

Teaching Heterodox Economics and Pluralism

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
1.1 What is 'heterodox economics'?	4
1.2 Pluralism	7
1.3 Why teach heterodox economics and pluralism?	9
1.4 Three strategies for teaching pluralistically via heterodox economics	12
2. Enriching an orthodox programme	13
2.1 Summary	13
2.2 Evaluation of the 'orthodox-plus' approach	14
3. Teaching a heterodox module	15
3.1 Summary	15
3.2 Evaluation of the heterodox module approach	16
4. The 'contending perspectives' approach	18
4.2 Examples	19
4.3 Summary of the contending perspectives approach	23
4.4 Objections to the contending perspectives approach	23
5. Assessment strategies	25
5.1 Assessment schema	25
5.2 Essays	26
6. Top tips	28
7. Resources	29
7.1 Single textbooks appropriate for pluralist modules	29
7.2 The multiple resource approach	31
7.3 Using a reader	31
References	32

1. Introduction

Remarkably, economics teaching has become newsworthy. In the UK, for example, [BBC Radio 4](#) and *The Guardian* have charted the debate over the design of economics curricula. This wide interest is probably driven by economic events - principally the Global Financial Crisis - but also concerns about *inter alia* austerity policy, the Eurozone, and climate change. Films such as [Inside Job](#), [The Big Short](#) and [Boom Bust Boom](#) have sparked curiosity about economics.

Employers, too, have complained that economics curricula may not prepare students for careers as economists (or elsewhere). In a survey commissioned by the Economics Network, [O'Doherty et al \(2007\)](#) report, surprisingly, that employers find that graduates could not apply theory to the real world, solve complex problems or be objective. Most strikingly, employers claimed that economics graduates could not engage in abstraction: only 41.7% of graduates were judged as being excellent or strong at this. This concern about employability, among others, led some to ask 'what's the use of economics?' (see [Coyle, 2012](#)).

The public and media interest builds on concerns from within the economics community itself. Even from within the 'mainstream' of economics, it was recognised that the remarkable uniformity across undergraduate economics programmes did not reflect the state of contemporary economics. [Becker \(2004\)](#) lamented that the undergraduate curriculum had lagged economic research. [The CORE Project](#) is a major response to this failure. CORE includes newer topics, principally game theory and behavioural economics. CORE also responds to calls for greater awareness of the 'real world' by presenting students with data. Its proponents believe that in doing this, CORE also helps students develop critical thinking, by teaching them to demand evidence to settle questions. This approach also introduces greater uncertainty, which may also serve to answer critics who allege that economics is guilty of hubris ([Fourcade, et al, 2015](#)).

Within economics there has also been an appeal for greater *pluralism* in economics teaching. This call has sometimes come from heretical mainstreamers or experts in economic methodology: for example [Hodgson, et al \(1992\)](#) did so in the *American Economic Review*. Further there is a constituency of economists who may regard themselves as 'heterodox', who campaign for pluralism; but moreover argue that space in the curriculum must be allowed for alternative economics traditions *inter alia* Marxism, Institutionalism (associated with the work of Veblen), Post Keynesianism, and Feminist economics. These economists complain that mainstream economics has become intolerant of difference and focused on key economic concepts (such as methodological individualism and equilibrium) or

methods (mathematical modelling and econometrics) to the *exclusion* of others ([Lawson 2013](#)).

These economists' calls for pluralism have been more pronounced recently, and embodied in a number of initiatives; *inter alia*, a special issue on pluralism in the IREE ([2009](#)) and the formation of [Reteaching Economics](#), a group of early career scholars campaigning for greater pluralism. Robert Skidelsky has been commissioned by INET to develop a pair of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) – one on history and philosophy of economics, another on 'unsettled questions' – material often omitted from conventional programmes. These add to the range of courses delivering heterodoxy and pluralism around the world.

Another driver of these new programmes is student demands for greater pluralism. These calls are not new. Figure 1 below reports responses from an Economics Network student survey from 2002; these were contemporaneous with calls from the Post-Autistic Economics Network (see [Fullbrook, 2003](#)) for greater pluralism of theory and method. Recently, though, these calls have been amplified greatly by such groups as the [International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics](#), the Post-Crash Economics Society, and [Rethinking Economics](#). [Earle, et al \(2016\)](#) solidify these calls within an overarching critique of economics.

Figure 1: Undergraduate students who want a more heterodox experience

- 'The basic problem is that the vast majority of economics in [the course] is orthodox/mainstream. Students aren't offered alternative approaches developed by Post-Keynesians, institutionalists and Marxists. But the problem seems to be the same elsewhere: 95 per cent of the economics taught in higher education institutions is mainstream.'
- 'More of historical account of the development ideas I believe would be beneficial to understanding why we believe the ideas we do today, what was wrong (why they failed/are no longer used) with ideas of yesterday, e.g. going from the Gold Standard to Keynesianism to Thatcherism to today.'
- 'I would like to see more empirical evidence used in lectures to support or maybe contradict the economic models. This would help relate what can be some very abstract ideas to the real world. The few times this has happened I have found it very interesting.'
- 'More focus on non-orthodox economics rather than just neo-classical to give a broader perspective.'

Students' responses to the question: Identify one or two aspects of your degree course that could be improved and say why ([Economics LTSN Student Survey Report 2002](#)).

In the light of this critique this chapter examines the rationale and scope for teaching heterodox economics, and pluralism. We now consider working

definitions of heterodox economics and pluralism, a summary of the arguments for teaching them, and an introduction to strategies for doing so.

1.1 What is ‘heterodox economics’?

‘Heterodox economics’ is a problematic term, which is continually debated (cf. [Mearman, 2012\[1\]](#)). It can mean simply ‘non-orthodox’ but that definition is problematic in two ways. Principally, it begs the further question of whether there is an identifiable orthodoxy; and if so, what that is. For some economists, ‘orthodox’ remains associated with the neo-classical economics. [Arnsperger and Varoufakis \(2006\)](#) define that in terms of three methodological meta-axioms: individualism, instrumentalism, and equilibration. [Lawson \(2013\)](#) defines neo-classical economics in terms of an adherence to a particular technical apparatus.

However, others hold that equating neo-classical and mainstream economics is incorrect. First, the term ‘neo-classical economics’ can mean a set of meta-theoretical principles or methods – as is the case in this chapter; however, it can also refer to a specific historical period in economics. Second, to equate neoclassical and mainstream ignores many recent developments in economic research ([Colander, Holt and Rosser, 2004](#)). Unfortunately, despite CORE, many of these theoretical developments still have not filtered into undergraduate teaching. As a result, ‘orthodox’ teaching still largely reflects neo-classical economics. Hence, in this chapter, the term ‘orthodox’ refers to the essentially neo-classical material present in the vast majority of undergraduate economics curricula. The term ‘mainstream’ refers to research.

The second problem of defining heterodox economics as ‘non-orthodox’ is that it downplays both the heritage and current potency of heterodox theories: they are both a) based in a tradition of alternative theoretical systems, such as those constructed by Marx, Keynes, Veblen, Hayek and Schumpeter and b) living traditions practised in research and other communities, with findings published in journals. Heterodox theories are considerably more than reactions to orthodox theories. For the purpose of this chapter, heterodox means neither simply ‘non-orthodox’ nor ‘non-neoclassical’. Nor is it defined merely in terms of new versus old, i.e. new economic research versus old textbook theory. Rather, it constitutes a set of key characteristics found in the writings of heterodox economists. A summary of these is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: A non-exhaustive series of heterodox principles

1. Methodology (rather than just *method*) is important to understanding economics.
2. Human actors are social and less than perfectly rational, driven by habits, routines, culture and tradition.

3. While theories of the individual are useful, so are theories of aggregate or collective outcomes. Further, neither the individual nor the aggregate can be understood in isolation from the other. The micro/macro distinction may be invalid.
4. Economic systems are complex, evolving and unpredictable – and consequently equilibrium models should be viewed sceptically.
5. History and time are important (reflecting (4)).
6. All economic theories are fallible and, reflecting (4), there is contemporary relevance of the history of thought to understanding economics.
7. Pluralism, i.e. multiple perspectives, is advocated (following on from (4) and (6)).
8. Formal mathematical and statistical methods should not be presumed to be superior. Other methods and data types are valuable.
9. Facts and values are inseparable.
10. Power is an important determinant of economic outcomes (cf. [Ozanne, 2016](#)).

Not every example of heterodox economics exemplifies every one of these characteristics. Austrian economics, for example, is weak on principle 10. Whilst some economists treat heterodox as a single body of theory (or try to create a single theory: [Lavoie, 1992](#); [Arestis, 1992](#); [Shaikh, 2016](#)), others treat it as a collection of theories ([Garnett, 2005](#)). Some argue for a coherence of heterodoxy at a methodological level or even in terms of the nature of reality as involving structures of deep causal mechanisms (Lawson, [1997](#), [2003](#)) or complex adaptive systems ([Potts, 2000](#)). Figure 2 includes assumptions with epistemological and ontological standpoints that are widespread in heterodox literature (and therefore tending towards a potentially unifiable body of theory). Given the scale of these principles, students will only have very limited opportunities to understand the implications within the context of a single module. A more thoroughgoing approach would require a review of the experiences offered to students across a whole degree programme.

1.1.1 Method and history

Some points in Figure 2 merit further elaboration. Attention to methodology (1) and to the history of economic thought (5) are hallmarks of a heterodox approach. However, heterodox economists have argued that these two (arguably key) areas are neglected in standard treatments of economics.

As discussed below, the question of what a model is, how it is to be used, how it is to be evaluated, etc. are crucial for anyone wanting to understand economics; and indeed, are useful questions for anyone required to think abstractly. Accordingly, abstraction is a central activity in economics: what does it mean? How are we to think of *ceteris paribus*? In contrast to many standard treatments, a heterodox

module would spend longer discussing those methodological issues and would not set them aside. Rather, they would be revisited repeatedly.

As [Hodgson \(2001\)](#) claims, ‘economics forgot history’. This could be true in two senses. It is too bold to claim that orthodox economics ignores methodology and history. However, history of thought is often confined to an optional specialist module. Even newer curricula, such as CORE, themselves only give cursory attention to history of thought ([Morgan, et al, 2014](#))[2]. And yet, it has been recognised that understanding history is important ([James, 2012](#)). Thus, Hodgson could be correct in a second sense too: economic models removed historical time from analysis. It is significant that the new Skidelsky MOOC will be on the history and philosophy of economics.

Heterodox approaches tend to take history very seriously. Partly this is self-serving. By pointing to the fact that neo-classical economics was not always the only game in town and by examining critically how economics got to its current state, it creates space for heterodox economics. Nonetheless heterodox economics is not merely history of thought. Rather, it rests on the belief that theories cannot be understood outside their wider socio-historical context. The rise of the *General Theory* is a good example: it reflected past intellectual currents but also the background of economic instability and high unemployment. The struggle between Monetarists and Keynesians is inexplicable outside of its economic context of what was actually happening to inflation. Heterodox economics precludes an ahistorical approach to theorising and asserts that students should be introduced to this way of thinking.

1.1.2 Heterodox pedagogy?

Not surprisingly, there is no single heterodox approach to teaching and learning. However, heterodox economists have made several interventions in pedagogy; and identified several benefits of teaching heterodox economics. It would be inaccurate to say mainstream economists have not shown any concern for pedagogy. For example, [Siegfried et al \(1991\)](#) avow a Socratic approach aimed at independent learning. [Forsythe \(2010\)](#) advocates problem-based learning. However, orthodox pedagogy tends to be instrumental, i.e. directed at more effective learning of and/or *training* students in conventional economics. For example, [Coyle and Wren-Lewis \(2015\)](#) assert that economics is a vocational subject. In many cases, though, this instrumental orientation is often only implicit: this partly reflects that there are few institutional incentives for engaging in deep reflection about teaching.

Contributions from heterodox economics have more often been explicitly informed by other pedagogical principles. Another element of that is to problematize education *per se*. [Bowles and Gintis \(1976\)](#) analyse education in terms of its role within capitalism. [Bridges and Hartmann \(1975\)](#) note the hierarchal nature of

teaching but also stress the problems facing women teachers in establishing their credibility in a masculinist system. They draw on feminist literature and on the radical pedagogy of [Freire \(1970\)](#). A radical or critical pedagogy is student-centred, focusing on emancipation of students via conscientisation, i.e. self-awareness of their own circumstances on their own terms. From the same tradition, [Rose \(2005\)](#) discusses various methods by which they encouraged the co-production of knowledge on their course, for instance via collaborative exercises, a contract grading system, group projects, and simulations. She cites [hooks \(1994\)](#) as an influence. Rose contrasts her approach with the ‘banking model’ of education, in which students are empty vessels to be filled by instructors. Similarly, [Kramer \(2007\)](#) advocates participatory learning: in this case, students were asked to construct an ideal US economy. [Ford et al \(2007\)](#), who also cite Vygotsky and Dewey as influences, provide another example of a *constructivist* approach, in which learning occurs through students’ constructing their own meanings, ‘scaffolded’ by their own experience, rather than simply reproducing others’ meanings.

These are just some examples of how heterodox economists have explicitly engaged with educational philosophy to design and evaluate their courses. [Barone \(1991\)](#) for example explicitly recognises the heterogeneity of students. [Peterson and McGoldrick \(2009\)](#) link service learning methods to the achievement of their educational goals. Several authors utilise educational psychology of [Perry \(1970\)](#) in their discussion: *inter alia*, [Lapidus \(2011\)](#), [Earl \(2000\)](#), and [Barone \(2011\)](#). Another strand of this work is around liberal pedagogy, which envisages education as a process of allowing students to develop into analytical, critical, autonomous thinkers. Several authors argue that teaching heterodox economics has clear educational benefits (see Figure 3 below). Many of these overlap with claims for the benefits of pluralism.

[1] The diversity of understanding of heterodox economics even within the heterodox community is demonstrated by [these assorted brief portraits of it](#) by leading exponents.

[2] It should be noted that, technically, CORE is just one module: nothing per se precludes teaching history of thought alongside it.

1.2 Pluralism

Like ‘heterodox’, ‘pluralism’ is a problematic term. At a basic level it refers to the existence of alternatives. However, there is an array of possible ways to practise that. [Garnett and Mearman \(2011\)](#) discuss how pluralism has evolved. Pluralism can operate at various levels: within the same theoretical framework, debating evidence; using different theoretical frameworks; deploying different

methodological approaches; or making different assumptions about the world (ontological) or about knowledge (epistemological). For the student and the teacher, these different options present different challenges.

Another dimension of pluralism is the way in which the alternatives interact, if at all. It is possible to create 'ghettos' into which alternatives are pushed: for example, a single optional module in Marxism within a programme which otherwise shuns Marx. This is a weak form of pluralism, one which merely tolerates the existence of the alternative. A programme in which a strand of heterodox modules is allowed, but again with little engagement between those modules and the core also falls into this category.

A stronger, more assertive form of pluralism is one in which different perspectives are considered in tandem, perhaps in contention with each other. The two perspectives can be variants of orthodox thought: for instance neo-classical versus behavioural treatments of microeconomics. However, they can also be orthodox versus heterodox. A thoroughgoing 'contending perspectives' module would contrast the perspectives throughout, including in the assessment scheme.

Whether pluralism occurs, and the form it takes, will depend on several factors. One is the institutional constraints faced by the instructor. The suggestions in this chapter and in the accompanying booklet reflect the different realities teachers face. It may be possible to design a complete pluralist programme, but often it is not. Even in these cases, dogged teachers can get approval for a heterodox or pluralist module within a conventional programme. However, sometimes this is not possible, and the only option open is to insert heterodox material into an orthodox module. And of course, in some cases, even this is not possible. Thus institutional context is crucial.

However, mindset is also important. To get the most out of a pluralist approach, one must be clear about the objectives of doing so. Similarly, a pluralist approach involves setting aside to some extent one's own beliefs about what is correct. It involves giving a fair hearing to material which the teacher ultimately believes is wrong: heterodox teachers know this very well! It also involves engaging with material that is more unfamiliar, and thus it takes time – time which is otherwise used for publishing papers necessary for career survival. For these reasons, teaching heterodox economics and pluralism are challenging.

Furthermore, it should be clear that merely teaching heterodox economics is not synonymous with pluralism. In [Figure 1](#), point 7 claimed that pluralism is a principle of heterodox economics. However, heterodox teachers can be non-pluralist in their approach, if they choose to be. Clearly, as well, orthodox teachers can be pluralist, if they choose to be. One of the reasons to do so is to consider the benefits of pluralist teaching.

1.3 Why teach heterodox economics and pluralism?

Some reasons for giving students opportunities to develop an understanding of the principles of heterodox economics, and for pluralism, are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Reasons for giving students good opportunities for understanding the principles of heterodox economics and for teaching pluralistically

1. In order to understand a model properly, it is important to know its limits. Further, by understanding heterodox principles will lead to a more informed understanding of ‘mainstream’ economics. For example, behaviouralism is part of the mainstream but it reflects heterodox principles. Hence students will understand the orthodox better if heterodox principles are also taught
2. Heterodox principles exert an important influence on policy (see [Ramsden, 2015](#)).
3. As the history of economic thought shows, today’s orthodoxy might be tomorrow’s heresy. Today’s heterodoxy could be tomorrow’s mainstream. Students should be prepared for the long run.
4. By analogy with biodiversity, in a complex world economics should have more varieties if it is to survive.
5. The dominance of orthodoxy (or indeed the mainstream) is not a reflection of the superiority of these ideas. It reflects social pragmatism, seeking to increase the esteem of the profession by conforming to a dominant political ideology (liberalism) and by adopting the methodology used in ‘hard science’. These desires are reinforced by disciplinary mechanisms such as so-called ‘research quality’ assessment.
6. The complexity of the world and humans’ limited ability to understand it suggest that one perspective may not be sufficient (see [Morgan, 2014](#)). Thus, heterodox as well as orthodox economics should be taught.
7. To be effective, economists need a ‘bigger toolbox’ ([Nelson, 2011](#)). Pluralism may aid skill formation and therefore make graduates more employable ([O’Donnell, 2009](#)).
8. Teachers as well as students learn and gain from teaching different perspectives ([Warnecke, 2009](#)).
9. Theoretical concepts and methodological approaches from heterodoxy, either in general or from specific schools of thought such as Marxism, encourage the development of key cognitive skills as well as open-mindedness and tolerance ([Clarke and Mearman, 2003](#); [PCES, 2014](#)). These faculties are, according to [Bridges \(1992\)](#), the mark of an educated mind.
10. A pluralist thinking style is the most effective single factor distinguishing people who reliably predict future events ([Tetlock 2005](#)).

The above arguments are now well-established and have been buttressed by recent literature. A significant strand of new literature has gathered evidence to suggest that teaching heterodox economics and pluralism have benefits (see [Garnett and](#)

[Mearman, 2011](#)). This evidence draws on a variety of approaches, including quantitative but also qualitative and mixed methodologies. There are still relatively few standard experimental studies, and no randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of which I am aware. This will disturb some readers. However, the absence of RCT evidence reflects two factors. First, it is often not possible to construct these trials, particularly in contexts in which an instructor is acting in isolation. Second, there are a number of objections to RCTs in an educational context ([Mearman, 2014](#)); hence, single-group studies relying on student (or alumni) performance, feedback and other reflective devices may be all that is available, and may in any case be preferable.

An early evaluation of pluralist teaching by [Barone \(1991\)](#) claimed that his students ‘as a result of heterodox integration... moved from dualistic to relativistic to critical forms of thinking’ ([Barone, 1991: 22](#)). He claims that students’ understanding is enhanced by the exposure to a wide range of phenomena. Further, he claims, students are better prepared to engage in policy debates because they are used to dealing with multiple perspectives. A follow-up study ([Barone, 2011](#)) made several similar claims, whilst acknowledging that in his context, pluralism had not been embedded sufficiently deeply to be most effective.

It is not hard to find reports of students responding positively to pluralist teaching. [Warnecke \(2009\)](#) reports greater student enthusiasm and highly positive student feedback. [Mearman, et al \(2011\)](#) aver that students on pluralist courses are more engaged and more content. [Harvey \(2011\)](#) reports (based on surveys of students on several runs of a pluralist module) that his students were not confused by pluralism, and rather, left their course more enthusiastic and more confident. However, he warns that his students did show some evidence of being influenced by the tutor’s biases.

[Mearman et al \(2011\)](#) also provide qualitative evidence that pluralism increases critical thinking skills; and that stronger contrasts (i.e. between mainstream and heterodox, rather than merely within the mainstream) may increase this benefit. [Resnick and Wolff \(2011\)](#) claim their students were better educated and better equipped to engage with other disciplines, having done a pluralist course which focused on philosophical entry points of different economic perspectives. [Cooper and Ramey \(2014\)](#) report survey evidence from alumni (over a ten-year period) that shows that their pluralist education helped them develop key attributes, including problem-solving. [O’Donnell \(2009\)](#) also provides evidence that pluralist courses aid skill development. [Amin and Haneef’s \(2011\)](#) tracer studies showed that their graduates developed professional competence and ethical awareness.

[Tetlock \(2005\)](#) reports on a twenty-year study in which experts from government, academia, journalism, and other fields made concrete predictions about events at least a year in advance. Each prediction involved assigning probabilities to sets of

three outcomes (increase, decrease, or stay roughly the same) for measures such as a currency exchange rate, GDP growth, or a government deficit. Over two eventful decades, hundreds of participants generated 28,000 predictions. There are multiple ways to calculate a score, but by almost any measure the human predictors all fared worse than very simple algorithms. There was no difference in accuracy between experts from the political right or left, but there was a profound difference due to cognitive style. The experts who held to one specific predictive approach—anything from free-market to Marxist—were the most wildly inaccurate. The best predictors were those who considered multiple frameworks in parallel, or who moderated the predictions from one approach by considering that other factors might alter the outcome.

This nascent literature on evidence supports the theoretical arguments for pluralism. It is hamstrung somewhat by the nature of the object of enquiry, and by ethical concerns about experimentation. Both of these aspects reduce the feasibility and desirability of RCTs. Further, direct assessments of abilities such as critical thinking tend to be rather cumbersome and disruptive to the teaching process, and for this reason are avoided. That does limit the evidential base for pluralism. However, the studies cited demonstrate evaluations which are theoretically-informed, rich, and hence valuable.

1.3.1 Student feedback

Module evaluations provide a routine source of information about students' experience of teaching. When the module evaluation gives students an opportunity for a free response the results are usually instructive. Figure 4 presents a selection of student comments in their written evaluations of a heterodox module taught by the author. These are indicative of possible outcomes of heterodox teaching and could be followed up by anyone interested in investigating the likelihood of these outcomes.

Figure 4: Examples of student feedback on their experience of heterodox economics teaching

1. 'I like a mixture so you can get a feeling from both sides of an argument.'
2. '[o]rthodox is easier to learn because heterodox tries to incorporate too many outside factors. I like different opinions, though, so hearing both sides is good.'
3. 'I think to begin the [module] comparing overtly is very difficult but it is much better to know the facts like that. I feel more informed.'
4. 'Towards the end I feel my paper was better and I was able to have better opinions on the topics and more able to put my thoughts together.'
5. 'I learned how to write an argumentative paper.'
6. 'I learned to form more concrete opinions and argue them.'
7. 'The papers have improved my way of thinking about certain topics.'

8. '[m]ost of my papers in high school did not want my opinion so it is nice to have an outlet for my thoughts.'
9. 'I feel I know my own opinions more'; '[m]y writing skills definitely improved as well as my thinking skills.'
10. '[t]he papers were my favourite part of the class. I actually told my mom that the two papers you had us write made me think the most out of any papers I have ever had to write.'

There is evidence here of the challenge posed to students. One student complains that the heterodox approach was too open. Another cites the difficulty that is inherent in contrasting theoretical perspectives. Similarly, [Lapidus \(2011\)](#) reports good feedback on two courses she taught as contending perspectives; but she also notes some negative comments conveying student confusion. For instance, in response to an exercise which problematised the reliability of official statistics, one student wrote: "...I can't seem to relate the answer I want to give, to the terminology of [the textbook]. It's almost like in my head I'm blabbing on and on...and it relates nothing to what I should've learned in [the textbook]" ([Lapidus, 2011: 92-3](#)). These comments reflect [Earl's \(2000\)](#) concerns, that comparative analysis at the beginning of a module is difficult for some students.

However, challenge can also be seen as a good thing, driving students towards higher levels of achievement, particularly in their critical thinking. This is apparent in the frequent reference to argument and argumentation. A number of students remark that hearing two sides of an argument is beneficial. Some also believe that their ability to construct arguments has improved.

1.4 Three strategies for teaching pluralistically via heterodox economics

There are three main strategies for incorporating pluralism via heterodox economics in a course or programme. These approaches are all pluralist, albeit to different extents. As outlined above, the different approaches may reflect tutor preferences, tutor resources, or institutional constraints. This chapter considers the three strategies, suggesting activities that can be used in such programmes. More detailed examples of each strategy appear in the companion booklet "[Pluralism in the economics curriculum](#)", with extracts from syllabuses.

1 Enriching an 'orthodox' module

This approach uses heterodox concepts to shed new light on orthodox concepts essentially following a standard textbook treatment augmented by heterodox material. This 'orthodox-plus' approach is probably the most common form of 'heterodox' module, given that most undergraduate teaching is orthodox and

opportunities to teach exclusively heterodox material are limited. This approach is described in [section 2](#).

2 A module that focuses on an alternative system of thought

For example, a module might aim to provide students with a rich understanding of the way of thinking found either in a specific strand of heterodox thought, such as Marxism, Post-Keynesianism; or in a synthesised heterodox approach to, say, microeconomics. These modules are rare in the UK and remain unusual in other countries, such as the USA. This approach is described in [section 3](#).

3 Teaching orthodox and heterodox economics as ‘contending perspectives’

A series of topics of interest or theoretical concerns are taught first from one perspective, then from the other, allowing comparison. [Barone \(1991\)](#) describes an entire programme organised around this principle. The new programme at Greenwich is designed along these lines. This approach is described in [section 4](#). Table 1 below shows contrasted ‘orthodox’ and heterodox concepts.

Option (1) is perhaps the most practical and the most commonly used. Option (2) means that justice can be done to heterodox ideas, but is often restricted to specialist, optional ‘ghetto’ modules, where the development of a critical understanding may be limited. This chapter argues that, pedagogically, option (3) is the most beneficial, because it is based on comparative, critical treatments of both orthodox and heterodox. Also, by committing to comparative treatment, the contending perspectives approach can prevent the confusion which can occur when students are faced with different perspectives only occasionally. However, it *may* mean that fewer topics are covered in a module.

At this point it is useful to note the rich resources now available online, for instance at the [Heterodox Economics Directory](#) and at those in the Economics Network’s own [TRUE Project](#).

2. Enriching an orthodox programme

2.1 Summary

We will call the strategy of adding heterodox concepts into an otherwise orthodox programme ‘orthodox-plus’. Of the three strategies for teaching heterodoxy discussed in this chapter, this is the simplest to implement. The essence of the approach is that orthodox concepts should be interrogated critically; and that heterodox criticisms and alternative concepts can assist this process. Note that the previous sentence was split into two: assess orthodox concepts critically, and use heterodoxy to do so. The first part is crucial. Of course, economics educators could always do better in looking critically – and encouraging their students to look

critically – at the concepts they are studying. This neglect is understandable: time constraints mean that tutors are under pressure to move on to the next topic; and, particularly at lower levels, it is incumbent on tutors that their students merely pass through that stage successfully and that core, underpinning concepts are *learned*. However, they may not be *understood*. Critical examination can increase understanding. All of that could be achieved without using heterodox content but using heterodox work could assist the process of critical teaching. Further, according to the variation theory of learning, thinking comparatively – from a number of perspectives – about an object of learning improves understanding of it.^[1]

To make space for the inclusion of heterodox perspectives in an orthodox module, something must be omitted, but what? This is significant precisely because an objection to the above proposal is that key concepts are omitted. What may be sacrificed is some detail, for instance in some of the technical details of the concepts being studied. [Salemi \(2005\)](#) argues that for an introductory economics module, some standard diagrams – he cites cost curves – can be omitted in favour of more reinforcement and application of key concepts. His approach is similar to arguing that ‘threshold concepts’ – concepts which once understood change the way the person thinks (see [Meyer and Land, 2005](#)) – should be targeted in order either to underpin higher-level study or give a basic summary of economics for a non-economist. The same argument could also be applied to the extent of mathematics used in a module. A further approach could be to leave out theories which are less useful in modern economics or spend much less time on them. For instance, CORE omits *inter alia* perfect competition, clearing labour markets, and Edgeworth boxes under perfect competition.

^[1] Space precludes full discussion of variation theory. Essentially, the theory holds that there is no discernment without variation. To understand a part, one must grasp the whole. Thus to understand orthodoxy, one may benefit from examining other parts of economics. See [Runesson \(2005\)](#) for further discussion.

2.2 Evaluation of the ‘orthodox-plus’ approach

- A critical examination of assumptions is encouraged. As [Sutton \(2000\)](#) notes, assumptions are something which students question (perhaps naturally) but the discussion of which is often postponed – often indefinitely. Referring to questions raised by students about (or against) the practice of reducing complex human actors to simplified mathematical representations of rational maximisers, Sutton (p. xv) claims: ‘By the time that students have advanced a couple of years into their studies, both these questions are forgotten. Those students who remain troubled by them have quit the field; those who remain are socialised and no longer ask about such

things. Yet these are deep questions, which cut to the heart of the subject.’ This situation is problematic from a pedagogical point of view.

- A discussion of the role of assumptions in economics is provoked. This is not ‘orthodoxy-bashing’: on the contrary, a discussion of the realism of assumptions leads naturally into one about their role and possibly a *justification* for unrealistic assumptions. That in turn leads to a consideration of models and a greater understanding of how they work and how to think about them. That can be vitally important in understanding economics and in offsetting the apathy many students feel when studying economics.
- Third, the heterodox conception offers an alternative for students to consider. Again, that should be done critically. There are two principal benefits of doing this. First, students are introduced to ideas that have played a formative role in the history of economic thought. Second, the heterodox views are a basis for comparison and examination of orthodox theory, and in line with variation theory cited earlier they provide a background for crystallising the orthodox views. This is the value-added of using the heterodox concept to examine the orthodox – compared with, say, simply drawing on the conclusions of experimental economics, as [Becker \(2004\)](#) suggests.

3. Teaching a heterodox module

3.1 Summary

As discussed above, exactly what comprises a heterodox module will depend on its level and the approach of the instructor. There are essentially three alternatives in constructing a heterodox module. One way is to try to teach a single heterodox approach, such as Post-Keynesianism or Marxism. In that case, considerable depth would be achieved. Most heterodox modules, such as those found via the Heterodox Economics Directory are of this type, as are many of the examples discussed in [the curriculum booklet](#). In each case, consistent with heterodox principles, the module would begin with a discussion of the tradition’s methodology, and its place in the history of economic thought. Thereafter, the topics covered will depend on the perspective being considered. Different heterodox schools have had different concerns and thus their literatures are skewed towards those issues. Space precludes a full discussion of all of these options here. However, reasonable guides to content can be based on treatments of the approaches in any texts dedicated to them, history of economic thought texts and recent editions of journals devoted to the tradition.

The second way to teach a heterodox module is to draw on the diversity of heterodox perspectives. One way is to anticipate the contending perspectives approach discussed below and teach a series of topics, in each case considering a

variety of heterodox perspectives. So, on successive topics of, say, methodology, the individual, firms and competition, the aggregate economy, the role of government and income distribution, one would consider the work of each of the heterodox perspectives chosen on those topics. In that way, the benefits of teaching heterodox material are achieved, as are the advantages of teaching multiple contending perspectives.

A third way is to attempt to teach a fairly unified heterodox perspective, not based around one perspective, but by combining elements of different heterodox traditions. The main benefit of this is that one chooses the heterodox school that deals best with specific topics. For example, if one wanted to deal with the question of money, one *could* examine a range of heterodox perspectives on it (for example, [Lautzenheiser and Yasar \(2005\)](#) discuss teaching money in Marx) but it may be equally useful to consider Keynes' work, which is arguably the most important contribution available. One might also discuss the issue of 'macroeconomics' and use that as a reason to discuss the contribution of Keynes to economics.

Alternatively, one could use Keynes to talk about uncertainty, or even, at the introductory level, about markets. The Keynesian beauty contest, in which stock markets are compared to a particular type of newspaper competition, in which entrants are asked to pick the beauty contestant whom they think others will choose, is a good example. That story is a good one: it encourages examination of the notions of the market, its efficiency, its outcomes and the market as an institution, rather than as a quasi-natural phenomenon.

Similarly, one might focus institutionalism on consumer theory, Post-Keynesianism on distribution, and Austrian Economics on competition (and policy). There is also a rich heterodox literature on production. Smith on the division of labour, Marx on exploitation, [Bowles and Gintis \(1985\)](#) on work organisation, and [Spencer \(2009\)](#) on the nature of work are all excellent sources for discussing actual production processes. It is this third approach which will be discussed here. [A more detailed example](#) appears in the accompanying publication "Pluralism in the economics curriculum".

3.2 Evaluation of the heterodox module approach

When one is trying to present a summary of heterodox microeconomic concepts, drawing on extensive literatures, not everything can be included. In terms of omission, the list of heterodox concepts not covered would be potentially long but the module can attempt to provide an overview and introduction. It can also build cognitive capacities, such as the ability to think about an issue from different angles. This anticipates the contending perspectives approach discussed in [section 4](#). Obviously, such a module is very different from standard introductions. Some

tutors may be concerned that a heterodox module deviates too far from the Economics Benchmarking Statement and that concern is examined in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Heterodox modules in relation to the Economics Benchmarking Statement

In some significant ways, the heterodox module differs from the description of Economics in the Benchmarking Statement. Concepts identified as core theory may be omitted or even rejected. Interestingly, the new statement ([QAA, 2015](#)) removes references to scarcity: hence one of the key differences between it and a heterodox approach has gone. Indeed, some core concerns of heterodox economics have been incorporated: for instance the central role of finance, critical thinking, and sustainability. Crucially, several pluralist terms have been added, for instance that teaching should create “understanding of alternative approaches to the analysis of economic phenomena” and that “explanations may be contested”.

Several of the other core concepts listed there might be de-emphasised, neglected, questioned, rejected or even omitted in a heterodox module (see Table 2 in [Section 2](#) of the curriculum booklet). However, their omission makes way for new concepts. Thus, side B of Table 1 below is easily converted from a set of principles into learning outcomes. In addition, though – and this theme should be clear throughout this chapter – learning outcomes *are* achieved in terms of student capacities and skills. Significantly, many of these are consistent with the Economics Benchmarks: abstraction, induction, deduction, analysis, quantification, design and framing – the identification of important variables – are all achievable in a heterodox module. Clearly, some of the conclusions reached about those skills – for example on the appropriate use of mathematical models – *may* be different from a heterodox viewpoint. However, in addition, skills of criticality, comparison and concrete, realistic thought may also be developed.

The above concerns also apply in different ways to the orthodox-plus and contending perspectives approaches. In both, the emphasis will be slightly different to a standard module and potentially some standard material will be omitted or less time will be given to it. However, equally, the development of critical and comparative skills will be enhanced to compensate, as in the case of the heterodox module.

The benefits of teaching a heterodox module are to some extent very similar to those of teaching heterodox material *per se*:

- The heterodox module structures laid out above offer opportunities to discuss methodological and historical questions.
- They confront students with different ways of thinking of the world and about economics.

- Students may consequently understand the orthodox material better, because they have been forced to question it, to examine objections to it, and to consider an alternative.

Additionally, teaching an entire module of heterodox material allows more depth and breadth of material to be achieved, and thus the benefits of teaching that material are amplified. Further:

- The benefits of studying heterodox material are achieved at a *programme* level. For example, students have space to confront ‘normative’ questions usually confined to policy analysis or philosophy. Indeed, that is a feature of the heterodox approach.
- Students are invited to question whether the heterodox approach is superior or inferior to – or perhaps just different from – the orthodox material they have been learning.
- They have the opportunity to study an entire system of thought and attempt to employ it.
- *If* heterodox theory is more realistic than orthodox, then students develop a useful applicable toolkit of concepts which cannot feasibly be learned in a brief one- or two-week treatment.

4. The ‘contending perspectives’ approach

4.1 Summary

Arguably, the best way to achieve the development of comparative and critical capacities is to combine the two approaches above. This can be done in a ‘parallel perspectives’ approach, in which issues or concepts are considered from different perspectives in parallel. This is pluralist but somewhat weakly so. A stronger version of this is ‘contending perspectives’, in which different perspectives are brought intentionally into contrast. The essence of this approach is summarised in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Characteristics of a ‘contending perspectives’ approach

1. Core economic concepts or problems are examined from an orthodox perspective (as would be done in an orthodox module).
2. The orthodox perspective is criticised from a heterodox perspective (as in the orthodox-plus design discussed above).
3. The concept or issue is discussed from a heterodox perspective (as in the module design discussed in [Section 3](#)).
4. Any orthodox rebuttals of the heterodox position and debate that has occurred are examined.
5. Students are invited to evaluate the debate and argue for a position. In some ways, this may have already been done in the heterodox module, if issues

were dealt with in turn from multiple heterodox perspectives. However, the contending perspectives approach does this more explicitly and systematically and allows both orthodox and heterodox positions to be examined.^[1]

In terms of learning outcomes, students will gain awareness of a variety of substantive concepts (albeit possibly slightly narrower in scope than on any individual orthodox or heterodox module). However, the key to using the approach successfully is not to compromise on the need to be critical and comparative. The contrast between the perspectives is utterly crucial and must pervade the presentation and assessment of the module being taught.

^[1] In theory, one could start with heterodox concepts. In an introductory module that makes most sense. In higher-level modules, in which students have most likely already studied some orthodox economics, the orthodox is most easily taught first.

4.2 Examples

This section outlines a contending perspectives approach. We start with general discussion of the distinction between orthodox and heterodox economics, based on a model of ten competing principles. The two sets of ten principles are presented in Table 1 below and are offered as a useful teaching device. That discussion places particular focus on the purpose of economics, the methods of economics, and the role of values in economics. Section 3 of the curriculum booklet sets out a particular Introductory Microeconomics module structured around contending perspectives.

At whichever level a contending perspectives approach is applied, a crucial first step is to get students thinking comparatively as early as possible and about fundamental issues. A useful device to assist that process is to employ Table 1, adapted from [Knoedler and Underwood \(2003\)](#). The principles shown there are not meant to be exhaustive but are an example which individual tutors can adjust according to their modules. The principles shown apply well to a microeconomics module.

Table 1: Ten Things Every Student Should Learn

(adapted from [Knoedler and Underwood, 2003](#))

Orthodox (Side A)	Heterodox (Side B)
1. Economics is the study of choice under conditions of scarcity.	1. Economics is about the social processes of providing for people's needs, not merely choices and scarcity.

2. Economic actors are motivated by rational self-interest to maximise their satisfaction from consumption (based on a given set of preferences).	2. Both scarcity and wants are socially defined and created.
3. Economics, practised correctly, is a ‘positive science’ premised upon value-free, objective knowledge. The role of the economist is to engage in the science of ‘positive’ analysis of the economic processes described above.	3. Economics is not ‘value-free’ and ideology shapes our analyses and conclusions as economists.
4. The history of economic thought is a specialist subject inessential for the study of contemporary economic theory.	4. The history of economic thought is critical to the study of ‘basic principles’ of economics.
5. The individual – understood as an entity separated from others – is the principal unit of economic analysis.	5. The individual should be understood, but as complex and connected to others – and as a means to understanding the operation of the whole economy.
6. Economies and markets tend to equilibrium. Equilibrium is a foundational concept in economics.	6. Although equilibrium can be a useful concept, economies generally do not tend to equilibrium; indeed, there may be no equilibrium to tend to and thus, economics should focus on dynamic processes rather than equilibria.
7. The market values (prices) established in a ‘free market’ economy are the critical guide to economic efficiency. Anything that ‘distorts’ free market values reduces efficiency, thus imposing costs on society.	7. Valuation is a social process.
8. Although a free market is believed to be the ideal way to achieve efficiency and maximum social welfare, there are many failures in the market requiring intervention by government.	8. Markets are social institutions that could never work as posited by the orthodox theory. Many of the failures described by orthodoxy are essential features of markets.
9. Distribution of wealth and income rests on marginal production of individuals, determined by their characteristics.	9. Distribution is shaped by membership in groups according to race, gender and class, and the relative power exercised by those groups.
10. The natural world, the source of all energy and materials and the repository for all waste, is not a necessary (complementary) element in production.	10. Ecological literacy (economy–ecology interface, unity between biophysical first principles and economic sustainability) is essential to understanding the economic process.

One useful way to employ the table is to print it on two sides of a sheet, with the orthodox principles as side A, the heterodox side B. This resource has been used successfully at Principles level.[\[1\]](#) It is one of the first resources given to students. They may immediately read it all – and if this stimulates their thinking that would be desirable – but it may also introduce too much early confusion. Thus it may be better just to have students refer to it as directed by the instructor. The initial segment of the module must be devoted to creating the impression of a division and making students comfortable with that. For beginning students, without preconceptions – or perhaps for those from other disciplines – it is straightforward to argue that there are simply two competing views, and then to explain them. Certain points from the ten things sheet are desirable and indeed necessary to establish the orthodox/ heterodox distinction.

The first issue to discuss is ‘What is the prime focus of economic analysis?’ Immediately students see the standard scarcity view contrasted with other views. As Table 1 shows, a heterodox economist might regard the economic problem as one of social provisioning – of needs, not wants. By questioning whether their wants are indeed unlimited, and whether their resources are scarce, students understand better what the orthodox postulate of scarcity means, and how it applies to real-world situations. Some students may reject the scarcity postulate as static and too geared towards selfish satisfaction; for others though it will resonate with their own budget management concerns.

After discussing the purpose of economics, the author finds it useful to consider the methods of economics. As outlined in [section 1.1](#), heterodox approaches contrast with textbook models in their recognition of history. Orthodox models tend to be framed in logical time, which is reversible. This is clearly unrealistic and excludes much apparently significant historical detail. However, students quickly realise that models must exclude. That leads into a contrast between abstraction and idealisation. Abstraction is the ignorance of some factors in order to focus on the essence of a phenomenon. Idealisation is the creation of idealised entities that deviate strongly from reality. Abstraction is necessary in economics because of the complexity of the world. However, arguably, idealisation is more common in orthodox models. Thus, economic man is a device that does not represent any real humans. However, that may not matter in terms of good theories. With some students, it may even be possible to discuss [Friedman’s \(1953\)](#) view of theories as predictive devices.

Point 3 on the sheet is also essential for the contending perspectives approach. It concerns the positive/normative distinction. The orthodox side A presents the positivist view that analysis should be value-free and objective. It is relatively simple to ask students whether they think this is a desirable aim and, if so, whether it is possible. Having the students read the introduction to [Chang \(2014\)](#) on ‘political economy’, or [Harvey \(2015: ch. 2\)](#) on economics as science, or [Stretton \(1999: ch. 5\)](#) on ideology assists that discussion. For [Barone \(1991\)](#) it is a major

benefit of contending perspectives that they allow value bases to be made clear and evaluated. In so doing, he argues, contending perspectives stop sneering and encourage healthy conversation and co-operation.

Stretton's (1999) book also facilitates the consideration of the role schools of thought play in economics. His early discussion of the development of economics is useful because it hints at point 4 in Table 1, on the role of historical context, but also establishes that there are several traditions out there and that they are worthy of consideration. Indeed, Stretton's approach is to examine briefly the history of economic thought, examine Smith and the classical growth model first, and then to show how the neo-classical economics took on only one part of the classical approach, namely distributional concerns. By reading these extracts from Stretton, students learn:

1. that there are several perspectives on economics;
2. about key figures in the heritage of economics;
3. that current theories are the latest in a long line of theories, some of which they develop, others they reject or change fundamentally

Some of the distinctions in Table 1 may appear rather stark but that is intentional. The stark distinctions serve as a vehicle to bridge them. For example, take point 8. In fact, perhaps few orthodox economists would argue (as strongly as that) in favour of the notion of free market capitalism, and perhaps many heterodox economists would not subscribe to the notion of a completely managed capitalism. In reality, there is more of a continuum of views. However, the two extremes serve as an entry point into a discussion amongst the students of markets and the role of government. This would most likely occur later in the module. It allows the free market view to be put across, examined and then contrasted with the view that all markets are institutional creations and therefore managed (which would also be evaluated). When those notions are presented simply, they become accessible to students. A case study such as the marketisation of health care or education is topical, personally relevant and an effective vehicle for understanding and discussing the two views as presented. Such a discussion could then lead on to more complex considerations and theories—for example, the new institutionalist approach.

Once the initial distinctions have been established, it is possible to move into a discussion of various economic concepts. That is where a discussion of module structure becomes relevant. Further detail on possible module structures can be found in the companion publication “pluralism in the economics curriculum”.

[1] In terms of its content, some points about the sheet should be noted. In general, it presents a workable set of heterodox principles: it is similar to the principles

listed in [section 1.1](#). However, Knoedler and Underwood come from the institutionalist tradition and some of their alternative principles will reflect that. Nevertheless, the tables can be tailored to reflect a particular perspective, or to suit the needs of a particular module. For example, number 7 on the heterodox side, ‘valuation is a social process’, is quite vague. It probably reflects the concern expressed in a number of institutionalist texts and modules about instrumental valuation (the notion that value is ascribed only in terms of its consequences). However, it could also be interpreted as reflecting the Marxist labour theory of value and the (social) determination of the surplus. Or it could be explained via the Keynesian beauty contest, in which social-psychological factors determine share prices.

4.3 Summary of the contending perspectives approach

A thoroughgoing contending perspectives module can cover all the required orthodox concepts as well as heterodox concepts. The comparative and critical approach starts on day one and is reinforced through the entire module, in exercises, class discussions and assessment (see below). Although the author has not formally tested whether this approach generated better marks for students, it certainly improved student perceptions of the introductory microeconomics module and seemed to attract more students to opt for economics. These findings are supported by the evidence reported in [section 1.3](#).

The author employed a similar method in modules on intermediate microeconomics, industrial economics, and economics of the environment. In the first case, orthodox and heterodox were contrasted in the same way as in the level 1 module, but considering higher-level material. In the second case, three perspectives were used: neo-classical, Marxist and new institutionalist. In the third case, environmental economics was contrasted with ecological economics. In all three cases, the contrast began almost on day one of the module and was pursued throughout.

4.4 Objections to the contending perspectives approach

There are several objections offered to teaching heterodox economics. Space precludes a full discussion here, but some of these objections are worthy of mention. One is that heterodox economics is pointless and that students should merely learn orthodox economics. Hopefully the arguments in [section 1](#) refute such claims. The other questions commonly raised are:

- Is it asking too much of students to have them cope with multiple perspectives while taking in complex economic material?

- Will students find competing perspectives approaches too difficult and unattractive *per se*?
- Will including heterodox material reduce the intellectual depth of the economics programme?

The first two questions rest on the belief that criticism and scepticism breed nihilism, and that students will learn nothing if they are taught to criticise. Even those who accept the need to criticise the orthodoxy claim that the basics need to be learned first. The danger of course is that once learned, the basics are impossible to question, and that the aims stated above of open-mindedness and critical thinking can be thwarted if students embrace the basics too vigorously. One strategy is to teach alternative basics from the beginning. A way to get students used to being critical is to immerse them in a programme in which criticism and comparison is endemic.

However, it is a genuine concern that students will be discouraged if they see only fallibility of theories and alternatives and see no hope of reaching answers. [Earl \(2000\)](#) shows that an instructor who tries to push students too quickly will come unstuck and lose them. As Earl notes, the comparative or relativistic way of thinking does not occur overnight: nor can students be dragged to that level. Most start off as what Earl calls ‘dualistic’, i.e. right and wrong, thinkers: one theory must be the whole Truth, or it is useless. A tutor should be able to demonstrate their expertise by delivering the Truth to students. It is difficult for students to move from dualistic to relativistic thinking. Even when students are at higher levels of thinking in their everyday life, for instance when discussing football, music or other aspects of popular culture, they can revert to lower levels in academic life, leading them to demand ‘right’ answers and to feel uncomfortable answering anything other than narrow technical questions. [Lapidus \(2011\)](#) echoes these concerns.

As [Earl \(2000\)](#) notes, it is imperative to communicate to the students early on—and to repeat—what you as a lecturer are trying to do. This can also be achieved through the design of assessment. As outlined below, essays of increasing length and significance in terms of marks can ease students into the habit of thinking critically and openly. A stress on the need to make an argument and develop a position can be similarly beneficial. Therefore, when teaching contending perspectives in particular, it is essential that students are treated carefully. Attempts to force students into thinking comparatively, etc. too quickly can lead to them attempting to escape from the process, or taking easy options.

On the question of intellectual depth, the arguments of [section 1](#) should show that teaching contending perspectives may actually increase intellectual standards. The students’ ability to think critically and open-mindedly is a crucial intellectual capacity. As Earl notes too, students’ ethical capacities may also increase, as they learn to show respect for other views yet find ways to criticise them and make

tentative commitments to a position (see also [Barone, 1991](#)). Barone also notes that when heterodox modules and contending perspectives were introduced into the curriculum at Dickinson College, USA, the ‘neo-classical’ content was strengthened: technical subjects, such as quantitative methods and applied calculus, were made compulsory for economics students.

In short, there appear to be many barriers to teaching a pluralist approach. However, as [Earl \(2000: 23\)](#) notes: ‘Most academic economists do not try to find out whether all these barriers really exist and are insuperable; they simply take them for granted.’ This section has demonstrated that in fact the barriers can be overcome if lecturers are prepared to try. Further, there may be many benefits to students of doing so.

5. Assessment strategies

In principle any type of assessment could be used on the modules discussed above. Like all forms of assessment, whatever is set should assess:

- understanding,
- the ability to structure an answer,
- criticality,
- writing and other stylistic features,
- ability to gather evidence and
- essay writing skills.

However, some specific elements of the heterodox perspectives discussed above should be assessed:

- the ability to establish a position and offer an opinion supported by some evidence, be it theoretical or empirical;
- evidence of having considered power;
- the ability to compare perspectives;
- reflexivity;
- evidence of having thought about method.

5.1 Assessment schema

Clearly, the extent to which those elements are assessed depends on the level and type of the module. For example, a first-year student may have less expected of them in terms of reflexivity, writing style and research skills, given that these are transferable skills developed during the higher educative process. Similarly, a student on an orthodox-plus module would have less stressed placed on comparison. The assessment scheme will also affect what is assessed: obviously, a scheme comprising only multiple choice tests will not improve essay writing skills

or the ability to develop an argument. However, tests are good ways of quickly testing understanding.

Tests can be very useful in particular on contending perspectives modules. As [Earl \(2000\)](#) notes, students need to be eased into thinking comparatively. One way he suggests is to ask students to write essays and to provide extensive feedback on them. That process is very time consuming. Tests create space in the tutor's time and can be conducted in-class for ease of organisation. An alternative of course is to use on-line tests, for instance programs which create unique sets of questions, and which are self-marking. Some examples of these are available at the *Economics Network* website. Both elements of those tests – the setting and marking of questions – remove an administrative burden from academic staff. Self-managed use of computer software can also assist learning. The only limitation in a heterodox or contending perspectives module is that most of the existing tests are geared towards orthodox content.

A final examination can be a way of testing all the skills simultaneously, through a mixed question format, incorporating short answer, data-response, medium-length and essay questions, all of which types the student would be expected to attempt. The short- to medium-length questions may be compulsory with students given a choice of essay question. Short answer questions may require simple factual responses – for instance to identify which of a list of economists could be regarded as either orthodox or heterodox. Other questions require slightly longer, more detailed answers – for instance to explain a particular model.

5.2 Essays

Perhaps best of all, essays test the ability to develop a position or opinion as well as conceptual understanding. Essays can be used as one element in a multi-method strategy. They can also form the main component of assessment. It may be that more than one essay is assigned. In that case, it may be wise to require shorter essays earlier on and give these less weight. That allows students who are unaccustomed to essays to adjust to them and is particularly important in the case of contrastive or position essays.

In this section, some examples of essay questions are presented. The examples can in principle be used on any of the module types discussed in this chapter, but some of the questions are more applicable to the types than others.

5.2.1 Mixed competence/criticism questions

All essays should demonstrate criticism and understanding, of course. However, some questions can be explicitly aimed at establishing that a student understands some theory before then explicitly asking them to engage in criticism or comparison.

An easy way to construct the separate elements of a question is to write it in multiple parts. For example, students may be asked to deal with a specific problem in consumer theory, before being asked critically to evaluate three of the assumptions underlying it. In the first part of the question they would be rewarded, as they would on any module, for technical correctness and logic of their answer. In the second part, the student is expected to elucidate the assumptions (indicating their understanding) before criticising them. They would be credited for drawing on the critical literature they may have been assigned. Exam questions could be a mixture of a similar type of questions. Clearly such questions target understanding and criticism, but also the ability to structure answers in a well-written way. They are most useful on orthodox-plus modules.

5.2.2 Critiques

Whilst we expect all essays to display criticality, some questions can explicitly ask for it. Criticality can be of oneself: for example on econometrics modules, it is useful to ask students to complete a project and then ask them to raise objections to their own method.

On modules covering theory it is easier to ask students to directly criticise theoretical claims. For example, one might ask students to: ‘Evaluate the usefulness of game theory in understanding real-world phenomena such as cartels or arms races’; or ‘Evaluate whether neo-classical consumer theory is useful in explaining consumer choices’. Clearly, in both cases, if the question forms part of one of the module types described here, there would be an expectation that heterodox material is drawn upon. Similarly, one might ask students to: ‘Critically evaluate Galbraith’s claim in *Affluent Society* that advertising creates demands in consumers (Galbraith changed his own position later)’. That question would be suitable at either an introductory or higher level. It would sit well on any of the module types discussed, but obviously would be very much at home in a heterodox module.

Good answers to all of these questions will be able to identify weaknesses but contextualise them in the general nature of models.

5.2.3 Comparative questions

Comparative questions explicitly ask students to compare two (or more) positions. For example, on a heterodox module, one might ask: ‘Is competition good? Contrast competing heterodox positions on this question.’ Principally the students should compare the Marxian, Post-Keynesian and Austrian theories of competition, which all define and evaluate competition differently. This is a higher-level question. On a macroeconomics module, students could be asked to consider rival approaches to economic growth, with a focus on capital accumulation. Clearly, the question could be adapted to any module type, for instance by inviting students to

compare orthodox and heterodox views on a specific topic. In this type of question, understanding is expected, as is the ability to organise a response. Crucially, comparative skill is assessed directly. Also, a good answer would identify the crucial criteria by which to compare the positions.

5.2.4 Position papers

The assessment issues are most interesting on the contending perspectives approach. A strategy has already been hinted at of using comparative essays to encourage students to reach a position by a reasoned argument. An extension of that is aimed at assessing – in addition to the other criteria for assessment discussed above – whether students could reach a position based on competing perspectives. In one microeconomics module taught in this way, the author asked students to write three position papers: one on consumers, one on firms and one on markets. As an example, the three papers from one run of the module were:

1. How do consumers make choices?
2. How do firms increase their profitability? Are these methods good or bad for society?
3. Should markets or government be relied upon to organise economic activity? Explain your answer.

Clearly, conceptual understanding was an important criterion, but equally, indeed perhaps more importantly, the ability to construct an argument to reach a position – while doing justice to both sides of the debate – was highly significant. Of course, it was perfectly possible – and indeed often happened – that a student reached the conclusion that the right answer was to be found by synthesising the insights of both perspectives and bridging the gap between them. For example, although students accepted the persuasive effect of advertising, rejected the notion of unexplained preferences, and acknowledged the importance of social factors in individual choice, they would maintain that the choice remained individual, and that some sort of calculation of prospective well-being informed it.

6. Top tips

- Encourage the students to write essays in which they have to argue for a position.
- Stress the role of history in economics and economic thought.
- Comparison is difficult so students must be guided through the process: explain the teaching strategy you are using.
- Structure the module/course so that competing perspectives are reinforced: start early and repeat often.
- Use/construct readers as a substitute for or complement to textbooks.
- Use autobiographical accounts to show how economists change their mind and why.

- Offer extensive feedback on assignments – perhaps create space for this by refusing to give advanced guidance.

7. Resources

Again, it is worth pointing out that the volume of resources available online for teaching heterodox, and pluralist economics has grown considerably in the last decade. Of particular note are those available via the [Heterodox Economics Directory](#) and the [Economics Network TRUE Project](#).

7.1 Single textbooks appropriate for pluralist modules

A common problem on all modules is that students often demand that their lecture and seminar material be supported by a single textbook. Using a single textbook can have advantages: students can get more out of a book with which they are familiar and a single textbook is generally cheaper than a range of books. This demand presents a problem for modules teaching heterodox content, because unsurprisingly most textbooks – or books able to play that role – are written from the orthodox perspective. However, a few exceptions stand out:

- [Harvey \(2015\)](#) is adapted from materials used in teaching an introductory module on contending perspectives. Further discussion of his module can be found in [section 3 of the curriculum booklet](#) and in [Harvey \(2014\)](#). The book is avowedly pluralist, and begins with a claim that speaking only one language creates a limited view of human consciousness. Thereafter, it contains a series of chapters on seven different schools of thought, starting with neo-classical economics. It also covers Austrian, Feminist economics, Marxism, New and Old Institutionalism, and Post-Keynesianism. It begins though with a consideration of economics as a science. This opening chapter is meant to problematize notions of truth, but also to establish criteria for assessing different theories: these come principally from logic.
- [Resnick and Wolff \(2012\)](#) offer a similar approach to Harvey's. Again, their material is drawn from a module they taught. It is discussed in [Resnick and Wolff \(2011\)](#). They contrast three schools of thought: neo-classical, Keynesian and Marxian. The book's central premise is that all theories have what they call an 'entry point' and logic. For example, they say neo-classical theory's entry point is individual humans' desires and capabilities. This is tied, they say, to determinist cause and effect relations. Similarly, Keynesian and Marxian theories have theirs. By considering these questions first, no one theory is prioritised, and each one can be compared according to accepted criteria.
- [Dow \(1996\)](#) takes a methodological approach to examining schools of thought in macroeconomics. The advantage of this is that many of the

differences between schools are methodological; and compare/contrast questions are often answered well if they address key methodological themes, such as predictive capability, the nature of the individual, etc. rather than merely expositing the two views and then attempting a contrast.

- [Snowdon, Vane and Wynarczyk \(1998\)](#) is another text aimed at higher-level macroeconomics students and, like Dow, it outlines different schools of thought.

These books eschew reach conclusions about which approach is ‘best’; rather they allow students to make up their own minds.

Heterodox concepts are most effective when the student is exposed to them early and often. Thus, some introductory texts would be useful. Again, most of the textbooks on the market tend to be written from a neo-classical perspective, even when attempts are made to address other views and other ways of thinking. There are some exceptions, however. [Chang \(2014\)](#) offers a commentary on modern economics. [Stretton \(1999\)](#) is a book aimed at an introductory level student. It is interesting in a number of ways, principally because of the order of its chapters.

- Rather than adopt a conventional module structure, the book comprises sections (each containing several chapters) on ‘studying economics’, economic growth, demands, productive institutions, distributive institutions and economic strategy.
- Crucially, Stretton places an early emphasis on method and on the history of thought. This immediately impresses on the reader that economics is a changing subject. This encourages the student not to think of theories as fixed and correct forever.
- Significantly also, Stretton introduces schools of thought: not as objects to be studied in depth, but as ways of thinking that can be applied to different problems.

[Earl and Wakeley \(2005\)](#) offer another resource, designed specifically with contending perspectives in mind. It is explicitly practical, pragmatic and pluralist. Its focus is on business decision making and it deals particularly with dynamic problems of firm start-up, maintenance and rejuvenation. It embraces both orthodox and heterodox, where heterodox is defined as a synthesis of behavioural, Post-Keynesian and evolutionary approaches. Its main resource is a set of applied contemporary-real world examples. Significantly, like the Kemp and Wunder simulation discussed above, the book develops an analysis on entrepreneurship. In other ways, the book reflects both traditional courses and heterodox concerns. For instance, one of its first topics is markets; however, the same chapter also deals with the nature of economic models. That then reflects the traditional order of modules but embraces the heterodox concern with methodology.

[Dorman \(2014\)](#) offers twin books which offer pluralist ways to teach microeconomics and macroeconomics. Both books emphasise critical thinking and understanding theories in context. They both also attempt to update the textbook with new evidence and current research. For instance, a large portion of the macroeconomics book presents evidence about the international macroeconomic environment. These data would clearly need to be updated: but this is an opportunity for learning via research. These books do not eschew orthodox material, but it is taught in a more realistic and policy relevant fashion than is often the case with textbooks.

Similarly, [Fine \(2016\)](#) offers a pair of companion books on microeconomics and macroeconomics which explicitly seek to deliver orthodox material in a critical way, drawing on heterodox material. These books are particularly useful for orthodox-plus modules. The macroeconomics edition ([Fine and Dimakou, 2016](#)) is also useful as a primer to heterodox theory.

7.2 The multiple resource approach

The utility of a single textbook approach can be questioned, of course. Using only a textbook can discourage students from reading widely, and to think that they can rely on one text – no matter how many times they are told the contrary. A single book can also encourage the belief that there is only one way of thinking; in the context of this chapter that is a serious problem.

An alternative approach could require students to buy several key texts. [Barone \(1991\)](#) reports that students were expected to buy one book per perspective studied, for example [Dugger \(1984\)](#) on institutionalism and [Littlechild \(1978\)](#) on the Austrian approach. Such a strategy will usually come up against a cost constraint. The modules described in [section 3 of the curriculum booklet](#) adopted this approach and encountered that constraint. See also the mixed resource approach in Figure 9 of that booklet.

7.3 Using a reader

An alternative is to adopt a reader. [Snowdon, Vane and Wynarczyk \(1998\)](#) is one such readymade reader. Heilbroner's *Teachings from the Worldly Philosophy* ([1997](#)) is another. However, another option is to construct a reader from key texts, perhaps including short handouts and newspaper articles. This has the disadvantage of being a little labour-intensive but has the distinct advantage – assuming copyright issues have been resolved – of providing the students with key material in a manageable format. A danger is that the students will regard this as an exhaustive list of readings, but nonetheless it might constitute more reading than they would otherwise have done.

Using readers is one strategy advocated by [Earl \(2000\)](#) and adopted by Bucknell University. One of their readers is available as [Schneider *et al.* \(2005\)](#).

References

Contents

- - [Websites](#)
 - [Books/articles as resources](#)
 - [Articles on comparative approach](#)
 - [Other books/articles cited](#)

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