
Today's student teachers need new strategies and better resources if they are to teach effectively the children from the full socioeconomic range.



Preparing Teachers in Economics

THE current oversupply of teachers has forced teacher education institutions to initiate new programs. Such programs equip today's student teachers for working with children from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Many college students in pre-teacher training are from suburban areas and may not have had direct acquaintance with culturally diverse populations. They are aware that such differences exist but do they truly appreciate this diversity? What types of strategies or techniques will a teacher education institution be able to implement to prepare its students for the teaching of children of families that are socioeconomically different?

The emphasis here will be on teaching strategies that relate to pre-teacher training

of economics for culturally diverse populations. In my elementary school social studies methods course I actively involve my students in a wide variety of activities, such as: in and out of the classroom projects, simulation and gaming techniques, role playing, and socio-drama.

Many of the teaching strategies utilized in elementary classrooms today are still very effective in the teaching of basic economic concepts, for example: supply and demand, wants and needs, distribution of goods, division of labor, and the consumption of goods. However, these teaching strategies can become more effective if they are modified to include the ethnic or culturally diverse populations of a neighborhood.

In utilizing the project method, I involve



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my students in social research methods and data gathering techniques. Through the inquiry approach to the teaching of social studies, questions are presented for group discussion. Researchable hypotheses are developed from the group discussion and written on the chalkboard or a transparency. To test their hypotheses, the students select the data gathering tools that would provide them with the best means for analyzing their data. Two data gathering tools which are very effective are surveys and interviews. Use of project method as a teaching strategy may be seen in the following example.

The class project is concerned with the retailing aspect in the process of distribution of goods to the consumer.

Hypothesis 1: There will be no difference

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in the purchasing of food items among people living in ethnic, inner-city, or suburban areas.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no price difference for selected food products in ethnic, inner-city, or suburban areas.

To test their hypotheses, the students are divided into small groups. These groups go into the ethnic, inner-city, and suburban areas of the community to collect their data. The data are brought back to the classroom to be tabulated and analyzed. Some generalizations that the students may develop from

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their surveys and interviews are as follows: (a) The food wants of people will vary in different areas of a community according to the customary foods of the area. (b) Prices will generally be higher in inner-city or ethnic areas of the community compared to the suburban areas. (c) There will be more independently owned shops or grocery stores in inner-city or ethnic areas as compared with the larger franchised supermarkets in suburban shopping centers. In some instances students may want to look at other aspects of the economic principle of distribution of goods and do independent research.

Consumer education is another aspect of the pre-teacher training for culturally diverse populations. Students can develop an awareness of the processes of consumption and the distribution of goods. Included in the processes of consumption are the economic concepts of wants and needs, advertising, competition, and protection agencies. The distribution of goods includes the economic concepts of packaging, advertising, and retailing. Survey and interview techniques again are very helpful as data gathering tools for an understanding of these two economic processes.

To Compare and To Analyze

One project that can be employed in the classroom is a comparison of various products and an analysis of these products. An example would be to compare various kinds of breakfast cereals. Questions are raised as to the price of a certain brand of cereal, the student's reason for purchasing this brand, and the nutritional value of that particular brand. Generalizations are developed from

an analysis of the answers to the above questions. Specific generalizations would include any deceptive advertising or packaging techniques to lure the consumer into purchasing the product.

The student should also become acquainted with various consumer protection agencies at the local, state, and federal levels and should know how these agencies function.

Moreover, students should learn about additional sources of help in teaching about economics. An excellent resource is the Kazanjian Economics Materials Library at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. The Kazanjian collection consists of the winning imaginative and creative projects of outstanding teachers, K-12, in the continuing Kazanjian Awards Program.

In conclusion, teacher education institutions are challenged to change their traditional teaching programs to meet the needs of children from the full spectrum of the American population and especially of children from families that are socioeconomically different.

Pre-teacher education programs in economics should not only be concerned with the teaching of economic principles but also with ways in which these principles affect all people at the different socioeconomic levels. Such programs should develop teaching strategies and techniques for consumer education. Traditional teaching strategies for economics can be modified and implemented for teaching children from varied backgrounds. Student involvement, through projects, is one of the strongest techniques for illustrating economic principles in the classroom.

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