

**Revitalizing Economic Geography Through Teaching Excellence: Some
Pedagogic Reflections**

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Abstract In this position paper, we outline some of the pressing trends in the recent development of economic geography as a subdiscipline in human geography. In particular, we note the lack of critical discussion of important pedagogical issues in teaching what might be termed “new economic geographies”, and particularly those associated with the “cultural turn”. In doing so, we introduce the most challenging politics and practices of teaching economic geography. Drawing upon the various contributions to this symposium, we outline five areas for pedagogical developments and cross-fertilization.

Keywords: Economic geography, pedagogy, cultural turn, plurality, politics and practice

Introduction

As both researchers and teachers of economic geography for a decade now, we are increasingly troubled by two trends that have prompted us to put together this symposium – and the 2005 Association of American Geographers (AAG) conference sessions on which it draws – in order to promote and enhance the viability of economic geography as a teaching subject in university curricula worldwide. The first trend has to do with the rapidly changing nature of economic geography research in the English-speaking world during the past decade which has profound implications for the teaching of economic geography. While we outline some of these significant changes in this position paper, it is useful here to preview our key observation that the so-called “cultural turn” in economic geography might have created a situation whereby economic geography is arguably no longer really focusing on pressing economic issues. Our concerns on this front date back, at the very least, to the Royal Geographical Society-Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) conference in London in September 2003, where we were enlightened by Peter Dicken’s plenary lecture on globalization in which he forcefully showcased, and pleaded for, the continued relevance and significance of the kind of economic geography to which we (and many other economic geographers) subscribe.

Specifically, Dicken (2004) argued that despite our relatively lesser role in major debates on globalization, (economic) geographers do have many interesting and significant things to say about both the spatiality of globalization and the geographical processes of its

key actors. While we found this argument for the continued vitality and significance of economic geography highly commendable, we were disappointed by the apparent lack of this kind of economic-geographical research – and its reflection in teaching programmes – in many parts of the UK and some centres in the US, as evidenced by what we witnessed at the conference. Instead, we observed a diverse range of (economic) geographies of actor positionality (including gender and race), performativity, governmentality, and alternative economies. Much as we like the exciting theoretical and methodological developments inherent in these diverse (economic) geographies, we often find it difficult to teach about them as both something *economic* and something *geographical*. We hope this paper and the subsequent commentaries can shed some critical light on this substantive trend in economic geography today.

The second trend that troubles us is the relative lack of discussion and debate about the development of the pedagogy of economic geography, a reflection in itself, perhaps, of the preoccupation of the “cultural turn” in economic geography with theory development over the last decade. Together with several of the commentators in this symposium, we have come to the realization that the pedagogy of economic geography has fallen worryingly behind the theoretical “revolution” in economic geography. It is hard enough keeping up with developments in our own particular niches of economic-geographical research; capturing and packaging the essence of intellectual trends across the sub-discipline for different student audiences is quite another challenge altogether. This is not a moot point because one of central roles of academic economic geographers lies in (re)producing the next generations of economic geographers, through not just excellent and theoretically-sophisticated research, but also – and equally importantly – through good teaching.

Antecedents of this symposium

Over ten years ago, Mick Healey and Gordon Clark organized a symposium on teaching economic geography at the 1993 Institute of British Geographers (IBG) annual conference held at Royal Holloway College, University of London (see two symposia in *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 1994a; 1994b). Intriguingly, they were particularly concerned with “the extent to which economic geography is still taught as a distinct and complete subdiscipline” (Healey and Clark, 1994: 67). While they recognized the “demands for more holistic approaches which integrate aspects of social and political geography with economic geography”, their session did not (and perhaps could not) fully anticipate the subsequent multiple transformations of economic geography as a subdiscipline that culminated in the so-called “new economic geographies” of both “cultural” and “economic” flavours. While the contributions by Woodroffe (1994) and Crang (1994) respectively addressed a certain brand of geographical economics and the cultural turn in economic geography, the developments in economic geography (broadly defined) in the subsequent decade have gone far beyond the analysis in those two papers. For example, Woodroffe did not discuss the work by Paul Krugman, then a prominent trade economist, on the new economic geography (e.g. Krugman, 1991), a subdiscipline that has grown substantially in influence and importance over the subsequent decade. And while we would agree with Crang’s (1994: 109) conclusion back then that “a purely economic form of analysis is, I would suggest, limited in what it can tell us about economic practices and institutions”, we would also assert that cultural approaches need to be combined with, and not replace, the “economic forms of analysis” to which he referred. This, it seems to us at least, has not always been the case over the past decade or so.

Meanwhile, a similar initiative took place in the USA in the form of the National Science Foundation (NSF) funded workshop on the *Global and Local Challenges to Theory*,

Practice, and Teaching in Economic Geography in Washington, DC, in 1997 (Glasmeier *et al.*, 1999). Of the eleven papers prepared for the 1997 workshop, only one paper (Pavlik, 1999) specifically addressed the educatory role of economic geography, while at least seven papers focused on substantive issues in the development of diverse economic geographies. Pavlik (1999: 132) identified the main pedagogical problem of “mastering (or at least understanding) many different approaches to questions in the field. In the classroom, this means we must consider how we introduce a breadth of approaches without being superficial”. This problem of too much diversity and fragmentation in economic geography has arguably been further accentuated in the years following the workshop. Distilling the key conclusions of these two previous introspectives, McCarthy (2005) has identified a number of important priorities and practices in teaching economic geography emerging on both sides of the Atlantic:

- Preserve the existing strength of economic geography: Develop pedagogic methods to approach research questions from a variety of theoretical and empirical perspectives, if necessary through teaching collaborations (for example with guest lecturers from other departments, or from other institutions via distance education).
- Integrate political/policy, social, and cultural considerations, and their interrelationships, as well as an historical perspective, into the teaching of economic geography.
- Teach some agreed upon key problem areas in economic geography classes both individually and in terms of their interrelationships at different spatial scales, namely: (1) Globalization (and the global-local nexus); (2) Key institutions/agents (transnational corporations, governments, households etc.); (3) Uneven development, core-periphery relations, and equity and efficiency issues; and (4) The environment and sustainable development.

- Attempt to tackle the issue of how the breadth of the subject creates problems in choosing what to include in a course, and course sequencing, especially in the US (and other countries following the US model) where students often declare geography as their major late in their undergraduate studies.
- Convey how economic geography grapples with important questions that are linked to contemporary economic processes and policies by analyzing the economic geography behind current events, studying areas that students are familiar with, and emphasizing topics that are important to students, including from their own community.
- Use problem- and project-oriented approaches to teaching economic geography based on student-centered learning (including small group work, for example, role playing and debates) involving topical real world examples (for example, drawn from the daily press).
- Provide broader and more rigorous methodological training based on improved methodological and analytical capabilities within economic geography. Improve the application of geographic information science (GIS) techniques to economic geography problems. Incorporate qualitative as well as quantitative empirical research methods.

Consequently, we think the time is now ripe to consolidate and integrate developments in *both* the research and teaching of economic geography, particularly at the undergraduate level (although some of the issues raised here will be applicable to graduate training in economic geography). With this in mind, in the next section we try to elucidate what we believe to be the place of economic geography in the sometimes confusing and fragmented field of human geography and the wider social sciences. Our argument here is for an open, pluralist economic geography that seeks to combine and integrate the theoretical and methodological insights of different strands of economic geography – i.e. political economy, cultural economy and geographical economics – and brings them to bear on the full range of economic-geographical issues facing contemporary society. We then move on to reflect on

how we might be able to practice pedagogy as politics in ways that help to revitalize the subject among our students or, in the words of Amin and Thrift's (2000: 5) intervention, "to revive economic geography as an imaginative, relevant, and socially useful subject".

Placing economic geography

We begin our introspection by examining some recent debates on the nature of economic geography. Ever since the 1995 IBG conference in Northumbria that culminated in Lee and Wills (1997) – a significant event post-dating Healey and Clark's 1993 symposium – economic geography has entered a pluralist phase, or, to adopt a Chinese saying, a period of "letting thousands of flowers flourish". The analytical concerns of economic geography today, particularly in the UK, seem to have moved away from the economic activities of firms, industries and regions to the practices, representations and performativity of economic actors in various (alternative) economic spaces. This transition to a kind of "cultural turn" or "new economic geography" (as distinct from the Krugman-inspired "new economic geography" in Economics) has been heatedly debated in the pages of *Antipode* (Amin and Thrift, 2000; Peck and Wills, 2001), the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Clark, 1998; Barnes, 2001; Yeung, 2003) and *Regional Studies* (Markusen, 1999; 2003; Hudson, 2003; Peck, 2003).

To cut a long story short, the "cultural turn" in economic geography seems to be so pervasive (and dare we say "hegemonic") that, in our opinion, there is too little "economic" left in the kind of economic geography available today. We use the term "economic" in this context not as a way into semantic debates about the culture/economy interface, but to refer to work with a particular emphasis on the key agents of capitalism – most notably firms, labour and their sectoral formations – and the economic-geographic outcomes of their actions e.g. uneven development, inequality and so on. In sum, we are deeply concerned that the

“cultural turn” is dominating these “economic” concerns, particularly in terms of the substantive foci of contemporary economic geography. While in past decades economic geography has made important contributions to debates about industrial location (1960s), uneven development (1980s) and the resurgence of regional economies (1990s), we now seemingly find these economic-geographical themes disappearing from the lexicon of many economic geographers. In its place we are witnessing the rise of a kind of “new economic geography” that in its extreme form seems to take theory and critique as independent of empirically grounded research and makes no direct claims to resolving the economic-geographical problems of the new millennium (Yeung, 2003).

Our observation may come as a surprise to some who believe that economic geography is, and should be, simply what economic geographers do. *Contra* Markusen (1999), we are not criticizing the intellectual integrity of the “cultural turn” in economic geography, but rather we are casting doubt upon the wisdom of appropriating anything and everything that is “economic” and re-evaluating it from a “cultural” perspective. In some instances, during this process the spatial and the geographical is often diluted, if not lost altogether, rendering it rather too obscure to be taught in economic geography classes. For example, some of our students in the UK and Singapore asked why topics such as gender relations and the body and alternative economic practices are taught in an economic geography module (instead of sociology or cultural studies). While we do emphasize the spatiality of these cultural readings of economic processes, sometimes we must confess that the boundaries are quite blurred and hard to draw even to us. While one could argue that intellectually such line-drawing does not matter, it very much does matter on-the-ground in contexts where students need to be convinced of the distinctiveness and “value added” of a particular disciplinary perspective for course recruitment purposes. Equally, it matters in terms of our sub-discipline’s contribution to solving pressing real-world problems.

We are not alone in this reading of the current state of economic geography in the English-speaking world. For example, in a recent overview of the subject area, Allen Scott (2004: 489-490) lamented:

the curious reluctance by some proponents of the cultural turn to make any concession to the play of economic processes in economic geography except insofar as they are an expression of underlying cultural dynamics ... in formulations like these, basic economic realities – the state of technology, the rhythms of capital accumulation and investment, the rate of profit, the flow of circulating capital, etc. – become just so much inert plasma to be written upon this way or that as cultural shifts occur...

In part these differences stem from the objects of study that characterize the different approaches to economic geography. As Ray Hudson (2004: 466-467) described,

... there is precious little agreement. Culturalists tend to see political-economic geographer's choices of research foci as unnecessarily centred on the formal economy/production/markets (and indeed certain industries) while political economists often see culturalists' research choices to be almost wilfully trivial... seen in this sense, one group seeks to centre the economy, the other to decentre it.

This shift in topical focus that has accompanied recent theoretical and methodological developments in economic geography is of particular concern to us. We concur with Martin and Sunley (2001: 155) when they voiced worries about the following trend:

Over the past 20 years or so, economic geography has moved progressively away from the study of uneven development, the geographies of socioeconomic inequality, and the role of power and politics in shaping the space economy ... as for inequality, few economic geographers have devoted their efforts to questions of income distribution, poverty and social exclusion.

Overall, our view is that while economic geography seems to be expanding in any number of new and exciting (cultural) directions, it increasingly seems to resemble a “donut” in which the central core of rigorously studying the most powerful agents in the capitalist system (especially firms) and the complex (and frequently deleterious) spatial consequences of their actions has been “hollowed-out” in favour of expanding the sub-discipline's theoretical and topical remit. We are not against the latter – far from it – but would rather it was combined with, and not at the expense of, the former.

What we want to advocate here is a reconstructive project that does two key things. First, it would seek to integrate and promote *dialogue* between the different “cultural” and “economic” strands of economic geography, relations that are currently characterized, to use Hudson’s (2004: 466) words, by “mild to strong tension on both sides, and quite a bit of mutual suspicion”. As economic geographers (who often incorporate “culture” in our own analysis), our own conviction remains that the nuts and bolts of the global space-economy must be understood from an economic-geographical perspective that does not privilege any particular kind of epistemological and analytical focus – no matter how interesting, sophisticated and presumably “fashionable” it may appear (see also Barnett, 1998; Markusen, 1999; 2003; Storper, 2001; Hamnett, 2003; Scott, 2004; Yeung, 2005). Equally, this would be a project that is open to dialogue with regional scientists and geographical economists, approaches that should not be dismissed out of hand as having nothing to contribute (*cf.* Scott, 2004). For all its well-known problems, economics remains as the most powerful discipline in analyzing and offering solutions of economic problems. In this regard, economic geographers must critically engage economics and economists in order to create some space for the kind of analytical approach that gives more nuances and complexity to modern economic problems. For example, it is simply not good enough for us to dismiss economics in our classrooms as some of our students will question such wisdom. We have to win over our students by showing them why financial economics tells them only part of the story about the immense power of Wall Street in the global financial community. We need theories of agglomeration and clusters to explain the spatial concentration of financial institutions in New York City, London and Tokyo and what this means for the political economy of global capital.

Second, we would actively seek to reclaim the relevance and normative strength of the *political economy approach* by re-focusing on the social and spatial inequities of global

capitalism (see also Dick Walker's commentary in this issue). While mainstream economics, including the Krugman-led version of geographical economics, has long abandoned political economy, it will be rather foolish for economic geographers to give up our hard-earned position in this approach. Substantial resources and efforts were put into developing this political-economic approach in economic geography during the 1970s and the 1980s. The approach is also highly mature as teaching materials on its theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and policy practices are easily available. In our own teaching practice, we find students as much interested in why economic development is so uneven in the UK, or between Singapore and its neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia; as in alternative economic practices (e.g. non-monetary exchanges of commodities). Such "big issues" as uneven development are arguably of equal, if not more, importance to our students in economic geography given that many will go on to pursue careers in business, politics, and international organizations.

In this reconstruction exercise, we would suggest that we actively need to develop an awareness of following issues in our pedagogical efforts:

- the potential and actual benefits of doing different kinds of economic geography;
- the potential and actual benefits of combining different approaches;
- the limits to both unfettered empiricism and abstract social theory;
- concurrent developments in cognate disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science, development studies, urban studies, and management studies;
- a sense of political commitment and social responsibility of our research;
- the potential policy and critical applications of our research.

This plural economic geography should endeavour to blend both structure and agency, and "bottom up" and "top down" perspectives on economic change (*cf.* Martin and Sunley, 2001). Clearly, pursuing such a project will not be easy, and will entail an academic division of labour between researchers with different sets of skills and talents. It will need different kinds

of theory, the synthesis of different forms of research and evidence, and imaginative approaches to curriculum design and teaching practice.

This mini-manifesto for economic geography does not privilege any particular kind of economic geography, whether standard analysis of local labour markets and R&D activities of firms or critical enquiry into cultural economies and consumption practices. What matters most to us in both research and pedagogy, though, is a sense of mutual commitment and respect among economic geographers of different epistemological and methodological practices. While both of us are too young to remember what went on during the quantitative revolution in the 1960s (see Barnes, 2001), we do know that the then hegemonic kind of (neoclassical) economic geography in which anything that could not be counted did not count was restrictive and disempowering. We are, however, old enough to witness the growing influence of a version of “new” economic geography in which anything that can be counted does not really count and anything explicitly “economic” needs to be theorized and critiqued from a cultural perspective. We remain convinced that both kinds of economic geography, if taken to their extremes, will hamper rather than promote the progress and viability of economic geography as a teaching subject that is *both* fun/imaginative and politically engaging/publicly relevant. For us, recent developments in the areas of cultural-political-economy perspectives (e.g. Hudson, 2004; Jessop, 2004) and relational economic geography (e.g. Boggs and Rantisi, 2003; Yeung, 2005) are suggestive of broadly-based ways forward. In the next section, we outline and debate some pedagogic strategies concerning how to bring the best of economic geography to our students.

Pedagogy as politics and practice: or why teaching economic geography matters, and how we might best do it

The above disciplinary trends and tribulations are clearly important in their own right. However, what is particularly important in the context of this symposium is the challenges and possibilities that such debates create for the teaching of economic geography. This importance is evident in at least two respects. First, it matters in terms of the kind of economic-geographical knowledge that students take with them into the wider world of life and work. Here, our view chimes with Crang's (1994: 11) when he hoped that his teaching would "stimulate ideas about students' present and future entanglements in the economic; and provide some skills, some everyday forms of 'research', which may help them develop those ideas in the practice of their economic lives, not only during but also after their time in higher education". Second, issues of sub-disciplinary reproduction are at stake here. What kinds of economic geographers are being created, or do we want to create, as the next generation of researchers and academics in the field? We need to be explicit about the aims and purposes of what we are doing in this regard. Le Heron (2005) has argued that as researchers, writers and teachers of economic geography we should be aware of the role we play in *creating* new economic spaces through the various aspects of our work.

In this section of the paper we seek to synthesize the issues and debates that arose during four panel sessions on the topic of "teaching economic geography" at the April 2005 AAG meeting in Denver, and position the various commentaries that follow. The sessions featured presentations from 18 economic geographers covering ten different national contexts for teaching economic geography (Canada, China/Hong Kong, Germany, Japan, Norway/Sweden, Singapore, UK and USA). The sessions were attended by an average of between 35-50 delegates throughout the day, and were characterised by frank and fulsome

discussion of a wide range of issues, ranging from the esoteric and abstract to the seemingly mundane and prosaic! What follows is not a roadmap of “best practice” in teaching economic geography – indeed as we shall see, such a singular notion is both undesirable and unachievable – but rather an attempt to encapsulate the key themes and lines of argument that arose from the discussions.

1. Context matters

What quickly became apparent during discussions was that the model of economic geography’s intellectual development that we have presented above is very much an Anglo-American one, and not one that is repeated in all national contexts, making it impossible to generalise about the teaching implications of changes in the sub-discipline in any meaningful way. Clearly, then, national context or “societal embeddedness” matters, and in a number of different ways, as shown, for example, by Henry Yeung and Liu Weidong’s commentary (this issue). It matters in shaping the kind of economic geography that is prevalent in particular territories: discussions revealed that the “new” economic geography emerging from the campuses of the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand needs to be contrasted, for example, with a Japanese context in which a relatively isolated economic geography is being increasingly dominated by Krugman-style geographical economics, and a Chinese context in which ‘traditional’ approaches to locational analysis and regional development are the norm. There is clearly an uneven geography of economic geography as an intellectual pursuit which shapes teaching practice in important ways.

National context also matters due to variations in the position of geography within the secondary education system. Countries such as the UK and city-states such as Singapore and Hong Kong, where students can choose to take geography at school and have at least some notion of what the subject is about as school leavers, can be contrasted with others where

geography may be a new subject at degree level. The nature of the higher education system also varies from country to country: while in the UK most students take a geography “major” (i.e. they choose a geography degree from the outset), in other contexts such as the US, Canada and Singapore geography may be just one of many subjects competing for “major” students during the first one or two years of a more broadly based degree curriculum. National context may also play a role in shaping the particular interests of the student body. Panelist George Lin (University of Hong Kong), for example, contrasted the relative interests of students in Vancouver and Hong Kong, finding students in the former to have strong interests in international development and under-development, and in the latter in offshore investments, commercial activities and retailing – both strands of economic geography underdeveloped in the “cultural turn”. Finally, different national contexts may offer different job markets for graduate students, creating needs for different ranges of interests and skills.

Notions of national specificity need to be considered alongside more “local” forms of context. On the one hand, there will be particular institutional conditions that play an important role in shaping how economic geography is taught: the type of institution (e.g. a large public university versus a small liberal arts college in the US context), the relative strength of geography within an institution (e.g. in terms of numbers of staff, size of teaching programme, research excellence) and the relative importance of economic geography within geography departments (e.g. number of staff, range of economic-geographical expertise). On the other hand, at the individual level, there are constraints as to what an individual teacher or group of teachers can deliver in terms of their own experience and skills. All of these different facets and levels of “context” overlap and intersect, therefore, to create very different challenges and opportunities for those who teach economic geography in different places (let alone those who move to different places!). The geography of economic

geography is indeed highly uneven, and what constitutes appropriate pedagogical practice can only be judged in context.

2. *Representing economic geography*

A good portion of the Denver discussions focused on the deceptively simple question of what should be taught under the banner of “economic geography” (*cf.* the 1994 symposium on “Teaching Economic Geography” in this journal: Part I – course content). As described above, the possible answers to this question will in part be shaped by a variety of contextual factors. However, they will also be shaped by lecturers’ and instructors’ views on what exactly economic geography is (or on what it ought to be). Where one stands on the above debate about the nature of contemporary economic geography will affect how one delimits the boundaries of the subject. Overall, teachers have to grapple with at least five intersecting dimensions of “coverage” when designing an economic geography curriculum: *geographical* coverage (constituent regions of the world economy); *theoretical* coverage (different intellectual traditions: spatial science, behavioural, political economy, the cultural turn etc.); *methodological* coverage (showing how economic geographers use methods ranging from quantitative techniques to semiotic analysis); *sectoral* coverage (from mining through to consumer services); and *thematic* coverage (e.g. the role of nation state/regulation, technological change, labour, transnational corporations etc.). In the commentaries that follow, Trevor Barnes, Nancy Ettlinger, Christine Jocoy, and Richard Walker (this issue) reflect on the issues that have informed the way they construct (and deliver) their courses in economic geography in Canada and the US from a range of perspectives and from differing levels of experience.

In discussions, it became evident that there was something of a tension between: (a) wanting to emphasise a coherent “core” economic geography that can easily be

communicated to students (in some cases for recruitment purposes), and (b) wanting to expand the boundaries of economic geography to benefit from the insights of the new economic geography of the last decade or so. Most participants were endeavouring to integrate both aspects into their courses, but to differing degrees. Trevor Barnes (this issue), for example, explicitly pitches economic geography as a “post-disciplinary” subject, searching for “cyborg economic geographies” that decentre the economy and emphasise the plurality, interconnectedness and embodied nature of economic practices. Richard Walker (this issue), on the other hand, starts from the notion of a simple but inherently geographical commodity chain and then works outwards, adding in money, labour, auxiliary services and management practices and the like. Nancy Ettliger’s (this issue) approach integrates the economy with social, cultural and political processes from the outset from an explicitly geographical perspective. Christine Jocoy (this issue) offers cogent advice for the instructor grappling with these many complex decisions for the first time.

While recognising the plurality of approaches, it is fair to say that there was a coalescence of interest during discussion around what might be called “issue-based” teaching. Rather than adopting an “intellectual history” approach that offers theoretical coverage, or an “industry by industry” approach offering sectoral coverage, there was agreement that focusing upon a series of pertinent themes and issues might be a progressive way to structure the curriculum. In such a scheme, topics and lectures start from everyday questions and topics that students might reasonably be interested in and can be shown to affect them (e.g. Does technology eradicate distance? Is the nation state on the wane? Where does your breakfast come from?). The concern in the classes is then to convey how these topics can only be fully understood from an economic-geographical perspective – an argument that needs to be actively demonstrated through case study and highly accessible empirical materials (e.g. news and press information) with which students can engage and identify (offering

opportunities for geographic and sectoral coverage). Such materials will reveal the different ways in which economic geography is “done” and implicated in everyday life (offering opportunities for theoretical and methodological coverage) but these differences are not the central concern. From our perspective at least (in the UK and Singapore), this thematic approach allows the teacher to combine insights from the political-economic and cultural approaches to economic geography in a very student-friendly manner and, yet, does not turn our students off with too many abstract theoretical ideas and remote empirical facts. The range of topics covered should ideally be as broad as possible, adding themes such as nature, labour, consumption, gender, ethnicity, corporate and regional/national cultures and discourses of the economy to “established” categories such as firms, states, production, technologies and uneven development.

3. Representing ‘others’: towards an inclusive global economic geography

One particular aspect of the debate about what to include when teaching economic geography should be singled out for further discussion, namely how the “Global South” or “developing world” is incorporated into the curriculum, a topic tackled by James Murphy (this issue) in his commentary. It is interesting to note that the Denver conference also saw sessions on the overlaps between economic geography and postcolonial geography, indicative perhaps of broader concerns about these issues. There are (at least) four aspects to this debate. First, in simple terms – time and space constraints of a particular course notwithstanding – it is important that aspects of the economies of all regions of the global economy are covered. Such steps need to go beyond simply including “emerging” economies that are clearly plugged into developed-world dominated global production networks, to incorporate regions such as Africa and Latin America that are, more often than not, passed over in curriculum design. Second, we need to think about the particular aspects of these

“marginalised” economies that are taught. These regions need to be considered not just as dependent, low cost production locations in global commodity chains, or as examples of agricultural production, natural resource extraction and informal economies, but also as sources of capital, innovation, knowledge and spatial change in their own right. The small but growing literature on developing world transnational corporations is one example of work that could inform such a strategy (see Yeung, 1999, for an overview).

Third, there is a whole set of issues concerning “how” the Global South is conceptualised in economic geography courses. As Murphy discusses, the dominant tendency has been to “export” theoretical approaches – and in particular “modernist” modes of thinking – from “developed” contexts to try and explain dynamics in “emerging” regions. Students need to be made aware not only of the limits and dangers of such processes of “theory transfer”, but also the potential for “theorising back”, i.e. thinking about how theories generated in different contexts may be able to inform economic geography at large. To give just two potential examples from many, how might theorising about the nature of the local state and the multi-layered governance system in China improve our understanding of the scalar reformulation of the nation-state in Western contexts? How might the “workfare” experience of Asian newly industrialised economies inform the transition from welfare to workfare states in North America and Western Europe? These are important questions for economic geography teachers in the Global South who are familiar with, and contribute actively to, Anglo-American economic geography (see commentary by Yeung and Liu this issue).

Finally, we need to be aware of the disciplinary straitjackets that may restrict our ability to make progress on the above. In certain institutional contexts, teaching on economic-geographical issues may also take place in “Area Studies” or “Development Studies” programmes, thus placing pressure on economic geographers to focus their efforts on

teaching courses on the “developed” world. Such distinctions are extremely unhelpful. Indeed, one panel participant (You-Tien Hsing, UC Berkeley), argued that the time is now ripe (with the dramatic ascendancy of the Chinese and Indian economies, for example) to reconfigure disciplinary boundaries in a radical way and thereby erase some of these spurious distinctions. Economic geographers may be able to play an integral part in these processes by seeking to develop inclusive and truly global notions of economic geography in which ‘there should not be a “mainstream” economic geography on the basis of geographic divides (the Anglo-American centres versus the rest of the world) or thematic divides (industrial geography versus rural or development geography)’ (Yeung and Lin, 2003: 120).

4. Inside the classroom: practices and strategies of engagement

At many points during the Denver sessions, debate inevitably turned to the nitty-gritty of teaching practices within the classroom (*cf.* the 1994 symposium on “Teaching Economic Geography” in this journal: Part II – methods and practices). Again, this was a story shaped by context and characterised by the plurality of approaches. Much discussion focused on “strategies of engagement”, or put another way, teaching practices that can capture the interest and imagination of students. Clearly there is a vast teaching and learning literature that could be brought to bear on this topic, both general and geography-specific, so here we will simply note some practical suggestions that arose:

- adopting an issue-based curriculum (see above);
- using debates in the popular press and media as “hooks” to grab attention;
- critically using the work of well-known commentators such as Naomi Klein and Thomas Friedman as a way into classroom debates;
- actively engaging with the everyday (working and non-working) lives of students and their families;

- drawing on student knowledge in a non-hierarchical and open manner to inform and shape class debates (see Barnes' commentary this issue);
- revealing the economic geography in surprising things/places e.g. a film such as the Full Monty, trading on E-Bay, buying a coffee etc.
- literally pulling apart objects in class (e.g. a mobile phone or a PC notebook) to reveal the complexity of contemporary global production networks;
- using the "lives" of particular commodities as a thread to connect different topics and themes (e.g. a car linking nature to production, labour issues, technological innovation and state regulation);
- explicitly exploring the limits to non-spatially infused interpretations of the economic sphere, particularly those of quantitative neoclassical economics;
- exploring the policy implications of the matters being discussed, and revealing the limits of non-geographically-informed policies;
- using carefully embedded field experiences (see below).

Two key "technologies" of teaching were the subject of perhaps the most heated segments of the day's debates: textbooks and Powerpoint! On the former, opinions ranged from textbooks being a necessity from either the student's perspective (e.g. large North American classes) or the lecturer's perspective (e.g. first time lecturers: see Jocoy's commentary, this issue) to being an impediment to wider, critical reading (mentioned most by those from the UK context). Clearly, however, not all textbooks are equal in terms of level, coverage and approach, and they can be used in a variety of creative ways (e.g. as the basis for lectures, as a general supportive resource, to free up time in lectures). It was noted that there is a relative lack of good textbooks in economic geography compared to other areas of the discipline, particularly ones that seek to combine insights from the "new" economic geography and are truly "global" in scope. On the latter, opinions again ranged from those

who thought Powerpoint was a vacuous technology that collapsed lectures into a rather “thin” linear sequence of events (the minority), to those who saw it as just another form of audio-visual aid that could either be used well or badly, and if used well could add to the learning experience by appealing to students on a visual register (the majority) and harnessing the potentially powerful pedagogical capabilities of digitally-available materials.

5. Outside the classroom: the field experience

There is one kind of teaching practice that cropped up repeatedly in debates and is worth singling out for special attention: fieldwork. The pages of this journal have seen a long and distinguished debate about the continued significance of the field experience to undergraduate geographers (see also Cottingham, Healey and Gravestock (2001) for a highly detailed bibliography on the topic). While there is no need to unpack these debates here, suffice to say that the Denver participants were equally vocal in their support for fieldwork as an integral part of the learning process for economic geography, an argument made more fully by Andrew Jones (this issue) in his commentary in this symposium. The examples discussed ranged from formal, organised visits to Singapore’s petrochemical complex (the second largest in the world after Texas!) to informal walking tours of the City of London (certainly one of the most significant financial districts of the global economy).

Four important points about fieldwork in teaching economic geography were evident from discussions. First, the field experience needs to be carefully and explicitly embedded in the wider course or curriculum in order to be effective and not a “free-floating” extra. Fieldwork was seen to work best when students were well briefed beforehand as to the nature of the experience and their expected role within it (e.g. asking questions of key informants), and were given a full opportunity to debrief and discuss what they had learned afterwards. Ideally, some relevant reading materials should be made available before the field visit so

that students are made aware of many “hidden issues” that may not be directly observable in the field (e.g. complex political-economic struggles in the development of a particular economic phenomenon or cluster). Second, fieldwork may work more effectively when it draws on the personal experiences of students. With seemingly more and more students working to sustain themselves through their degree, this potentially opens up wide range of economic geography landscapes than can be explored as part of the curriculum and remain relevant to them during their post-graduation working life. Third, as has been much commented upon in the literature, there is clearly a delicate politics to fieldwork. In economic geography, where the objective may be to reveal relations of domination, exploitation or exclusion, the field experience clearly needs to be designed with great sensitivity to both the students and those who are being observed (e.g. moving in small groups, briefings conducted in private, subtle methods of recording observations etc.). Finally, there are clearly a range of pragmatic issues to be faced when conducting fieldwork which is a relatively time and cost intensive mode of learning. Decisions about the desirability of fieldwork will necessarily need to be balanced against factors such as class size, the total length of the course, and the institutional and student funds available.

Conclusion and next steps: implementation and action!

In this introductory piece we have reflected upon the current state of economic geography – at least in the geographical territories with which we are most familiar – and raised some important concerns affecting both the research and pedagogical aspects of practicing economic geography. We have also tried to distil the key debates and insights derived from the Denver discussions as context and background for the contributions that follow. Clearly the two are intimately linked. While this represents the latest in a series of introspectives on “teaching economic geography” – adding to the one in the pages of this

journal in 1994, and a 1997 National Science Foundation workshop in the US (see Glasmeier, 1999) – a running thread to our argument has been that the intellectual changes to economic geography as a result of the so-called “cultural turn” pose a number of important new questions and challenges to us as teachers of economic geography courses.

In the Denver meeting, Linda McCarthy (2005) raised the thorny question, “where do we go from here?”, suggesting in particular the possibilities for collaboratively developing innovative teaching resources for economic geography that can be shared on-line. We wholeheartedly support such ideas, although we have concerns that in some “research prioritising” contexts (e.g. the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong) the freeing up of time and resources that will be required to develop such resources may take hard work. The general point is well made, however. Once again, in this symposium, economic geographers have come together and reaffirmed – notwithstanding some of the discussion points raised above – their belief in the significance of economic geography, and the importance of teaching it well. While talking is itself good, the dialogue needs to be extended to finding ways of sharing progressive teaching practices and innovations across the global community of economic geographers. The challenge is perhaps to become as globally connected in terms of pedagogy and teaching networks as some of the globalizing capitalist institutions that we chose to study and critique!

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