

# ED296949 1988-05-00 Economics in the Curriculum. ERIC Digest.

ERIC Development Team

[www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov)

---

## Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

<a href="#">Economics in the Curriculum. ERIC Digest.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">WHAT IS THE MAIN GOAL OF ECONOMIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS?.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">WHAT ARE THE CURRICULUM PATTERNS IN ECONOMICS?.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">HOW CAN THE ECONOMICS CURRICULUM BE IMPROVED?.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">REFERENCES AND ERIC RESOURCES.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>



---

**ERIC Identifier:** ED296949

**Publication Date:** 1988-05-00

**Author:** Seiter, David

**Source:** ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education Bloomington IN.

## Economics in the Curriculum. ERIC Digest.

THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

Trade deficits, stock market woes, and the energy crisis are examples of economic problems in the United States during the past fifteen years. However, it is unlikely that most citizens understand what created these kinds of problems or how leaders have tried to solve them. This lack of knowledge is a consequence of insufficient emphasis on economics in the general education of citizens. There is no doubt that education in

elementary and secondary schools is essential in preparing a responsible citizenry that can understand and cope with economic problems and issues. This ERIC digest examines (1) the main goal of economic education in elementary and secondary schools, (2) current curriculum patterns in economics, and (3) means for improving the economics curriculum.

## WHAT IS THE MAIN GOAL OF ECONOMIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS?

Economic educators tend to agree with Mark C. Schug that "the goal of economic education is to foster in students the thinking skills and substantial economic knowledge necessary to become effective and participating citizens" (1985, 6). Economic literacy is emphasized as a key to effective citizenship in a free society. According to Ronald A. Banaszak, "Economically literate citizens, because they possess an understanding of economic generalizations and concepts, will enjoy a more complete understanding of their world, be able to make reasoned decisions, and be more fully in control of their economic future" (1987, 2).

In his comprehensive review of literature on economic education, Steven L. Miller (1988) highlights the viewpoint that economic literacy is an indispensable facet of general education for citizenship. Furthermore, Miller argues persuasively that the basic concepts of economics should be included in the core curriculum, the common learning experiences required of all students for graduation from high school. To what extent is economics included in the curricula of elementary and secondary schools in the United States? How is it included?

## WHAT ARE THE CURRICULUM PATTERNS IN ECONOMICS?

Separate courses in economics and infusion of content into other courses are two means of including economics in the curricula of elementary and secondary schools. Separate courses in economics are usually one-semester in duration and are offered in high school. These courses tend to emphasize micro-economics; content on macro-economics is usually omitted or treated superficially. As of the beginning of 1988, sixteen states mandated that students complete a course in economics as a requirement for graduation from high school.

In contrast to the separate course approach, the infusion process integrates economic concepts into other courses throughout the curriculum, such as history, geography, and government. According to Miller (1988, 18), infusion is the dominant means of including economics in the secondary school curriculum (grades 7-12). Courses most often reported as objects of infusion of economics content are American history, government, civics, and world history. Virtually all teaching of economics in elementary schools is done through infusion, as part of the broader social studies program.

The infusion strategy is exemplified by the Developmental Economic Education Program (DEEP) of the Joint Council on Economic Education. Established in 1965, DEEP has been extended to more than 1375 school districts with some 15 million students. Members draw on sources and materials from 50 state economic councils and 270 centers for education for their courses. Even though there are difficulties in quantifying the value of DEEP, evidence from research done by the Joint Council on Economic Education (JCEE) shows "that students in DEEP districts learn significantly more economics than students from districts that do not participate." (Miller 1988, 22).

One aspect that makes the infusion method enticing to curriculum developers is that most social studies teachers are potential teachers of economics (Brenneke and Soper 1987, 187). For example, it is impossible to teach American history accurately without using economic concepts to explain key themes and events such as the development of industries, the rise of labor unions, and the Great Depression.

The effective infusion of economic concepts requires a coordinated effort to comprehensively implement materials and connect content from one grade level to the next. The essential content must be systematically presented to all students. Teachers who know basic ideas of economics are also essential to successful use of a general infusion strategy.

Another type of infusion approach is using discrete units of economic instruction within existing courses on other subjects the piecemeal instruction that is often encountered with the general infusion approach. This strategy offers a greater possibility of coherent and comprehensive treatment of economics from subject to subject and from grade to grade. However, successful use of this method depends upon units that fit together in a well-planned economics program within the social studies curriculum.

## HOW CAN THE ECONOMICS CURRICULUM BE IMPROVED?

One way to improve education in economics is to combine an infusion strategy in grades K-12 with a required one-semester course in high school. Exposure to a formal secondary school course in economics is the key to higher scores on tests of economic literacy (Miller 1988, 31).

A sound secondary school course in economics is distinguished by four essential characteristics:

- Emphasis on basic concepts and principles of the discipline.
- Reinforcement of basic concepts and principles through

teaching strategies that elicit active learning by students.

-- Connection of basic concepts and principles of economics

to various subjects in school and to the lives of citizens outside of schools.

-- Applications of economic knowledge to decision-making

about public and private issues and problems of the kind

that individuals face as producers, consumers, and

citizens.

One area of skills neglected in most economic education curricula is the use of quantitative data (QD). The use of QD in arriving at economic decisions is crucial in any economic education curriculum. Social studies teachers have a long tradition of developing decision-making skills but seldom use QD in helping to reach those decisions. There should be renewed emphasis on including QD in the economic education curriculum to further develop cognitive processes and skills in decision-making.

One facet of content that is often overlooked or underemphasized is macro-economics, the study of the functioning of the economy as a whole. This content deficiency deprives students of knowledge and perspectives needed by citizens to comprehend, analyze, and judge certain kinds of economic decisions by the United States government and by international organizations. Thus, the ideas and perspectives of macro-economics should be included in high school education on economics.

It seems that all students, even those of lower intellectual ability, can benefit from a rigorous high school course based on concepts and principles of economics and development of skills in rational decision-making about economic issues and problems. Thus, a solid course in economics belongs in the core curriculum, the program of studies required of all students for graduation from high school.

Improvement of economic education in elementary and secondary schools will enhance the economic literacy and citizenship capabilities of all students. They will gain a better understanding of national and world-wide economic events, issues, and problems. And they are likely to become better decision-makers in their private lives and in their public participation as citizens of a free society.

## REFERENCES AND ERIC RESOURCES

Following is a list of resources including references used to prepare this Digest. Those items followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, write EDRS, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304 or call 1-800-227-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CIJE (CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION) which is available in most libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS; however, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries using the bibliographic information provided below. Banaszak, Ronald A. "Economics for Junior High School Students." SOCIAL STUDIES REVIEW 24 (Spring 1985): 49-55. EJ 316 065. Banaszak, Ronald A. THE NATURE OF ECONOMIC LITERACY. ERIC Digest

No. 41, Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social

Studies/Social Science Education, 1987. ED 284 823. Banaszak, Ronald A. and Elmer U. Clawson. TEACHING STRATEGIES:

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL. New York: Joint Council on

Economic Education, 1981. ED 212 520. Brennan, Dennis C. A SURVEY OF STATE MANDATES FOR ECONOMICS

INSTRUCTION, 1985-86. New York: Joint Council on Economic

Education, 1985. ED 266 989. Brenneke, Judith S. and John C. Soper. "Economics in the School

Curriculum." THEORY AND RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE 26 (Summer

1987): 187. Gilliard, June V. CURRICULUM MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS. New York:

Joint Council on Economic Education, 1985. Hansen, Lee W. "The Scope of Microeconomics: A Comment." JOURNAL

OF ECONOMIC EDUCATION 18 (Spring 1987): 150-54. EJ 356 146. Kourilsky, Marilyn. "School Reform: The Role of Economic

Education." ECONOMIC EDUCATION 17 (Summer 1986): 213-17.

EJ 338 250. Laughlin, Margaret A. "Infusion--Not Addition: Infusing Economics

in the Elementary Curriculum." SOCIAL STUDIES REVIEW 23

(Fall 1983): 29-32. EJ 290 595. Miller, Steven L. ECONOMIC EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP.

Bloomington, IN: Foundation for Teaching Economics and ERIC

Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education,

1988. ED number to be assigned. O'Donnell, Margaret G. "Using the History of Economic Ideas to

Teach Social Studies." SOCIAL STUDIES 78 (May-June 1987):

118-22. EJ 356 164. Saunders, Phillip and others. MASTER CURRICULUM GUIDE IN ECONOMICS: A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING THE BASIC CONCEPTS. New

York: Joint Council on Economic Education, 1984. ED 247

198. Schug, Mark C. and Jean C. Birkey. "The Development of

Children's Economic Reasoning." THEORY AND RESEARCH IN

SOCIAL EDUCATION 13 (Spring 1985): 31-42. EJ 317 507. Schug, Mark C., ed. "Introduction," in ECONOMICS IN THE SCHOOL

CURRICULUM, K-12. Washington, DC: Joint Council on Economic

Education and National Education Association, 1985. ED 267

002. Soper, John C. and Judith-Staley Brenneke. "The Test of Economic

Literacy and an Evaluation of the DEEP System." JOURNAL OF

ECONOMIC EDUCATION 12 (Summer 1981): 1-14. EJ 250 370. Walstad, William and Michael Watts. "Teaching Economics in the

Schools: A Review of Survey Education." JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC

EDUCATION, 16 (Spring 1985): 135-46. EJ 319 114.

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under contract no. RI88062009. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED.

David Seiter is Assistant Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education.

---

**Title:** Economics in the Curriculum. ERIC Digest.

**Document Type:** Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Guides---Non-Classroom Use (055); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);

**Target Audience:** Teachers, Practitioners

**Available From:** ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Indiana University, 2805 East Tenth St., Suite 120, Bloomington, IN 47408.

**Descriptors:** Curriculum Design, Economics, Economics Education, Elementary School Curriculum, Elementary Secondary Education, Secondary School Curriculum, Social Studies

**Identifiers:** ERIC Digests

###



[\[Return to ERIC Digest Search Page\]](#)