic topics? How might critical pedagogy influence economic education and its standards?

Discussion

Examining the hidden curriculum helps uncover what unseen issues becomes apart of daily classroom occurrences. As shown, the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for Economics portrays traditions of capitalism transmission and neoclassical disciplined inquiry leaving virtually no room for an alternate view. However, in order to progress towards further analysis, we cannot solely look at the GPS for Economics as a document but within a broader social context. Other factors influence the meanings and intentions of the standards including aligned tests, teachers, social studies as a whole, among other things.

For instance, the writers of the GPS knew that this document would have a powerful impact on classrooms all over the state. Like most standards, the GPS is used as a measuring stick of what students need to know in order to meet or exceed high-stakes tests at the end of each semester (Obara, 2006). With its ties to high-stakes testing, standards-based educational

reform as well as the role of schools, teachers, and students, is truly political (Luke, 1996).

Important though, this research is not excusing the very political role of the teacher. In fact, I am highlighting the standards because, especially in economic education, most “knowledge” stems from standards documents and its alignment with high-stakes tests. Therefore, examining a standards document provides a way to understand the content and methods of economic education. By analyzing the GPS from a critical theoretical perspective, political structures of *power and privilege* and *knowledge and truth* emerge

Power and privilege

The GPS, and its subsequent high-stakes testing, can serve as a tool of oppression, granting power to some while leaving others powerless. By creating standards and advocating high-stakes testing, power and privilege reside among the writers of the standards document. The existence of these created standards effectively hold students, teachers, and schools accountable.

As Bigelow (2002) states,

the aim of this process has been not so much to understand and change the world as it has been to construct tests that will hold teachers and students “accountable” - i.e., make them fearful of what will happen if they don't do what the state tells them to do. ...I hope that teachers will insist that our discipline is not about educating competent Trivial Pursuit players, nor about simply obeying orders from distant bureaucracies (p. 1).

Standards in this way often promote conservative notions of individualism and competition.

This competition for access to power and money leaves many behind --- contrary to the ideals of *No Child Left Behind*. Schools are penalized, often with less funding, if students do not meet or exceed testing requirements. If students do not pass one end-of-course standardized test, they must repeat the grade. In the same way, teachers can lose their jobs if their students do not meet the required marks on high stakes end-of-course tests. Such high-stakes tests do not take into

account any other information but that of the performance of a student on a given day. Schools and teachers use standards to help prepare students for standardized tests. However, not looking into other factors that may influence student performance on high-stakes tests gives aligned standards unquestioned validity. Therefore, power resides in the knowledge portrayed in standards.

In the case of economic education, standards often perpetuate a one-sided, neoclassical, and pro-capitalist perspective. Such ideologies can marginalize and silence many alternate issues. For instance, the idea of capitalism and free-market forces, as opposed to communism or Marxism, is powerful and privileged in economic education. Thus, the basis for learning about different economic systems loses its position to the dominance of capitalism. If a classroom has the opportunity to discuss Marxism within the command economic system, it will usually play the role of the foil for capitalism instead of a “serious alternative world view” (Helburn, 1985, p. 29). Unfortunately, this biased dichotomy continues the misunderstandings of Marxism and communism, advocates capitalism as the correct political and economic ideology, and deprives students of a chance to critically examine economic systems in a real way. Clearly, standards documents in general are powerful in that they become “legitimated, negotiated, and contested toward political ends” (Luke, 1996, p. 12). Just as notions of power and privilege have an impact on economic education standards, so do truth and knowledge.

Truth and knowledge

As noted above, the GPS as a standards document is often seen as unquestioned truth (Bartlett & Feiner, 1992; Feiner & Roberts, 1995). By acting as one of truth, the GPS fosters false consciousness since people seldom know to question the motivations and the meanings

behind standards (Lather, 1991). Through a critical theoretical lens, however, one has the ability to question truths and uncover hidden structures of knowledge.

For example, although macroeconomics follows a Keynesian model, it often becomes known as a part of the neoclassical synthesis (Gerrad, 1995). Economic educational standards and textbooks portray this synthesis as a singular truth. However, Keynesian and neoclassical economics actually are highly debated and differential models for explaining economic behavior (Colander, 1999; Froyen, 1996; Gerrad, 1995). The GPS and the overall economic education framework, however, barely reflect this debate. Revealing this fact would help students to understand that questioning and analyzing economic content in its broader context and usage is appropriate.

By exposing truths as a way to get at a greater understanding of knowledge, economic education standards have the space to work towards a more critical theoretical outlook. Macroeconomics, in particular, has the potential to include issues of unemployment and inflation in a more personal way that could help students not become disassociated from the severity these issues entail (Feiner & Roberts, 1995). The current standards regarding macroeconomic activity, however, do not explicitly reflect real life situations of critical issues such as race, class, and gender. Not including a critical perspective of macroeconomics can stifle economic educational understanding as well as possible empowerment of students.

In examining the truths and knowledge of standards, it is also important to take a look at the newest addition to Georgia standards, personal finance. Not mentioned in the QCC, personal finance, a part of the GPS, works towards helping students manage their spending and savings by making rational decisions and choices towards their future (Georgia Council on Economic Education, 2006a). Spending, saving, financial institutions, individuals' role in inflation, credit,

insurance, and earnings all become apart of this new aspect of economics. Aligning with both capitalism transmission and neoclassical disciplined inquiry, personal finance teaches students how to become good consumers as well as take control of their individual finances *within* the market framework.

The writers of the GPS, though, have a reason for adding personal finance knowledge to the required curriculum. As Georgia's debt and bankruptcies continues to increase, the Georgia Council for Economic Education (GCEE) worked to add a section within the standards that could focus on personal financial responsibility (Georgia Council on Economic Education, 2006b). Such an addition however, does not come without a price. The corporate ties that bind this personal finance section to the standards give cause for concern. The GCEE as well as the NCEE have directed resource materials for the personal finance section of the GPS. Such resources run the risk of catering to the corporations that provide both financial and ideological support. Sponsoring corporations include Bank of America and Equifax, under the GCEE, as well as the NCEE's partners with American Express, Wells Fargo, UPS, Verizon, McGraw-Hill, Ford Motor Company, and so on (National Council on Economic Education, 2007a; National Council on Economic Education, 2007b; Georgia Council on Economic Education, 2006a). With this type of backing, economic educational resources and its linkage to the GPS create at least the possibility of unduly biased curricula.

Using the lenses of truth and knowledge, and power and privilege enables a critical set of answers to the question of: What is the extent to which the GPS encourages critical examinations of economic topics? Clearly, the GPS for Economics as a whole does not overtly encourage a critical theoretical development within the classroom. Most of the economic educational standards fall into the traditions of neoclassical disciplined inquiry as well as capitalism

transmission that foster what critical theorists may consider oppressive notions of ideology, hegemony, and the selective tradition. A few standards, though, have the possibility of encouraging a critical examination of economics. Unfortunately, the extent to which this possibility is realized often depends upon the teacher's personal knowledge and beliefs within a critical theoretical framework and his or her use of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Likewise, the few issues that more naturally lend themselves to a critical theoretical understanding of issues within the economic context exist towards the end of the course objectives outlined in the standards. Because of the placement and order of the GPS, topics such as international economics and the new personal finance section risk cursory treatment as teacher rush towards the end of the school term. Their placement in the GPS could send the message that international economics and personal finance are least valued among all the "fundamental concepts" of economics. From such dire straits, understanding how to improve this situation as well as how teachers and students can become emancipated from their oppressed positions is necessary in regards to the mandatory standards for economic education in Georgia.

Implication for "praxis"

Critical pedagogy, developed in the early 1980s by theorists such as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, promotes a more just form of education (Heilman, 2003). Bringing critical pedagogy into the discussion on economic education suggests opportunities to merge critical theory (the idea) and critical pedagogy (the outcome) into critical economic education. Through critical pedagogy, the power relations of society become actively challenged within the classroom by merging theory and practice into a new synthesis --- praxis (See Figure 4).

This act of praxis stemmed from the critical theorists as well as from the work of Paulo Freire. A Brazilian educationalist committed to plight of the oppressed, Freire believed in revolutionary action and transformation (McLaren, 1994). Similar to themes in critical theory, such critical pedagogical transformation suggests an enlightened understanding of knowledge and working towards emancipation from powerless positions.

As a pedagogy that works “to get students to think critically about their place in relation to the knowledge,” students have the opportunity to “transform their worldview fundamentally by taking the politics of knowledge seriously. It is a pedagogy that attempts to link knowledge, social responsibility, and collective struggle” (Mohanty, 1994, p. 152). By stressing students’ location in the politics of knowledge, critical pedagogy does more than just provide a way for students to think critically. Largely, critical pedagogy highlights generally accepted features of society, fosters a critique of such features, and thus empowers students and teachers with a greater sense of agency and voice through praxis.

Overall, critical pedagogy focuses on “demystifying the act and the process of representing by revealing how meanings are produced within relations of power that narrate identities through history, social forms, and modes of ethical address that appear objective, universally valid, and consensual” (Giroux, 1994, p. 47). The process of representing, the commonsense issues of society, has an enormous amount of power which necessitates demystification. Criticalness denotes a consciousness raising effort to challenge this powerful and dominant ideology without hiding the political. As a liberatory educational experience, critical pedagogy hopes to convey a realistic, yet crucial transformation of citizenry through the act of praxis. The merging of critical theory and critical pedagogy with economic educational

standards reveals tensions within the text that provides opportunities for spaces to exist in order to work for change.

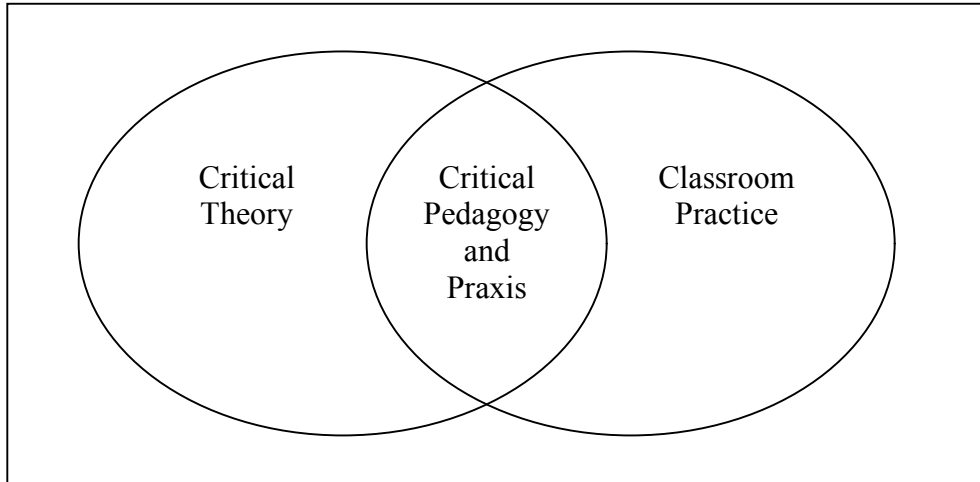


Figure 4: The Emergence of Critical Pedagogy and Praxis

Policy Recommendations and Conclusions

Finally, I specifically focus on what a critical theoretical lens and a critical pedagogical outcome can do to influence economic educational standards. From the standpoint of critical theory, the economic education standards require revision because they rarely provide opportunities to examine the power structures and social inequalities in place in our society. As it stands, the GPS for Economics follows the traditional, neoclassical cannon fostering an approach based on faith in its capitalistic, free-market models. However, there is another way to explore economics. Table 2 is a reproduction of Aerni's (1999) table on "Comparing Feminists Economics and Traditional Economics Methodology and Pedagogy."

Table 2: Comparing Feminists Economics and Traditional Economics Methodology and Pedagogy	
<p><i>Feminist Economic Methodology</i></p> <p>All knowledge is value laden, or subjective.</p> <p>Emphasis is on lived experiences.</p> <p>The personal is political.</p> <p>Behavior is partly socially, culturally determined;</p> <p>Behavior variables must be analyzed in context.</p> <p>Emphasis is on cooperation, empowerment, and production for use.</p> <p>Commitment to social/political change.</p>	<p><i>Traditional Economic Methodology</i></p> <p>Economic models are ethically neutral, or value free.</p> <p>Emphasis is on analytical reasoning.</p> <p>Math is particularly useful.</p> <p>Assume autonomous human behavior; ceteris paribus conditions hold.</p> <p>Emphasis is on competition, control and production for exchange.</p> <p>Politically neutral.</p>
<p><i>Feminist Economic Pedagogy</i></p> <p>Focus on practice and process.</p> <p>Metaphor-teaching as midwifery.</p> <p>Students are knowers and creators of knowledge.</p> <p>Teachers expand the limits of discourse.</p> <p>Discussion.</p>	<p><i>Traditional Economic Pedagogy</i></p> <p>Focus on product or content.</p> <p>Metaphor-teaching as banking.</p> <p>Knowledge is quantifiable; students are passive.</p> <p>Teachers dispense knowledge.</p> <p>Lecture.</p>

(Aerni, 1999, p. 87)

In response to this table, I would like to add a critical pedagogical take on comparing methodology and pedagogy (See Table 3).

Table 3: Critical Pedagogical Economics Methodology and Pedagogy
<p><i>Critical Economic Methodology</i> All knowledge is value laden, subjective, and a social construction. Emphasis is on lived experiences. Everything in the classroom is political. Culture and society matters in terms of behavior and must be carefully analyzed in the context of history. Emphasis is on dialogue, emancipation, and the collective as well as the individual. Commitment to social justice.</p>
<p><i>Critical Economic Pedagogy</i> Focus on praxis: theory and practice. Metaphor-teaching focused and committed to the side of the oppressed. Students are knowers and creators of knowledge. Teachers work with students to expand discourse. Dialogue and controversial issues work to critically examine the world of economics.</p>

Focusing on issues of praxis, dialogue, and student centered learning, critical pedagogical economics with a critical theoretical lens can promote more relatable experiences for students of economics. A critical theoretical lens helps further the argument for improving economic education and its standards towards a more reflective and enlightened critique.

Policy Recommendations

Utilizing critical theory and critical pedagogy, we can understand how to improve economic education by working towards a more open, dialectical approach. Just as critical theory can help transform economic standards through social justice and critical understanding, Bigelow (2002) finds similar understanding in his critique of national social studies standards. He suggests that changes to social studies standards as a whole would allow students to:

1. Consistently seek out explanations for social phenomena and learn to distinguish between explanation and mere description.

2. Recognize how their individual actions affect human and biotic communities throughout the world, reflecting on how every action they take has global social and ecological implications.
3. Question the ecological sustainability of key economic and cultural practices, and consider alternatives to practices that are deemed unsustainable.
4. Evaluate the role that racism has played - and continues to play - in shaping the experiences of social groups, especially with respect to economic and political power.
5. Appreciate the impact social movements have had in addressing injustice of all kinds, and evaluate the effectiveness of those efforts.
6. See themselves as capable, both individually and collectively, of contributing to social and ecological betterment.

The goal would be to engage in a process in which we ask: What are the basic tools of inquiry that are needed to comprehend the world's most important problems, and to imagine alternatives?

(Bigelow, 2002, p.1).

As this recommendation is intended for social studies as a field, its merits can be applied to that portion of the social studies curriculum known as economic education.

In addition to Bigelow's suggestions, the GPS for Economics can include the following ideas in order to increase its in-text critical pedagogy by putting critical theory into classroom practice. A structural as well as a contextual change is necessary. Instead of a list of standards and sub-standards within the traditional economic scope and sequence, perhaps a real world questioning experience could take place as a way to thematically organize an alternative take on the GPS for Economics. A contextual change, in four steps, is also needed.

First, the GPS for Economics needs to become *culturally responsive*. In doing so, the document must make explicit which country or economic system it speaks for so it does not perpetuate an assumed universality of values. The current standards discuss capitalism without asserting that it is referring to this context. This can mislead students into thinking that free-market capitalism is the only viable economic system. For example, instead of stating that students must "Define and give examples of productive resources (e.g., land (natural), labor (human), capital (capital goods), entrepreneurship), standards could question, "Are productive resources such as land, labor, and capital neutral? Is it open to everyone? Is it fair?" By becoming culturally responsive, the GPS for Economics can open the doors for students to

question economic systems and principles in a way that validates alternative views. Students will learn that behavior is not autonomous when looking at economic models. Individuals' behaviors have a culture and that must be respected and taken into account when discussing economics.

Secondly, through critical theory, students can learn to *question the power structures* within an economic context. When discussing production costs, students can question and debate issues of sweatshops. When learning of personal finance and employment, students can understand and critique the income gap. Bringing in a critical look at race, class, and gender, students have an opportunity to understand and situate economics in a real way. Instead of merely defining unemployment, critical standards could question, "How does American unemployment affect the rich? The middle class? The poor?" Critical issues, such as poverty and social inequalities along various lines, should play more than a minute role in economic education. By including these topics into the standards, students can inquire into the problematic structures of society and learn how to take action against them.

Next, such standards should *position economics within a historical context*. In this way, students can understand why and how economics became a subject they study in school. Students can learn what issues were once contested within the economic academic circles in history and realize change can be a positive result of conflict. . For example, instead of just accepting economic models as facts, standards can include questions such as "How and why did macroeconomics become an accepted tradition within the overarching term of 'economics'?" Similarly, students can have a chance to look at specific aspects of economics in the context of the time period of its enactment. For instance, it is important for students to understand the various causes as to why the Great Depression occurred, not just the effects of the event. Simple

answers should not suffice when it comes to economics and education in general. Students need to question why and get at the systemic structures that exist in relation to every issue.

Just as the standards need to include a historical context, it also must *foster a relationship with the present*. By examining the present using a critical theoretical framework, students can have an opportunity to learn to critique the systemic societal structures and make economic examples relevant. Making economic education personal for students through critical questioning can translate to students' lives and communities. Providing students an outlook to ask why and "how does this economic concept affect [my] life?," the GPS for Economics has the possibility of opening up doors for students rather than keeping them shut with lackluster rote memorization and the so-called mastery of skills (Aerni, 1999, p. 87). A critical look at issues such as the political and economic power of corporations, the real role of the United States government, and the context of globalization all can have a place within the GPS for economics. For example, standards can help students to question commonsense realities such as "Is Wal-Mart good for our community and its small businesses?," "How does immigration affect American unemployment both today and in the past?," and "How does the American government work to economically assist citizens? What does this mean if you are rich? Poor? Middle class?"

These four contextual steps towards change in the GPS for Economics looks at the past, the present, culture, and power. From these issues, the standards have an opportunity to enlighten the lives of students by helping them to understand pressing societal issues. Utilizing a critical theoretical lens and the outcomes of critical pedagogy, GPS for Economics has the ability to promote relevance and also strive for a change.

Conclusion

The problem revolves around the message that “state mandates want students to become good consumers, to trust and believe in free enterprise and business leadership, and they have ordered the schools to teach to these objectives” (Helburn, 1985, p. 30). This capitalistic focus often cheapens the education students receive in US public schools. Economic education, instead, needs to reflect reality and prepare students to understand and critique the world around them.

A need for a more personal, and what I deem, critical, theoretical study of economics that begins with a bottom-up transformation of classrooms has become a viable option in economic education (Bartlett & Feiner, 1992; Bergmann, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Galbraith, 1980; Moret & vanOosten, 1985; Wilkes, 1985). Galbraith (1980), for example, advocates a four-step process towards the teaching of economics. This includes making economics personal, studying society and real world issues of families and community, organizing inquiry conceptually, and applying skills and understandings in a real way. Through this method, it becomes possible to work towards a transformation of economic education to include greater understanding of the world and of the empowerment needed to make a change.

Fortunately, some organizations offer resources to aid in critical approaches towards economic education. For instance, Rethinking Schools, a nonprofit, independent publisher of educational materials, presents some practical ways of challenging the dominant paradigm of economics within the classroom curriculum. For example, Maier (2002) argues:

The one sided materials in Financial Fitness for Life might be used in combination with sources recommended by the PBS program, *Affluenza*, a television special that explores the high social and environmental costs of materialism and overconsumption. Also, teachers can ask their students to assess the authors’ biases in, for example, materials from Junior Achievement and the Foundation for Teaching Economics.

In addition to warning against credit scams, personal finance courses should examine pervasive consumerism and unnecessary advertising in the U.S. economy. Also, the curriculum should introduce students to empirical facts about income and wealth distribution, pointing out the role of race, sex, unionization, and executive compensation. (p. 1)

Similarly, we must teach economics in a relevant manner to students, thus, involving critical and controversial issues.

One of the tenets of critical theory includes learning of the power structures in society in hopes of leading towards the emancipation of individuals from oppressive forces. Instead of alienating and marginalizing teachers, standards should work to empower them. Students also can gain a personal understanding of economics rather than feeling alienated from the current economic educational traditions' failure to address real issues in a relatable way. Therefore, I want both students and teachers to become what Cornel West (2005) terms, "critical organic catalysts," defined as "a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer --- its paradigms, viewpoints, and methods --- yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling subcultures of criticism" (p. 39).

In conclusion, meaningful learning must take place on a personal level for students. As Eisner reported on Linda McNeil's speech at the 1993 Invitational Conference on the Hidden Consequences of a National Curriculum, the utilization of standards as bureaucratic means rather than focusing on the needs of students will in turn allow students to "disengage from what they see to be institutional knowledge, something that is not theirs" (p. 38). The detrimental affects of not incorporating a critical theoretical lens into economic education results in students feeling that economics has no place in their lives and does not relate to the world around them. Because teachers rely on standards-based textbooks as well as standards in general to guide their instruction, analyses of economic educational standards are necessary. I hope that future research will allow for insight into other content areas of curriculum standards both within and

outside of social studies. Also, I hope that further research will utilize observations and interviews of students and teachers dealing with standards-based educational reform from a critical theoretical perspective specifically in economics --- all towards working for change.

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APPENDIX

Economics

Approved 10/14/2004

Economics

The economics course provides students with a basic foundation in the field of economics. The course has five sections: fundamental concepts, microeconomics, macroeconomics, international economics, and personal finance. In each area, students are introduced to major concepts and themes concerning that aspect of economics.

Fundamental Economic Concepts

SSEF1 The student will explain why limited productive resources and unlimited wants result in scarcity, opportunity costs, and trade offs for individuals, businesses, and governments.

- a. Define scarcity as a basic condition that exists when unlimited wants exceed limited productive resources.
- b. Define and give examples of productive resources (e.g., land (natural), labor (human), capital (capital goods), entrepreneurship).
- c. List a variety of strategies for allocating scarce resources.
- d. Define opportunity cost as the next best alternative given up when individuals, businesses, and governments confront scarcity by making choices.

SSEF2 The student will give examples of how rational decision making entails comparing the marginal benefits and the marginal costs of an action.

- a. Illustrate by means of a production possibilities curve the trade offs between two options.
- b. Explain that rational decisions occur when the marginal benefits of an action equal or exceed the marginal costs.

SSEF3 The student will explain how specialization and voluntary exchange between buyers and sellers increase the satisfaction of both parties.

- a. Give examples of how individuals and businesses specialize.
- b. Explain that both parties gain as a result of voluntary, non-fraudulent exchange.

SSEF4 The student will compare and contrast different economic systems and explain how they answer the three basic economic questions of what to produce, how to produce, and for whom to produce.

- a. Compare command, market, and mixed economic systems with regard to private ownership, profit motive, consumer sovereignty, competition, and government regulation.
- b. Evaluate how well each type of system answers the three economic questions and meets the broad social and economic goals of freedom, security, equity, growth, efficiency, and stability.

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SSEF5 The student will describe the roles of government in a market economy.

- a. Explain why government provides public goods and services, redistributes income, protects property rights, and resolves market failures.
- b. Give examples of government regulation and deregulation and their effects on consumers and producers.

SSEF6 The student will explain how productivity, economic growth, and future standards of living are influenced by investment in factories, machinery, new technology, and the health, education, and training of people.

- a. Define productivity as the relationship of inputs to outputs.
- b. Give illustrations of investment in equipment and technology and explain their relationship to economic growth.
- c. Give examples of how investment in education can lead to a higher standard of living.

Microeconomic Concepts**SSEMI1 The student will describe how households, businesses, and governments are interdependent and interact through flows of goods, services, and money.**

- a. Illustrate by means of a circular flow diagram, the Product market; the Resource market; the real flow of goods and services between and among businesses, households, and government; and the flow of money.
- b. Explain the role of money and how it facilitates exchange.

SSEMI2 The student will explain how the Law of Demand, the Law of Supply, prices, and profits work to determine production and distribution in a market economy.

- a. Define the Law of Supply and the Law of Demand.
- b. Describe the role of buyers and sellers in determining market clearing price.
- c. Illustrate on a graph how supply and demand determine equilibrium price and quantity.
- d. Explain how prices serve as incentives in a market economy.

SSEMI3 The student will explain how markets, prices, and competition influence economic behavior.

- a. Identify and illustrate on a graph factors that cause changes in market supply and demand.
- b. Explain and illustrate on a graph how price floors create surpluses and price ceilings create shortages.
- c. Define price elasticity of demand and supply.

SSEMI4 The student will explain the organization and role of business and analyze the four types of market structures in the U.S. economy.

- a. Compare and contrast three forms of business organization—sole proprietorship, partnership, and corporation.
- b. Explain the role of profit as an incentive for entrepreneurs.
- c. Identify the basic characteristics of monopoly, oligopoly, monopolistic competition, and pure competition.

Macroeconomic Concepts

SSEMA1 The student will illustrate the means by which economic activity is measured.

- a. Explain that overall levels of income, employment, and prices are determined by the spending and production decisions of households, businesses, government, and net exports.
- b. Define Gross Domestic Product (GDP), economic growth, unemployment, Consumer Price Index (CPI), inflation, stagflation, and aggregate supply and aggregate demand.
- c. Explain how economic growth, inflation, and unemployment are calculated.
- d. Identify structural, cyclical, and frictional unemployment.
- e. Define the stages of the business cycle, as well as recession and depression.
- f. Describe the difference between the national debt and government deficits.

SSEMA2 The student will explain the role and functions of the Federal Reserve System.

- a. Describe the organization of the Federal Reserve System.
- b. Define monetary policy.
- c. Describe how the Federal Reserve uses the tools of monetary policy to promote price stability, full employment, and economic growth.

SSEMA3 The student will explain how the government uses fiscal policy to promote price stability, full employment, and economic growth.

- a. Define fiscal policy.
- b. Explain the government's taxing and spending decisions.

International Economics

SSEIN1 The student will explain why individuals, businesses, and governments trade goods and services.

- a. Define and distinguish between absolute advantage and comparative advantage.
- b. Explain that most trade takes place because of comparative advantage in the production of a good or service.
- c. Explain the difference between balance of trade and balance of payments.

SSEIN2 The student will explain why countries sometimes erect trade barriers and sometimes advocate free trade.

- a. Define trade barriers as tariffs, quotas, embargoes, standards, and subsidies.
- b. Identify costs and benefits of trade barriers over time.
- c. List specific examples of trade barriers.
- d. List specific examples of trading blocks such as the EU, NAFTA, and ASEAN.
- e. Evaluate arguments for and against free trade.

SSEIN3 The student will explain how changes in exchange rates can have an impact on the purchasing power of individuals in the United States and in other countries.

- a. Define exchange rate as the price of one nation's currency in terms of another nation's currency.
- b. Locate information on exchange rates.
- c. Interpret exchange rate tables.
- d. Explain why, when exchange rates change, some groups benefit and others lose.

Personal Finance Economics

SSEPF1 The student will apply rational decision making to personal spending and saving choices.

- a. Explain that people respond to positive and negative incentives in predictable ways.
- b. Use a rational decision making model to select one option over another.
- c. Create a savings or financial investment plan for a future goal.

SSEPF2 The student will explain that banks and other financial institutions are businesses that channel funds from savers to investors.

- a. Compare services offered by different financial institutions.
- b. Explain reasons for the spread between interest charged and interest earned.
- c. Give examples of the direct relationship between risk and return.
- d. Evaluate a variety of savings and investment options; include stocks, bonds, and mutual funds.

SSEPF3 The student will explain how changes in monetary and fiscal policy can have an impact on an individual's spending and saving choices.

- a. Give examples of who benefits and who loses from inflation.
- b. Define progressive, regressive, and proportional taxes.
- c. Explain how an increase in sales tax affects different income groups.

SSEPF4 The student will evaluate the costs and benefits of using credit.

- a. List factors that affect credit worthiness.
- b. Compare interest rates on loans and credit cards from different institutions.
- c. Explain the difference between simple and compound interest rates.

SSEPF5 The student will describe how insurance and other risk-management strategies protect against financial loss.

- a. List various types of insurance such as automobile, health, life, disability, and property.
- b. Explain the costs and benefits associated with different types of insurance.

SSEPF6 The student will describe how the earnings of workers are determined in the marketplace.

- a. Identify skills that are required to be successful in the workplace.
- b. Explain the significance of investment in education, training, and skill development.