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From monoculture to pluricultures: Recent trends in economics education

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Recent trends in economics education

Lukas Bäuerle and Michelle Meixieira
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Abstract

The role of academic economics education in establishing and nurturing a monoculture of thought and action, emanating from this powerful discipline has been pivotal. However, as of today, there exists a vast array of pedagogical alternatives. These are contributing to an emerging pluriculture of future economics and future economies. The following chapter presents a framework to compare these pluralizing ambitions in (and of), economics education. Furthermore, we discuss in detail how recent trends in the debate are beginning to reflect economic education in the broader context of its socio-ecological pervasiveness. So too, we grapple with the process of reshaping it from an overtly imperialist tradition towards a decolonized and diversified domain, in terms of content, capabilities and didactics. Throughout the chapter we provide examples, databases and go-to manuals that have been established to foster pluralist economic education. This chapter does not diminish the challenges that exist in economics education but also seeks to point out instances where progress has been made, and offers avenues that exist for economic pluricultures to emerge.

Keywords

Economic Education, Heterodox Economics, Pluralism, Social Studies of Economics

1. Introduction

The advances of heterodox economics manifest across numerous domains: among others, research, politics, public discourse, and education. It is fair to state that the realm of economics education (EE) has shown a remarkable level of critical-minded activity and innovative impulses in the first quarter of the twenty-first century and especially since the global financial crisis of 2008. How so?

First and foremost, the economics community has seen a dramatic rise in student initiatives, criticizing the existent curriculum, organizing for, and in many cases even self-developing the educational reality they hoped to find when enrolling for the subject in the first place. International landmarks in this development are the ISiPE (2014) open letter, the 2016 publication of *The Econocracy*, the launching of Exploring Economics, and the institutionalization of Rethinking Economics. The pressure built and maintained by economics students has brought a wave of EE innovations unseen before, both in terms of quantity and depth. This is true for content production, didactic, and institutional innovations. Throughout this chapter, we will provide highlighted boxes containing references and links to databases that compile work (mostly) originating from this movement.

A second development in the field is that EE has increasingly evolved into a subject matter for heterodox economics research. An extensive body of knowledge has been created on the status quo of conventional economics teaching, that is in terms of study material (Green 2012; Zuidhof 2014; Bäuerle 2021), instructor (Mearman *et al.* 2022), student perception (Colander 2007; Mearman *et al.* 2014; Pühringer & Bäuerle 2019), and curriculum design (Nesiba 2012; Jatteau & Egerer 2022; Lambertini & Silva Neira 2022). On the other hand, numerous volumes have been published to substantiate, orient, and foster post-mainstream pedagogical practice in economics (Reardon 2009; Coyle 2012; Madi & Reardon 2014; Decker *et al.* 2018, 2020; Feraboli & Morelli 2018). That is to say, as of today, the field has highly invested in catching up with the mainstream teaching discourse (Hoyt & McGoldrick 2012, 2019) and some argue that it is actually exceeding it in terms of depth and width (Mearman *et al.* 2022: 49–50). Crucially, these developments have also brought forward new didactic material such as textbooks (Hill & Myatt 2010; Fischer *et al.* 2017).¹

Thirdly, think tanks and (donor) foundations have traditionally been vital in the establishment of EE in the postwar period (see the references to private institutions in Saunders

¹ For a list of heterodox textbooks and teaching material, see Kapeller & Klann (2024), World Economics Association (2024), and the boxes in sections 3 and 5.

2011). As of today, this field can itself be studied as a reflection (*vis-à-vis* enabling force) of the pluralist turn (The Management Committee of the Association for Heterodox Economics 2015). Organizations such as Partners for a New Economy, the Young Scholars Initiative, and the Hewlett Foundation played a central role in developing and consolidating heterodox EE initiatives over the course of the past 10-15 years.

Despite these advances, the overall reality of economics (higher) education is still largely dominated by mainstream approaches, both in terms of content and form (Center for Economy Studies 2024a). After all, undergraduate programs barely reflect on the methodological and theoretical developments of the discipline (Ferguson 2011). One explanation for the continuing ‘reform gap’ despite this latent openness appears to be institutional path-dependencies reinforcing the reproduction of a highly streamlined set-up (Hodgson 2019). Other explanations could include, an overall disdain of academic teaching in career paths, fears for the employability of students, homogeneity of topics needed for student mobility to other universities or publishers’ support in the workload-sparse usage of already well-selling textbooks are tentative examples of this institutional pre-configuration. While highlighting pluralist advances in EE throughout this chapter, we recommend having in mind this overall context.

Instead of providing a comprehensive, descriptively accurate picture of the heterogeneous EE developments (which is almost impossible due to word count limits), we chose to focus on encompassing dimensions that this ‘arena’ is structured along. That is to say, we will touch upon recent developments in the dimensions of scope (the second section), content (the third section), capabilities (the fourth section) and didactics (the fifth section) before concluding with synthesizing remarks in the last section. Besides conceptual remarks on said dimensions, the chapter will provide examples from practice around the world in three text boxes. These insights are not meant as conclusive case studies, but as flashlights on an educational realm in transition. Certainly, we also hope to inspire lecturers (and students) around the world to reflect on and possibly rethink our pedagogical practice—over and over again.

2. Scope: from Grand Theories to Grand Challenges

In attempting to get at a first grip on the multiple ambitions to pluralize EE, the question of its overall framing and contextualization offers a vital starting point for internal differentiation. The lowest common denominator of the discourse lies in the opening up of ‘orthodox’ educational approaches. This means that with pluralist interventions, the overall scope of EE increases. However, within this common framework, there are drastic differences in the degree and quality

of this contextualization, which echo those that have already been raised in relation to the notions of heterodoxy and pluralism (Bigo & Negru 2008; Dobusch & Kapeller 2012). After all, within the established institutional framework of academia, researchers and teachers are mostly the same people and, typically, they are not educated in educational philosophy or didactics (Mearman *et al.* 2022: 46). Personal affinities and/or epistemological considerations thus seamlessly translate into pedagogical considerations.

Against the backdrop of orthodox EE, three archetypical heterodox approaches to EE can be identified, with the defining *tertium comparationis* the respective degree of epistemo-political contextualization (see Table 1). It should be noted, however, that the boundaries are notoriously blurred and their occasional crossing in real-world EE practice is to be seen as the rule, rather than the exception. The meta-framework is intended as a tool for ongoing comparison and discussion of different approaches to EE.

Ethic	Aim	Content	Didactics	Roles	Scope
Orthodoxy	Overcoming epistemic deficits	Canonical knowledge	Repetitive	Knower / Non-knower	Academic + Disciplinary
Fragmented Pluralism	Overcoming epistemic deficits	Canonical knowledge	Repetitive	Knower / Non-knower	Academic + Disciplinary
Interested Pluralism	Learning epistemic possibilities	Different theories and methods	Comparative	Knower / Non-knower	Academic + Disciplinary or Multi- or interdisciplinary
Transformative Pluralism	Social transformation	Epistemic and practical possibilities	Experimental	Co-creators	Societal + Trans- or postdisciplinary

Table 1: different EE archetypes, stratified along their degree of epistemo-political contextualization

Fragmentally pluralized EE expands or replaces orthodox content with content from a different paradigm or school of thought (for example, Post Keynesian economics and Marxian economics) and leaves the rest of the educational environment intact. That is, where students had to learn principles or outright truths as emanating from mainstream theory, they now have to learn those of a different paradigm. The content of EE continues to be canonical knowledge, which translates into didactic approaches of repetition, exemplification, and application of the given canon. The educational setting is arranged along an epistemic differential (instructor > students) to be gradually overcome by pedagogical means. Students thus enter the classroom with

epistemic deficits and are meant to leave them with less. Since this approach, in the broader picture, still unfolds under the epistemic condition of orthodoxy, the epistemic situation is turning from being monist to being binary (orthodox vs. one heterodox approach), typically translating into discursive antagonisms. Different heterodox approaches, or the possibilities emanating from different disciplines are either neglected or downplayed by similar means as under orthodox conditions. Orthodox scholars are now part of the 'non-knowers' as well, who appear deficient (either through ignorance of heterodox economics or disagreeing with it) in relation to the heterodox canon in place. Overall, the contextualization of heterodox EE of this kind is *academic*, meaning that a quest for (the real) truth is paramount, as it is bound to the disciplinary framework of economics which would be better off with the right paradigm in place. In short, one paradigm is to be substituted by another (for a discussion of such 'paradigmism,' see Garnett 2006). Teaching the alternative paradigm to the discipline's prospects is one way to contribute to this paradigm shift.

EE in the spirit of interested pluralism, on the other hand, aims to provide economics students with epistemic possibilities as they are compiled by various heterodox traditions or even neighboring sciences. Students are offered a wide range of theoretical and methodological options, all of which have, in principle, an equal right to contribute to a pluralized economic debate. Instead of continuing in the tradition of paradigmatic successions, a new meta-paradigm or "pan-paradigmatic agenda" (Garnett 2006: 521) is promoted. Consequentially, the ability to navigate within this expanded set of possibilities becomes crucial. This is why comparatist competencies and frameworks enjoy special place within this archetype (Dimmelmeier *et al.* 2017). The archetypical roles of a knower/non-knower remain in place, although the overall base of knowers is expanded dramatically. In addition to scholars from all corners of the economics discipline (for some, even mainstream economists!), scholars from other disciplines working on economy-related topics are welcome as partners. This can take the form of an additive expansion of epistemic resources (multidisciplinary pluralism) or a commitment to mutual dialogue between heterodox economists and non-economics scholars (interdisciplinary pluralism). Crucially, the scope ends at academic boundaries. Interested pluralism resembles a *scholarly* ethos that aims at better science, conducted by scholars who are trained to be pluralistic. This approach can be seen as the more or less reflected meta-paradigm of both the students-led as well and the scholars-led efforts of the past 20 years, wherein it might be seen as diverging from older approaches in the heterodox community inclined to deeper fragmentation and monism (Garnett 2006; Sent 2007).

The last and most recently emerging EE pedagogical ethic to be introduced could be labelled 'transformative pluralism.' It contrasts sharply with the other three cases in the overall contextualization of EE. In this educational ethic, economics and its educational branches are related to—and *designed towards*—the broader socio-ecological arena they are embedded in (Decker *et al.* 2020: Part III). Self-sufficient scientific reproduction guidelines (such as paradigmatic truths or meta-paradigmatic ethics) give way to considerations rooted in the social functions of science of societies-in-transformation. Instead of offering more 'grand theories' as a rule, econo-pedagogical ventures are being directed towards 'grand challenges,' which then—and only then—lead to the expansion and reconfiguration of curricula, syllabi, and so on. Consequently, the criteria for the validity and usefulness of EE content and didactics do not derive solely from intra-scientific debates, but from a resonant relationship between (economic) theories, methods, etc. on the one hand, and societal issues on the other, be it in epistemic and/or practical terms. The aim is not to extend epistemic possibilities, but to find adequate ones. In other words, the criterion of problem-centeredness involves limits to pluralism.

The resulting learning experience therefore builds on the classroom's engagement with theories and methods that might be appropriate for understanding transformative processes. In some cases, it even aims at directly 'doing' transformations, be it in local community projects or real-world laboratories. With a specific social issue at the center of the educational process, rather than a 'pacified' body of knowledge, its *modus operandi* is experimental and notoriously ambiguous in nature. Rather than uncritically reproducing or critically comparing, these ventures aim to *generate* knowledge along the educational process. During this process, rather vertical roles of a knower/non-knower give way to rather horizontal co-creator roles with different responsibilities, skills, and backgrounds. In a sense, (epistemic and political) deficits or challenges continue to play an essential role, but they are framed not as an individual problem but as a collective one to be overcome through a process of mutual engagement. Crucially, these challenges, whether they come in the form of injustices, inequalities, or environmental degradation, are not only epistemic in nature, but they are identified as (ontological) problems in the lifeworld.

Box 1: Pluralist curricula

In the past decade, numerous case studies have been performed, mostly by pluralist student groups, to assess the plurality of economics study programs. Center for Economy Studies (2024a) has aggravated the findings and have, based on them, developed a Curriculum Review Tool to facilitate further inquiries (Center for Economy Studies 2024b). While the overall findings corroborate a highly orthodox design of economics curricula, there is a growing list of single study programs that offer viable options for students interested in pluralized EE. On an international level, Kapeller & Klann (2024)'s *Heterodox Economics Directory* offer a recently updated list. The list reflects a strategic development, fostered by all agents involved in redesigning EE to invest in an entire curriculum change, rather than single add-on courses. While programs such as CORE Econ or the INET (2024) curriculum clearly outline programs in the spirit of interested pluralism, the Gender Analysis tracks on MA and PhD levels offered by the American University and the Regenerative Economics MA program offered by Schumacher College (2024) reflect issue-centered approaches in the spirit of transformative pluralism.

With the Pluralist Curriculum, Exploring Economics (2024a) developed an innovative approach, curating pluralist courses from different institutions, and facilitating their participation by students from other institutions as well as the subsequent acknowledgement by respective institutions. Sam de Muijnck & Joris Tieleman (2021: 373, 387) provide a handbook with generative ideas on how to design a pluralist curriculum, including example courses and curricula.

Finally, we would also like to mention a trend towards decidedly extracurricular programs, for example, in the form of summer schools such as the REFA Festival taking place yearly since 2018 (Rethinking Economics for Africa 2024) or the manifold workshops organized by the Economics Transformation Project, hosted by J-PAL North America (2024).

On the one hand, this development is fueled by megatrends in academia, such as the move towards transdisciplinarity, the responsabilization of science, and a closer science/society nexus (Maasen & Lieven 2006). On the other hand, it is supported by specific philosophies that are gaining strength within the heterodox community, such as pragmatist philosophies (Unger 2007a; Kolodko 2014), feminist thought (Harding 1995; Barker & Kuiper 2003; Dengler & Seebacher 2019), postcolonial thought (Zein-Elabdin & Charusheela 2004; Zein-Elabdin 2009), and literature aiming at decolonizing economics itself (Chelwa & Shringarpure 2021; Agunsoye *et al.* 2022; Alves *et al.* 2024). All of them reconstruct supposedly value-neutral and generalizable philosophies of science (meta-paradigms) as well as specific theories put forward by academic economics (paradigms such as neoclassical economics) as projects of domination. In this vein, some propose to even abandon disciplinarity as such (Jessop & Sum 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). This development is flanked by an increased reflection on the socio-political pervasiveness of mainstream economics (MacKenzie *et al.* 2007; Maeße *et al.* 2021), and thus a heightened

awareness about social impacts of econo-scientific endeavors. Crucially, hierarchies in/of gender and race (Bayer & Rouse 2016), cultures (Kvangraven & Kesar 2023), age (Ambler *et al.* 2022), professions (Winzler 2019), human-nature relations (Tallgauer & Schank 2023), and their interrelated economic aspects are not only seen as external problems, but as deeply embedded in mainstream (and sometimes heterodox) economics and EE. Against this background, the quest to pluralize the discipline entails not just an epistemic transformation, but also a profoundly political one. In a way, EE is being recontextualized in order to self-critically account for its *political* pervasiveness.²

3. Content: from Disciplined Ignorance to Contested Knowledges

As we grapple with what it means to transform the content of EE, in both interested and transformative pluralisms, an underlying motive has been that of epistemic justice. This is conceptualized by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 4, emphasis added) as “democratizing ‘knowledge’ from its current rendition in the singular into its plural known as ‘knowledges.’ It is also ranged across overrepresentation of Eurocentric thought in knowledge, social theory *and education*.” In a nutshell, these two sentences also represent different notions of epistemic justice as emphasized in the two paradigms: while interested pluralism conceptualizes the pluralization of economic knowledges as an (intra-scientific) end, transformative pluralism challenges epistemic injustices in their socio-cultural functions. Given the problems that abound in the economics discipline, one can immediately sense what a fundamental challenge the conceptualization of *knowledges*, irrespective of its scope, encompasses for economics more generally, and EE specifically. Since there are a number of arguments for EE content in the spirit of interested pluralism out there, we will here focus on the question of what to choose in terms of economic content when thoroughly reflecting it against its social genesis, embeddedness, and therefore impact.

In this regard, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 3) closely couples the quest for epistemic justice to that of epistemic freedom, which is “fundamentally about the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism.” Transforming educational content, hence, translates into decentering it from

² As such, an important distinction between transformative pluralism and the other two pluralizing strands, is that it entails an explicitly political ethic, whereas the other strands formulate purely epistemic ethics. From the standpoint of transformative pluralism, one could certainly criticize this position as falling short, but at this stage we do not criticize one ethic by means of another. Rather, we simply try to describe them as accurately as possible in order to have them laid out for comparativist purposes.

inherited Eurocentrism. There are various understandings of Eurocentrism. For the purposes of this chapter, we find it useful to view it through the work of Kvangraven & Kesar (2023: 1725)—who draw from the work of Amin (2010)—in that:

Eurocentrism can be seen as an understanding of the world that centers the idea of endogenous capitalist development in Western Europe, which in turn is associated with the Enlightenment values of rationality and objectivity and views the rest of the world only in relation to it.

We highlight that an important component from a pedagogical perspective is also that “the problem with Eurocentrism is less that it exist as a place from which to understand the world, than the fact that it has been projected as the neutral, objective and universal one” (Rutazibwa 2018: 165).

In thinking through the content of what we teach in economics, we find it helpful to frame these confluence of factors (Eurocentrism, capitalist development, rationality, universality) in relation to an example that Zein-Elabdin (2009: 1154) points out about postcolonial insights for “imagining different economic relations.” Zein-Elabdin highlights the work of Trulsson (1997) who examined the decision-making behavior of entrepreneurs in Tanzania. This research showed that despite these entrepreneurs importing labor-saving technologies, they continued to employ their work force as a commitment to kin which would “appear irrational to a Western observer” (*ibid.*: 44). As Zein-Elabdin (2009: 1163) emphasizes, “‘self-interest’ and ‘efficiency’ have been hybridized with social obligation in a way that persistently compromises market rationality.” A typical, Eurocentrically designed, economics curriculum would not empower students to perceive this ambiguity. This is especially so at the undergraduate level, where the narrow conceptualization of rationality and objectivity, linked to utility and profit maximization, stand in stark contrast to the social obligations that Zein-Elabdin highlights. This illustrates that EE content would (have to) look vastly different if lecturers and students were to be allowed to think, theorize, interpret the world, and write from where they are located.

Some may respond that this perpetuation of rationality and objectivity emphasizes the urgency of pluralism in the economics discipline and EE, especially in undergraduate courses. However, pluralism in EE, as postcolonial and decolonial scholars emphasize, can far too easily continue to uphold Eurocentric principles. While Pradella (2017: 147) is not explicitly discussing economics education, her concern that a “pluralisation of voices that leaves Eurocentric frameworks intact” can easily be transferred to the domain discussed here. This is why the

lecturers' and students' ability to design EE from a source of epistemic freedom as outlined above is so vital for scholars in the tradition of transformative pluralism.

Box 2: Pluralist teaching material

Socialized and embedded within the arguably most lucid example of a textbook science in the Kuhnian sense within the social sciences, it must not surprise that heterodox economists continue to produce and use this didactical possibility. This is reflected by compilations such as those by the Heterodox Economics Directory and the World Economics Association mentioned in footnote 1.

However, reflecting the methodological variations and influences within the field, pluralist teaching material encompasses more than textbooks. Especially in branches with affinities towards the humanities and/or social theory, sociology, political sciences, original readings of economics classics or recent monographies play an important role. This is expressed, for instance, in the syllabi's reading lists hyperlinked above or in respective compilations, such as those by the D-ECON Movement (2024) or the Manchester Post-Crash Economics Society (2014). The Nawi Collective (2025) has also collated a digital archive of work produced by African feminist economists. IDEAS (2025) as a pluralist network, has a wide variety of resources that can be used for teaching purposes which centers Global South scholars. The curated reading proposals by Exploring Economics, categorized by schools of thought and difficulty, have doubtlessly elevated these resources to a new level.

A recent development is the increased usage of digital teaching material beyond 'just' compiled texts. Videographic material, such as the [ECO]nomics Webinar provided by INET (2022), the Complexity Explorer platform with ready-to-use tutorials and courses developed by the Santa Fe Institute (2024) or the MINE Website developed by Malte Weber (2024), providing a responsive platform for studying relationships between nature and economies illustrate the didactically appealing and at the same time easy-to-access qualities of digitalized pluralist EE. Furthermore, Youtube channels such as Age of Economics (2024) provide resources for 'uninstructed' self-education, thereby enabling 'undisciplined' engagement with economic theories, thinkers, and realities. Beyond mere transferal of knowledge, experimental didactics such as the real-world action labs have gained increasing attention.

As Kayatekin (2009: 1114) offers in the symposium published in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, "postcolonial theory could likewise be inspiring in challenging the modernism in difference strands of feminist, post-Keynesian, institutionalist and a varied and long tradition of Marxist Political Economy." Chester (2021) affirms that "heterodox economics scholars also have an ethical and moral obligation – thus responsibility – to 'diversify and decolonise' their teaching, research and other practices given our own experiences of marginalisation, exclusion and disregard by the mainstream." In terms of the opportunities and challenges that exist for a radical

transformation of EE, we do require a more nuanced understanding of the priorities that exist among heterodox economists. Kvangraven & Kesar (2023) assess to what extent academic economists are concerned with decolonizing economics teaching based on a survey of 498 economists in mainstream and heterodox/pluralist departments. There are numerous interesting and important conclusions from this study, but one that is especially fitting to highlight here is that

in contrast to the mainstream of the discipline, the respondents in heterodox or pluralist economics departments fared somewhat better in terms of their openness to the decolonization agenda ... however ... even among heterodox economists, decolonizing economics is not a top priority. (*ibid.*: 1743)

Against this backdrop it is worth emphasizing the opportunities for allyship and fruitful engagement of decolonizing ambitions and heterodox theories. Relationist methodologies, as embedded in some heterodox strands (for example, Wolff *et al.* 2012; Alves & Kvangraven 2020) can be useful in revealing the “interaction of the economic with other social processes, and other inherent contradictions under capitalism” (Kvangraven & Kesar 2023: 1727).

To sum up, the act of choosing the ‘right’ content, here, already reveals an emancipatory component since those epistemic possibilities are to be chosen that actually allow for the agents’ empowerment to make sense of their respective lifeworlds and issues therein. In a deconstructive ambition, such a take challenges established, possibly oppressive, bodies of knowledge. But it can also mean that students (and lecturers) are not only entitled to reproduce and critique established bodies of knowledge, but even co-create knowledge that resonates with the world they live in. Certainly, such an approach demands, first and foremost, adequate didactics.

4. Capabilities: From Reproduction to Reflection and Action

When observed from a science studies perspective, educational programs do play a (maybe *the*) crucial role in perpetuating pre-established paradigms. Prominently, this is expressed in the synonymic use of the concepts ‘normal science’ and ‘textbook science’ by Kuhn. The central competency fostered by the educational programs of disciplined sciences appears to be the reproduction of theories and procedures. As already Kuhn himself underlined, these reproductive competencies are not just intellectual in nature, but bear a strong performative aspect: “the process of learning a theory depends upon the study of applications, including practice problem-

solving both with a pencil and paper and with instruments in the laboratory” (Kuhn 1996:47).³ The defining feature of a normal-scientific education in the Kuhnian sense is its overall calibration towards a predefined set of knowledge and related procedures to be achieved by deficitary newcomers to a discipline. Benchmarked knowledge allows for standardized assessment procedures; didactical considerations are limited to the technical quest of maximum efficiency in transferring this knowledge (see, for instance, the scope of mainstream EE considerations in Allgood, Walstad, and Siegfried 2015). This kind of standardized education, an „epistemological steeplechase, toward a preordained end“ (Meyer and Land 2005:379), is deeply embedded in the etymological roots of central pedagogical terms such as competencies (from lat.: *competere*) or curriculum.⁴ Among the social sciences, economics ranks amongst the most standardized disciplines when it comes to content, didactics and assessment procedures (Graupe 2019).

As laid out before, such an understanding of education does not necessarily conflict with notions of heterodoxy. One standardized monoculture, for instance, might be replaced by another one, inspired by one heterodox tradition. However, bearing in mind the ascendancy of interested and transformative pluralisms over the past 15 years, we would like to propose a different vocabulary for capabilities reflecting a pluralist EE. Irrespective of the question whether the concept is well suited to rethink well-being and development (for a critical perspective see Shilliam 2012), we think that Sen’s notion of *capabilities* can be instructive for pedagogical ends as pursued by the heterodox community. Sen put people’s agency—their *being* and *doing* in light of a *functioning*, aiming at a freely chosen *achievement*—at the heart of processes of value creation (Sen 1985). Well-being is then seen “in terms of functioning vectors and the capability to achieve them” (Sen 1985:203). When transferring such an understanding to the educational realm, the motivations, questions and goals of students (their *functioning vectors* and envisioned *achievements*) are to be seen as crucial cornerstones of *their* educational processes. Taking seriously such an approach hardly contrasts with an educational approach prevailing in ‘normal-science’ EE, where beings, doings and functionings are all aligned at achievements *chosen by third parties* (especially disciplinary traditions and program heads). When taking a Senian approach, achievements as envisioned by students take a decisive role. The notion of capability, thus, goes beyond the transferal of predetermined skill sets but invites students to take a proactive role in their educational journey. Empirical studies show a threefold motivational background in the

³ Note, that what is someone able to do when educated economically is, hence, not only a question of mental, but also of embodied dispositions.

⁴ “The term curriculum captures this perfectly, originally denoting a circular racecourse of standard length used to order the competitive movement of charioteers” (Hershock 2008, 26).

undergraduate economics student body: (1) understanding economic matters, (2) practically engaging in economic matters and (3) politically transforming economic matters (Pühringer and Bäuerle 2019):

- 1) The desire to *understand* economic matters is mostly rooted in students' real-world experiences before they enroll for the curriculum (Mearman, Papa, and Webber 2014).⁵ 'Why is there such a thing as poverty?', 'How can we explain the recent Argentinian economic crisis?', 'How does (neo-)colonialism continue to shape economic interactions today?', 'How can economies be designed in a sustainable manner?' are typical expressions of this decidedly *epistemic* motivation. Being capable to answer these questions demands the ability to find, understand, compare and eventually integrate epistemic possibilities as provided by social scientists working on these questions and thoroughly relate them to the specific case in question. Note that learning epistemic possibilities, as envisioned by interested pluralism, alone does not suffice to accomplish this goal. The understanding of theories and methods is a means to the end of understanding a specific aspect of economic reality. Enabling and assessing educational progress entails, in such a panorama, both the epistemically sound reproduction of a specific interpretative possibility, as well as the concise 'transferal' of such theories and methods to the issue at question.
- 2) A second motivation virulent in the economics student body entails the *practical engagement* in economic matters. One could argue that this is a 'false' motivation, to be delegated to fields such as business administration or entrepreneurship. In fact, in many national educational traditions, business administration and economics students do share a lot of courses, especially at the beginning of undergraduate programs. What is more, economics introductory courses have an enormous outreach far beyond its own narrow disciplinary borders.⁶ That is to say that economics instructors notoriously face motivational structures in their student body that do not match their own disciplinary (or sub-disciplinary) fashions. Amongst them ranks students' motivation to learn *useful* and *applicable* knowledge. On the other hand, to actually address these motivations reveals, a possibility to further promote pluralist EE against the backdrop of typically highly abstract

⁵ See, for illustrative reasons, the impressive list of well-known economists' own motivations in (Mearman, Berger, and Guizzo 2021:7).

⁶ In the German case, in the summer term 2019 approximately 22,4% of the entire 2.7 mio. strong student body (any subject) had to take a mandatory economics introductory course; while only 21.581 students (= 0,008%) were enrolled the same semester in an economics curriculum (Bäuerle, Pühringer, and Ötsch 2020:7).

mainstream study content unfit for real-world application, let alone instructive potential for practice. Successful examples of a practice-oriented pluralist education include the usage of transdisciplinary methods such as action labs, where students are invited to experiment with social or technological innovations in a given setting.⁷ Another example would be courses or curricula designated to entrepreneurial activities. Here, a pluralist edge in the spirit of both interested and transformative pluralisms can be seen in the contextualization of entrepreneurial activities, materializing in the form of social and/or ecological start-ups, initiatives or organizations.⁸ The decisive capability fostered here is the ability to use and apply knowledge learned or generated in the economics curriculum not just to understand, but *to shape* economic matters, thereby becoming an active part of economic reality itself.

- 3) Finally, the aspiration to *politically transform* economic matters is to be discussed. ‘The Economy’, in this instance, is seen as something problematic, that is in the sense of unjust, ecologically detrimental or, generally speaking, counterdirectional to normative considerations upheld by students. This clearly goes beyond the textbook dichotomy of (normative) policy-advice based on (positive) knowledge. Enrolling in an economics program is connected to the desire to challenge this version of a capitalist/neoliberal/neocolonial/unjust etc. economy *and* to develop it into something more aligned to different normative standards. Typically, this motivation is closely linked to *understanding economic matters*, although with a decisive critical edge. Understanding, here, entails the critical penetration of fixed answers which are themselves seen as a means of control (c.f. the tradition of critical pedagogy as developed by Giroux 1983). However, it embraces two more capabilities, both of which are marked by a generative/creative component: one addresses the ability to reflect on different ethical standpoints and envision desirable vectors for social alteration on the basis of explicit normative considerations and imaginations. A second one goes beyond a mere epistemic challenge onto the performative *experimentation* with social relationships beyond those envisioned by orthodox theory and practice. Since a lot of (even heterodox) curricula tend to uphold a classical stance of education as a purely epistemic endeavor, these performative capabilities are rarely met by the formalized parts of an economics curriculum. However, students with that emphasis typically (co-)create opportunities for politico-economic transformation on their own account: be it via the engagement in student

⁷ See, for instance, the Doughnut Economics Action Labs (DEAL 2024) as inspired by Kate Raworth (2017).

⁸ See, for instance, the “Social Entrepreneurship and Impact” course offered by India based Ashoka University (2024).

initiatives, activism outside academia and/or entrepreneurial activities (see above), based on strong considerations of purpose and ethics. In a sense, engaging in a pluralist student group on campus precisely reflects the “agency freedom” Sen (1985:203–4) had in mind: against the backdrop of institutional obstacles, students proactively address their own motivational disposition, thereby developing themselves, in some cases even the institutional setting itself .

Note, that none of these motivations aims at ‘Learning to think like an (heterodox) economist’. When taking a student-centered (rather than a dogma-centered approach) against the backdrop of Sen’s theory, capabilities might enter the discussion that are typically not accounted for by considerations rooted in long-held traditions of a given scientific community.⁹ Besides providing orientation and guidance by means of their respective capabilities, instructors and faculty officials need to center the expectations and lived-experiences of students, so that pluralist economics curricula can thrive.

5. Didactics: from Hierarchies to Co-Creation

Fourcade *et al.* (2015: 89) have documented a “pronounced hierarchy that exists within the [economics] discipline, especially in comparison to other social sciences.” They conclude this by studying how economists get jobs, how they get published, and how their professional associations are organized in relation to other social sciences. We argue that this pronounced hierarchy exists and is continuously being replicated also through the didactics of economics. While there are certainly advantages to social differentiation (that is along gradients in knowledge), hierarchies become problematic when disconnected from a concrete and shared purpose (that is that of learning) and reproduced merely for its own sake. This is why, especially when it comes to EE didactics, we propose to explicitly and continuously reflect and build upon the questions of “Why study economics?” and “Who do I want to become by studying economics?” (Bäuerle 2021: 53).

⁹ As explorative elicitations by Rethinking Economics indicate, a good share of the now discussed capabilities are actually demanded by employers as well (Yurko 2018).

Box 3: Pluralist courses

On the level of single courses, pluralist lecturers around the world continue to contribute to the opening up of EE by treating their syllabi as public commons. Enhanced by digitalization and institutional caretakers, interested lecturers can, as of today, rely on huge compilations of non-orthodox syllabi (for example, The Economics Network 2024; IAFFE 2024; URPE 2024; HOPE Center 2024; Exploring Economics 2024b). Besides introductions into single subjects, the history of economic thought or economic methodology, formulated in the spirit of fragmented or interested pluralisms, there is an increasing number of pluralist courses aiming at social transformation. This is especially true for courses originating from the Global South, such as those developed by GIHPTE Colombia (2024), or the Organised Women of the Faculty of Economics at UNAM México City (Rethinking Economics 2021). However, courses such as Decolonizing Economics performed at Kings College London (Kvangraven & Dutt 2023) or the institutionalized elective course Economics of Social Change at University of Greenwich (Rethinking Economics 2023) underline, that critical EE in the Global North is increasingly levelled against social issues, that, in part, are deeply embedded in the discipline itself.

A tradition that offers orientations for those questions and respective didactical decisions for both instructors and students are decolonial feminisms. Although decolonial feminisms are being integrated more frequently in the heterodox community lately, there is still very few explicit conceptual and instructive work on what this integration actually entails for EE. This is why, throughout this chapter, we refer to the learnings of other disciplines.

Vergès (2018: 100) points towards the far-reaching implications when allowing oneself to re-think dominant educational ideals:

the architecture of the classroom must set up a hierarchy between those who possess knowledge and those who do not ... It is top/down; it instills a deep disconnect between oneself and the world; it teaches competition and individualism; it institutes a strong separation between disciplines.

What is important for Vergès is to no longer have these strong separations in the classroom between humanities and life sciences “at a moment when the need to bring multiple understandings of the world—the social, the cultural and ‘nature’—is more urgent than ever” (*ibid.*). Hence, reframing the educational setting is not just a question of different educational philosophies, but one of centering transformations of the lifeworld to which education necessarily has to relate in some way or another.

If we reflect critically as we read this—students and lecturers alike—about how many of us have become as we have studied and taught economics this contribution by Vergès may make us feel uncomfortable at best and, at worst, may seem insurmountable. There may even be those among us who would argue that if we take this call seriously, we would stray away from the very essence of EE, even when filled with heterodox content. In such an instance, the words of bell hooks can serve to animate this cause, within a discipline sometimes recalcitrant to change and openly hostile to differences, by affirming that “the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (hooks 1994: 13). For heterodox economists working in the spirit of transformative pluralism, this space is not just a question of epistemic possibilities, but also of possible social relations beyond domination and competition—*to be practiced in the very classroom itself*. This is not to look past the severe challenges that exist within the neoliberal institutions of tertiary education but to point towards “the smaller variations that are at hand to produce the bigger variations that do not yet exist. Experimentalism is existential bootstrapping”; it is about changing the context of established arrangement and assumed belief, little by little and step by step, as we go about our business (Unger 2007b: 43).

Decolonial feminisms can be an essential point of departure as we think through how to move from hierarchies to co-creation in our economics pedagogy. As de Jong *et al.* (2018: xv) point out “critical pedagogy understands teachers as learners and students as co-responsible with their teachers for the creation of a communal space of learning.” We agree with Lubicz-Nwrocka & Bovill (2023: 1745) that co-creation can be adequately conceptualized as a process which requires students to be given more responsibility for sharing decision making about learning, teaching, and assessment than is often the case with other active learning and student engagement initiatives. Throughout co-creation experiences, students’ perspectives and contributions are valued, and the hierarchy between the teacher and students is reduced.

We emphasize, however, that what is an essential element to this co-creation is also to recognize the “epistemic injustices that prevent people from being able to share their knowledge” (Vargas *et al.* 2020: 91). As Fricker (2015: 5) aptly puts it, knowledge is bi-directional “requiring not only that one may receive, but also that one may give.” Explicit examples of co-creational pedagogical settings are reported on by Bovill & Woolmer (2019: 409), with regard to students designing courses, curricula in direct engagement with lecturers but also institutionally embedded in curriculum approval systems.

Beyond co-creation being an opportunity for lecturers to radically reconceptualize EE, research points to the benefits that students experience of co-creation. Some of the benefits that students experience from co-creation suggest enthusiasm for taking a more active role in their

higher education experience (Bovill *et al.* 2016), and the development of a range of graduate attributes (Cook-Sather *et al.* 2014). Seeing co-creation as central to flattening hierarchies, does of course, not negate the challenges that exist in implementing this (see the systematic literature review of Zarandi *et al.* 2024).

Co-creation does open up important avenues for us to think through the opportunities for assessing economics students differently. One might argue that, ideally, a co-creation of knowledge would be pursued for the purposes of epistemic freedom and liberation, and that tying this to assessments forces lecturers and students to have to perform the ‘mastering’ of these knowledges. However, we think that given the constraints within neoliberal organizations that require grading, it is still feasible to construct assessment opportunities that allow for transformative pedagogy.

When it comes to operationalizing decolonial-feminist education, we draw inspiration from some of the cases collated in Walker & Boni (2020). Cin & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm (2020) give us insight into participatory action research (PAR) in a Turkish university with undergraduate students from low-income households and conservative backgrounds. The work employed a feminist participatory video-production method, which aimed to give students the opportunity to highlight gender equality issues they wanted to work on and then publicly display their videography to garner greater attention. Walker & Mathebula (2020) also crafted a participatory photovoice project with low-income students in South Africa. In this instance students were given digital cameras to document their lived experiences through the process of visual and oral storytelling.

While Trisos *et al.* (2021) are wrestling with decoloniality and anti-oppressive practices for ecology and not economics *per se*, their deliberations on what it means to know/learn a (different) language point to important pluralist EE considerations. They explain how in isiXhosa

[the] root word for the environment is difficult to translate into English. *Indalo* means both creation and nature. *Kwezendalo* means of or in the environment. *Umdali* is the creator. The implication is that people (abantu) are located within the environment. Recent Western ecological concepts such as social-ecological or coupled human-natural systems are therefore already the *de facto* way of thinking in many non-European languages. (*ibid.*: 1206)

The enormous significance of language and framing has risen as a major research topic in mainstream and heterodox discourses alike (Sacco 2020). Pedagogical practice in economics

still tends to handle and introduce central economic terms such as wealth, resources, and markets as bearers of a presumably fixed meaning, with definitions to be uncritically memorized. In such a move, the crucial act of defining and signifying is carried out by instructors (or textbook authors) themselves and, typically, the act itself is being concealed behind an aura of normality, scientificity, and/or neutrality. Educational theorist Maxine Greene (2007: 9) carves out the hidden violence involved in such pedagogies:

More often than not, they are the languages of domination, entitlement, and power; and there are terrible silences where ordinary human speech ought to be audible, silences our pedagogies ought somehow to repair. The modern world is, as well, a world where what we conceive to be our tradition is petrified, located in private enclaves, or surrounded by auras that distance it from lived experience, from the landscapes of our lives.

Transformative pedagogies, on the other hand, aim at empowering students “to view themselves as conscious, reflexive namers and speakers if their particular standpoints are acknowledged, if interpretive dialogues are encouraged, if interrogation is kept alive” (*ibid.*: 57). And she emphasizes: “transformative pedagogies must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation” (*ibid.*: 51). Didactically speaking, students are not asked to reproduce codified knowledge sets, but to experiment with epistemic (even practical!) possibilities in relation to an issue they care for (Bäuerle 2020). Along the way, both a language and a “critical community” (Greene 2007: 196) emerge that do not fit the dichotomies of passed/failed, 1/0, or right/wrong, but rather thrive in the resonance between signified and signifiers, and their co-evolution into more desirable grounds.

Greene’s (2007) general educational remarks resonate with Shackelford’s (1992) work in the *American Economic Review* on feminist pedagogy in the economics classroom. Shackelford emphasizes that there is no “essential feminist pedagogy” and she seeks to “describe, rather than define, what employing a feminist pedagogy might entail” (*ibid.*: 570). Shackelford (1992: 571) puts forward three themes as lenses for students (and we would emphasize lecturers as well), to challenge economics education. These are:

an explicit goal of ending patriarchy and oppression and empowering or giving voice and influence to those disempowered by patriarchal structures; validation of forms of knowing other than ‘objective,’ ‘hierarchical,’ or ‘authority-laden’ models; and a focus on practice, with an emphasis on process over product or content ... Knowledge that students

construct rather than memorize becomes more meaningful, because it is about them and therefore important to their lives.

It goes without saying that this would be a vastly different approach to the “formalistic economic modeling” (Lawson 2004: 22) that has become the beating heart of the economics discipline.

These lenses are particularly necessary if we acknowledge that economics education defers heavily to experts being authority-laden (Fourcade *et al.* 2015), such that local people (not just those in academia) are not viewed as ‘knowers’ of their economies. The classroom can gradually serve as an initial stage for the powerful experience of co-creating meaningful knowledge on economic matters of concern.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that EE is subject to ongoing debates, proposals, and experiments. Against the backdrop of increasing contestations of the values, paradigms and technologies of late modern societies, EE can itself be studied as an arena of transformation. Naturally, this is to a large extent a conflictual process, as it is a multifaceted one, reflecting different needs and challenges around the globe. Parallel to the theory-practice-gap in global climate politics, the need to transform EE is facing serious delay, if not denial due to institutional safeguards of mainstream EE with an established tradition mounting to several decades. In their ambitions, student groups, heterodox economists, and donor foundations might find orientation in frameworks developed by sustainability transitions research (Hebinck *et al.* 2022). Put simply, innovations require institutionalizations, while exnovation (as the antithesis of innovation) requires de-institutionalizations of the to-be-overcome in order to finally phase out. While pluralist EE has passed the experimentation phase, mainstream EE is far from entering a phase of destabilization, let alone breakdown.

In other words, syllabi and textbooks are written relatively fast. But to rewrite study regulations, entire curricula, establish career paths for pluralist lecturers, ensure job opportunities for pluralistically educated students, or create entire institutions to nurture pluralist EE, runs on different time scales and involves capabilities beyond purely academic ones. The ongoing collaboration with extra-academic stakeholders, therefore, will prove to be decisive in successively mainstreaming the intellectual innovations developed in the past 20 years.

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