

## Critical Andragogy and Teaching the Principles of Macroeconomics Course: A Pilot Study

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“Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education described first by Paulo Freire and developed by Henry Giroux educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action.”<sup>i</sup>

Examples of critical pedagogy exist in the choices of curriculum (do we teach creationism or evolution?<sup>ii</sup> and in our choices in the classroom. (Personally I focus on how much time to focus on the classical macro-theory vs, Keynesian macro-theory.) We require certain courses, and, we require certain topics within each course. The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and AACSB dictate some of the choices we make.

Teaching adults is also wrought with the complications of teaching within a politically-informed framework, obviously in the choice of political science, history, and women’s studies, but most especially within the principles of economics courses, both macro and micro. I try to avoid confrontational politics within my courses, but of course neither course is apolitical. In microeconomics, the role of government in imperfect markets is stressed. The assumptions of perfect markets include

- Lots of buyers and sellers
- Complete, relevant information
- No product differentiation
- No ability to set prices
- No transactions or other costs

What can we do when these assumptions are not true? The question then becomes, “should the government do anything?”

Within the context of the principles of macroeconomics, the choice of teaching a Keynesian-based theory is an andragogical choice as well as a political choice. To me, teaching Keynes is grounded in the assumption that this is easier for most students, particularly those without a background in calculus, to grasp. Always, my focus is on what they can take away. In microeconomics, I want them to learn decision-making skills; in macro I want them to learn some of the tools of citizenship—what is the government doing? Is it right? Is it appropriate? Will it work? (This is also true of microeconomics.)

Since spring semester 2009, I have incorporated an Excel-based study of current macro-indicators. My goal is two-fold: To have my students understand the importance of macro data and its relation to a Keynesian-based theory, and also to see the underlying relationships among key macro indicators, particularly gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment rates, changes in the price index, and changes in the money supply.

My main purpose is to get students to see the relationships among key macro-indicators. In the early stages, led with the help Joyce Sandusky,<sup>iii</sup> the project worked. Students would collect current data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Federal Reserve. As the economy recovered, however, the relationships have become blurred. Students are collecting too much data, so information is obscured. In addition, many students have a poor understanding of Excel, and therefore, get very little out of the project.

I still think the exercise is valuable, but it needs to be reframed and a more serious analysis of actual student learning applied. Here is my plan to revise the exercise and to develop a quasi-experimental project that can extend over time.

First step: Get IRB approval for using student assessment for publication.

Second step: Collect pre- and post-test data on student accomplishment re understanding of the relationship of key macro-indicators for fall and spring semesters.

Third step: Reformulate the exercise based on student accomplishment during the fall and spring 2013 exercise. Put more emphasis on Excel skills.

Fourth step: Compare results.

Next step: Expand the study to include more countries and different kinds of economies.

Next step: Find a way to discover how the assignment has improved student "citizenship, if possible.

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<sup>i</sup> Giroux, H. (October 27, 2010) "Lessons From Paulo Freire", [Chronicle of Higher Education](#). Retrieved 5/20/13.

<sup>ii</sup> Pinholster, G. (February 19, 2006) "AAAS Denounces Anti-Evolution Laws as Hundreds of K-12 Teachers Convene for 'Front Line' Event", [AAAS News](#). Retrieved 9/31/13.

<sup>iii</sup> Joyce Sandusky works with faculty and students at CSU to learn critical technological skills.