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Whose [Economic] Knowledge is it, Anyway? Authorship and Official Knowledge

Erin C. Adams

Kennesaw State University

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Abstract

This is a study of the politics of “official knowledge” in K-12 economics curriculum in the United States. The purpose of this study is to understand how reviews of literature both promote official knowledge and thus serve as useful sources of uncovering the authorship, or author-function at work in a social science discipline, which are usually thought to be anonymous and author-less.



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Introduction

Curriculum is never-neutral, but an “assemblage of knowledge.” As a human endeavor, it is “part of a *selective tradition*, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge” (Apple, 1993, p. 222). Yet, investigations into official knowledge and curriculum often point to inanimate and impersonal entities like textbooks and state and national standards or ideologies and leanings like conservatism (Apple, 2006), corporatism (e.g. Evans, 2014) or neoclassical theory (Adams, 2019a,d; Shanks, 2019; Sober, 2017), as in economics (the focus of this study). While interrogations of texts and standards are important, they do not fully identify the authors, that is, the people, the “someones,” the “who/se” that have a selective tradition, a vision, and that get to say “what counts” as official knowledge, and to determine the knowledge that is most worthy of inclusion and investigation. For example, in various studies of economics curricula, scholars have concluded that high school economics textbooks largely follow the Council for Economic Education’s *Voluntary National Standards for Economics (VS* hereafter) (Gans, 2015; Leet & Lopus, 2007; Myers & Stocks, 2010; Neumann, 2012), which are admittedly neoclassical in nature (CEE, vi) and that neoclassical theory is the prevailing paradigm at all levels of economic education at the precollegiate and collegiate levels (Earle, Moran and Ward-Perkins, 2017). In this study, instead of investigating curriculum, the usual assembly-points of knowledge (i.e. textbooks and standards), I seek to examine reviews and syntheses of literature/scholarship as spaces that compile, legitimize and thusly create and control, or author, official knowledge in a field of study. Thus, I seriously take up the question “whose knowledge is it, anyway” (Apple, 2000) by asking whose *economic* knowledge is it?

Authorship and Disciplinary Knowledge

I draw on Foucault’s notion of the author-function (2003) and Franklin’s (1999) study of reviews of research. Authorship is not just about enunciation, it is about the production, location and legitimation of discourses. As Foucault (2003) and Prior (2010) have described, a letter might be signed with a particular name or a story (such as *The Odyssey*) a singular author (e.g. Homer) but a name alone is not necessarily enough to tell us the authorship-the material discursive conditions under which the letter or book was produced. So while a name might be known, its authorship, remains largely unknown and/or unseen and therefore anonymous (Foucault, p. 382). As such, authorship, or author-function, is about more than just names but about modes of legitimation that make certain names powerful or significant, that stand the test of time, and that get included in the historical record. Moreover, the will-to-name and to affix authorship is a product of modern society. I see reviews of literature and scholarship as a kind of authorship archive where this legitimizing process can be seen.

Franklin (1999) undertook a Foucauldian genealogical study of reviews of literature published in the journal *Review of Educational Research (RER* hereafter) in order to understand how, over time, “the research reviews that have appeared and continue to appear in *RER* have constructed a field of educational inquiry and to consider what that relationship tells us about the connection between research reviews and the material reality of educational research” (p. 348). Franklin analyzed 13 themed issues devoted to curriculum from 1931-1969, finding that trends in curriculum “did not just happen”-precursors were required” (p. 357). For example, an activities-based curriculum for what were then called “slow learners,” adopted by New York City schools and lauded by the *New York Times*, was made possible by the belief that “curriculum was a

mechanism of social control and had an ameliorative mission”—a then-new notion that had been advocated for in early reviews of literature published in special issues of *RER* (p. 357). Franklin identified “the linkage between the discursive practices embedded in curricular language and the state building that occurs when such proposals are institutionalized” (p. 358). In short, Franklin found connections between reviews of literature and school and classroom praxis; two realms that we might not think would normally intersect. Thus, I suggest that one way to begin to uncover authorship, the who/se of official knowledge, is not to look simply at textbooks and standards, but reviews of research as “venues where fields of inquiry, subjects, or problem domains are constituted, reproduced and at times changed” (p. 348). Reviews of research are important for delineating official knowledge and constituting a discipline by its inclusion and exclusion criteria; determining who or what is in or out, who is named and who is not, and who has the power to make these determinations.

Methodology

For this study, I created a method of analysis of literature reviews and authorship that I call a critical meta-synthesis discourse analysis. It is a method that borrows from Foucauldian discourse analysis and archival method and the method of meta-synthesis, which is a method for analyzing qualitative studies. A meta-synthesis of studies is not a matter of simply summarizing studies, but of finding new insights, connections and relationships beyond the individual studies (Mohammed, Moles & Chen, 2016). Meta-syntheses allow for reviews of research to communicate with and inform each other in order to create new knowledge. Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) advise flexibility when conducting meta-syntheses in order “to accommodate methods to the study and not the study to the methods” (p. 17). Doing otherwise can impede innovation and insight.

Whereas Franklin used Foucauldian genealogy, I draw on Foucault’s earlier, archaeological methodology; viewing reviews of research as a kind of archive. An archive is not just a depository of knowledge but, through its curation and preservation, creates knowledge. For this study, I am using “reviews of research” as a broad term to include peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that delineate the past and present state of pre-collegiate (K-12) economics education in the U.S. I examine reviews published from 2008-2017, a nearly ten-year span. Due to their potential for conflict of interest, I do not include studies commissioned by the Council for Economic Education such as Watts’s (2005) “What works” A Review of Research on Outcomes and Effective Program Delivery in Precollege Economic Education.” While many of the included pieces do not call themselves a literature review, they are documents that, to use the title of one of the reviews in this study, attempt to tell us “all that we know that may be so” about a particular field of study (Schug, Clark and Harrison, 2012), in this case economics and often take the form of a report on the state of economic education in the U.S. or a historical account of economic education.

Reviews or syntheses of research do not just house studies, or knowledge, they organize and make sense of them. As such, they are knowledge-creators, making arrangements in such a way that some connections and ideas are promoted and not others. They utilize inclusion and exclusion criteria that allows some to speak and silences others. A meta-synthesis would be expected to attend to this inclusion and exclusion criteria. However, the reviews of research that I have found and analyzed are vague about their criteria. Mostly, the reviews state that their objective is to do things such as “pause and observe the trends that have emerged in the past several decades” (Clark, Shug & Harrison, 2019, p. 1). “stress what research tells us about teaching

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economics at the high school level” and “review the longstanding debate among economists about teaching economics at the precollegiate level” (Watts and Walstad, 2011, p. 200). As such, determining this criteria is one of this study’s inquiries.

There must be leeway based on the particular phenomenon and discipline studied. This is particularly important advice for this study because economics education is unique in many ways. It is a small discipline within a small field in K-12 education (social studies) and it has a contested relationship with social studies and the other social science disciplines. Economics calls itself the Queen of social sciences (Pühringer, 2016) and has imperialistic tendencies (Conrad, 1998; Lazear, 1999) which can put it at odds within a democracy-oriented field like social studies. Moreover, while social studies is generally deferential to disciplinarians (Cherryholmes, 1983), economists are given outsized expertise in economics education and in overall society, being able to weigh in on social matters some say they are ill-trained to understand (Adams, 2019c; Earle, Moran and Ward-Perkins, 2017). This means economic educators, following disciplinary trends, might write differently than scholars in other fields.

Archives, and reviews of literature, like curriculum, are never neutral. In seeing reviews as kinds of archives, I attend to spatial arrangements, that is, the structure of the reviews, the inclusion and exclusion criteria and presences and absences, “the accumulated existence of discourses” that Foucault analyzed in his archaeological methodology (Olssen, 2014, p. 29). In my analysis, I attended to patterns or regularities that exist and how that promotes certain narratives and hides others. I attended to their structure, whom they choose to foreground and cite, and with whom these authors are affiliated and how they are connected to each other. Moreover, in order to understand who or what counts, I do just that-count. I count the citations, page lengths and mentions of words suggesting what should be taught and what is of most worth. In this way, I attempt to identify the human and nonhuman actors at work in authoring K-12 economic knowledge and the official curriculum in which it resides and is circulated.

The Reviews of Research

Seven reviews and syntheses of research serve as the data, or body of inquiry, for this study. The literature reviews derive from a variety of sources, most of which are publications that fall within economics education, which itself straddles social studies education and economics. I located these reviews over the course of several years while conducting research in K-12 economics (see Adams, a;b). The most seminal of the reviews, at least in the social studies community, is the Miller and VanFossen (2008) review published in the *Handbook of Social Studies Education*. It’s existence as “starting place” (Schug, Harrison and Clark, 2012) is not hypothetical. These authors retain authorial power in a field (social studies) that has few scholars devoted to economics education.

The studies are listed in the following chart:

Table 1

Review Articles and Syntheses of Research Selected for Analysis

Author(s)	Date	Title	Source:
Miller & Van Fossen	2008	Recent research on the teaching and learning of pre-collegiate economics	<i>Handbook of research in Social Studies education</i>
Clark, Shug and Harrison	2009	Recent trends and new evidence in economics and finance education	<i>Journal of Economic and Finance Education</i>
Watts and Walstad	2011	What research tells us about teaching high school economics	<i>Teaching economics in troubled times: Theory and Practice for secondary social studies</i>
Schug, Harrison and Clark	2012	All that we know that may be so in economic education	<i>Social Studies Research and Practice</i>
Harrison, Schug & Clark	2013	Battling the forces of darkness: How can economic freedom be effectively taught in the pre-college curriculum?	<i>The Journal of Private Enterprise</i>
Walstad and Watts	2015	Perspectives on economics in the school curriculum: Coursework, content and research	<i>The Journal of Economic Education</i>
Henning	2017	Introduction: Promising economic education practices from the past to present	<i>Innovations in economic education: Promising practices for teachers and students, k-16</i>

The reviews of literature I analyze were published between 2008-2017. In the section below, I describe each review in the order they were published.

Miller and VanFossen: A Starting Point

I begin with the review published as a chapter in the 2008 *Handbook of Social Studies Research* by Miller and VanFossen for several reasons. First, it was the first review of research on economics published in a *Handbook of Social Studies Research* since 1991. As such, the reviewers begin referentially; noting that they are building on that previous handbook review by Schug and Watts (1991). The time between these reviews speaks to the infrequency of reviews and reinforces why Miller and VanFossen's is so notable. At the time of this (2020) publication, twelve years later, it still stands as the most recent *Handbook* review of economic education. Second, as we will see, this chapter serves as a kind of pace-setter for the other reviews and reviewers, who give it both reference and deference. Third, its position in the *Handbook* makes it notably authoritative. Handbooks are meant to be objective guides. Other authors in this review have said of it "this chapter was designed, in part, as a starting point for graduate students and other researchers to gain

an overview of research that has been completed and what remains to be done” (Schug, Harrison & Clark, 2012, p. 2). That the authors were specifically commissioned to write it speaks to the authors’ recursive standing in the field; the *Handbook* editors viewed them as experts and, in turn, the published review conferred expertise upon them.

The review began with an overview of what would be included. The authors stated they would “revisit the case for economic literacy,” seeking new elements and “what economic literacy means, in order to determine what economic students should be learning” (p. 284). They stated they would examine curriculum and summarize research studies regarding the teaching and learning of economics. The review would discuss “major topics addressed by researchers” such as readily available sources, K-12 and studies published after 1990. Financial literacy cited as an example of an excluded topic with the reason being that the National Council for the Social Studies does not consider it as such. After reviewing Schug and Watt’s recommendations, the authors make a case for economic literacy, linking it to the *Voluntary Standards* and citizenship. In a section entitled “what economics is worth knowing?” (p. 287), the authors ask “what economic knowledge and understanding are essential for effective citizenship?” and “what economic content and reasoning skills must citizens master in order to enhance the workings of a market system, to encourage democracy or to participate in decisions related to public policy ?” (p. 287). Economic literacy is linked with “an economic way of thinking.” Citing Dahl (1998), the authors outline six key ideas that “people must grasp” to be economically literate (p. 287). These include; there is no such thing as a free lunch, thinking incrementally, markets coordinate consumption and production, relative price changes guide decision making, trade promotes growth and markets can fail (pp. 287-288). The discussion turns to the *VS* and their development, which are called the “de facto definition of economic literacy” (p. 288). There is some discussion of disagreements regarding the role of consensus and the user-friendliness of the standards. Most of the review is dedicated to the teaching and learning of economics, including teacher preparation (or lack thereof). Considerable space is devoted to the teaching and assessing of high school economics, including the Test of Economic literacy and the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), both products of the CEE. The authors end by discussing the “rich opportunities for researchers” presented by economic literacy in transition countries (e.g. People's Republic of China and the former USSR) (p. 300).

All That We Know and That is So

The next three reviews are by Clark, Schug and Harrison (2009), Schug, Harrison and Clark (2012) and Harrison, Clark and Schug (2013). Since these reviews share named authorship and are similar to one another, they are discussed together. The 2012 review, “All we know that may be so in economic education” was published as an introduction to a special issue on economics education for the journal *Social Studies Research and Practice*. Its purpose is to “provide an overview of recent reviews of research in economic education and the results of the recent National Assessment of Educational Progress in economics” (p. 1). Four of the article’s seven pages are dedicated to summations of the Miller and VanFossen (2008) review and that 2005 CEE-commissioned report by Watts on the state of economics education in the U.S. Drawing on Miller and VanFossen, they describe the importance of the *Voluntary Standards*;

[they] played an important role in influencing what economics is taught at the pre-college level. Textbooks and curriculum materials are often aligned to the

Standards. Many states looked to the *Standards* for guidance on developing state standards. The content of national assessments, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress in Economics 2006, an assessment of high school seniors, was influenced by the *Standards*. The *Standards* were produced by a committee of largely mainstream economists...represent[ing] something of a consensus regarding what content is most important at the pre-college level. While the debate continues...the *Standards* remain dominant (p. 2).

This is a very informative statement. It succinctly sums up the fact that the NAEP assessment, state standards and textbooks are based on the *Voluntary Standards*. Although the review itself does not tell us exactly what concepts or content is important, we are told that the *VS* will tell us what content is “most important.” Consensus of “largely mainstream economists” is emphasized (p. 2). As a result, a reader, desiring to know the status of economic knowledge, likely will need to look no further than the *VS*. Like Miller and VanFossen, they reiterate that “teachers remain poorly prepared to teach basic economics” (p. 2).

In the 2009 review, “Recent Trends and New Evidence in Economics and Finance Education” Clark, Schug and Harrison deferred to the Miller and VanFossen *Handbook* chapter for a status update on the field. The section in their review on economics curriculum consists of a presentation of findings about teachers’ opinions on teaching economics and personal finance. In both reviews, and similar to Miller and VanFossen, the *Voluntary Standards* were shown to be *the* K-12 economics curriculum. Next, the authors presented findings from a study of the high school economics NAEP scores across the social studies disciplines. They found that economics scores were “much higher than the levels attained in the 2010 NAEP assessments in history, civics, or geography” (p. 5). They speculate that “[p]erhaps it [high scores] results from the relatively widespread agreement regarding what economics concepts are most important to teach as demonstrated by publication and revisions of the *Standards*” (p. 5). Again, consensus is stressed and consistency is given credit for NAEP scores. Finally, they present findings from a study on high school economics that analyzed teachers’ attitudes and beliefs.

The authorial team’s most recent review was written for a slightly different, more visibly partisan, audience. Instead of a social studies or economic audience, this review was published in the *Journal of Private Enterprise* and situates economics firmly in an ideology of private control and the free market. The tone and focus of the review mirrors the journal itself in its adherence to free market ideology and privatization as it continually stresses the value of involvement by the private sector to ensure parity with public-sector subjects like civics. The authors make a case for private investment (to use economics terminology) in K-12 economics through Council for Economic Education (CEE) sponsored programs, saying of the Georgia council “it might be the most effective and cost-efficient in-service training in the nation” (p. 98). What also sets this review apart is its disclosure that one of the authors, Schug, “has participated in the development of several of these publications” (p. 94) regarding instructional materials. Like the other reviews, this one reiterates that students and teachers do not know enough economics (i.e. aren’t economically literate), score poorly on economist assessments, need more help and thus there needs to be more research and investment in pedagogy and curricular materials. We can only assume that by the title “forces of darkness” they mean challenges to “institutions of a free market economy” (p. 87) posed by economics illiteracy.

Walstad and Watts

In a book chapter in Wood and Schug's (2011) edited volume, Watts and Walstad (2011) presented scholarship related to the number of states requiring economics and the importance of teaching economics. Their topics are similar to those of Miller and VanFossen. The review provides an overview of the advent of the *Voluntary Standards* and then presents research related to the teaching and learning of pre-collegiate economics. They cite poor NAEP scores in economics, advocate for better teaching materials, and for economics to be taught as a separate high school course. In terms of curriculum, the authors cite an increase in the number and range of textbooks available since 1960 and provide various for and non-profit economics education websites and curricular resources from organizations like the CEE, Junior Achievement, Proctor and Gamble and McDonalds (p. 203). The authors do not offer an evaluation of these resources except to note that they are "student-centered" and use "active-learning teaching methods" (p. 203).

In 2015, Walstad and Watts published "Perspectives on economics in the school curriculum: Coursework, content and research" in the *Journal of Economic Education*. The content was similar to the authors' 2011 review. It began with a statement about the large body of research and a statement that this review would "build upon the substantial body of past work by describing the current conditions for the teaching of economics in the K-12 curriculum" (p. 325) and the implications of current initiatives. The authors remarked on the dominance of the *VS* and the "relatively minor updates in economic content" (p. 328), noting that this represents what is covered in university principles textbooks and comprises what "should be taught in elementary and secondary schools" (p. 329). The authors mentioned the existence of "alternative perspectives" presented in a panel discussion on the *VS* and published in a special (2012) issue of the *Journal of Economic Education (JEE)* but do not elaborate on those viewpoints.

Past and Present

The most recent review served as the introduction for Henning's (2017) *Innovations in economic education: Promising practices for teachers and students K-16*. The book is intended to fill a gap and meet a demand for integrating economics into education for young children and young adults. In the review, Henning offered an updated historical review of the field. Although proceeding chronologically, it covers many of the same topics and foregrounds many of the same arguments as the other reviews. There is an emphasis not necessarily on curriculum formulation but execution, that is, on sponsoring organizations and the materials such as video series and experiences they provide. Specifically mentioned are mini society and classroom economics and sponsoring organizations such as the CEE, Junior Achievement and the Federal Reserve (p. 2). The themes Henning identified are similar to other reviews; the struggle to define the field, the production of standards and improving teacher education. The assertions are similar; insufficient economic content taught by non-economics social studies subjects (p. 4 & 9), taking economics courses in high school and being taught explicit economics content leads to higher scores of economic literacy (p. 5), traditional social studies teacher training is insufficient and thus the CEE has attempted to fill the void with workshops (p. 6). A page is dedicated to the *Voluntary Standards'* influence on textbooks, virtual programs and state standards (p. 9). A few pages later, Henning noted the 2010 updates made to the *VS* as "mostly changes in formatting and some 'faddish' ideas about pedagogy (p. 13). Like Walstad and Wats (2015), Henning cites Marglin's

(2012) contention of the *VS*'s oversimplification of consensus and overemphasis on the market. Ample space was provided for discussion of instructional methods and use of technology. Henning also discusses the NCSS Inquiry Arc and the C3 Standards and the Federal Reserve's role in supplying supporting content (p. 13).

Findings

The authorship analysis reveals several important insights into authorship and official knowledge in K-12 economics education. In this section, I describe how the reviews of literature frame official knowledge and authorship and how this aligns with the larger mainstream trends in economics and economics education.

Shoulds, Oughts and Worths

Official curriculum defines what knowledge is of most worth; it is what (someone believes) *should* or *ought* to be learned. These “shoulds” and “worths” constitute “official knowledge” or “the explicit academic content that students are intended to learn and the often-implicit social content that both lies within and contextualizes academic content” (Gershon, 2010, p. 618). All of the reviews emphasize that the *Voluntary Standards* are what should be taught and represent what is important to know. In the Miller and VanFossen chapter, “should” is used six times in reference to the *Voluntary Standards*. Clark, Schug and Harrison (2009), as cited earlier, note that the *VS* represent what is “most important” to learn (p. 1). Similarly, Walstad and Watts (2015) used “should” four times in their section on “economics content” when emphasizing that the purpose of the *VS* is to delineate the knowledge that ought to be learned at both the K-12 and collegiate levels (p. 328-329). Although these standards constitute the *should* and *ought* to be taught, it is still unclear what, exactly, economic knowledge is. Much of that information is left up to the *VS* and tests of economic literacy to determine. There are a few engagements with explicit concepts, such as the six outlined by Miller and VanFossen and the emphasis on private sector in Harrison, Clark and Schug (2013). Debates over curriculum mostly consist of how it should be implemented or technicalities such as the difference between a principle and a concept rather than ideology or schools of thought. It is stressed to readers, over and over, that *VS* content is good because it is formed of “consensus” (Henning, p. 9 citing McDonald & Siegfried, 2012, p. 308) and because, unlike economic content found in other disciplines, it is correct and not misleading. It is continually stressed that students who take economics courses score better on tests of economic literacy and that standalone courses are more successful than integrated ones at teaching economics (Miller and VanFossen, p. 299). Essentially, economics *is* the *Voluntary Standards* and learning them equates to learning economics and/or developing economic literacy. It makes sense that learning these standards equates to higher test scores, since the tests of economic literacy are based on the *VS* and both are sponsored by the CEE.

Who ought to teach economics? A great deal of the reviews are dedicated to describing students' and teachers' lack of economic knowledge, what should and ought to be done to raise NAEP test scores (indicating what “counts” as learning economics and is of most worth) and, relatedly, the importance of leaving economics education to the professionals. A study by Buckles and Watts (1998) is used to great effect in the reviews to make the case that since the “other” (their words) non-economic social science disciplines, history, geography, government and social studies (which they consider a distinct discipline), do a bad job of teaching economic concepts,

teaching economics ought to be the primary domain of economists and certain other approved specialists and students ought to learn economics in a standalone course. For example, Miller and VanFossen (2008) cite Buckles and Watts' disdain for the geography standards they analyzed:

“Geography . . . concentrated on the importance of natural resources and the environmental cost of economic activity. If these [standards] documents were implemented in their current forms, we believe they would contribute to low levels of economic literacy among students taking only those courses and confuse students who take separate economics courses” (p. 290).

The chosen quote is representative of Buckles and Watts' argument, even if it does leave out some of their more pointed and inflammatory accusations. In that article, Buckles and Watts write that geography's “most significant weaknesses... are a largely one-sided emphasis on the environmental costs of technology” and “reliance is heavy throughout on the importance of government policy and the allocation of resources through means other than markets” (p. 164). Henning wrote that Other disciplines “ignore or misrepresent economics” and thus “short-changed” students (p. 9) and that the evidence for content integration was less than compelling (p. 12). Still, it is unclear from the reviews of literature or from the article itself why a curricular emphasis on natural resources or other issues lead to student confusion and low levels of economic literacy. What Buckles and Watts considered “wrong” or “weak” appears to be largely a matter of ideological mismatch rather than a knowledge problem. For example, in their conclusion Buckles and Watts write “we found an uncritical acceptance in these documents for wide-ranging government intervention and planning” alongside critique of economic growth (p. 165). The authors do not tell us *why* laissez-faire policies are right, only that favorable views of government intervention are wrong or incongruous with the *US*. In short, it would appear that the economic knowledge students gain in geography, civics, history and social studies is not the right *kind* of economic knowledge. Geography suggests human consumption can be bad for the environment and geography and civics are complimentary of government intervention¹. It seems that the authors believe integration not only teaches “wrong” content but also leads to confusion, which seems to be a concern among economics educators.

Not mentioned in the reviews is “National standards or economic imperialism?” a response to Buckles and Watts published in that same issue of the *Journal of Economic Education* (Conrad, 1998). Nevertheless, the Buckles and Watts study is cited in four of the reviews (both Walstad reviews, Miller and VanFossen and Henning). Harrison, Clark and Schug are a bit more optimistic about integration, but stress economics needs to be taught explicitly and that, referencing a study by Schug and Niederjohn (2008), integration *could* be successful under the right circumstances (p. 95). It could be concluded that, according to the reviews, the prevailing thought is that economics should be taught by a select body with legitimated knowledge in order to reduce confusion and increase economic literacy, i.e. NAEP test scores. Council for Economic Education-sponsored teacher workshops and products were lauded and advertised, particularly by Harrison, Clark and Schug. Although it is not stated directly, a critical take on this is that there is a desire on the authors' part, to contain and narrow and control economic knowledge. Moreover, “confusion” can be code for non-conforming, that is, a deviation from the neoclassical norm. Confused students raise uncomfortable questions. This is consistent with a statement in the *VS* (2010) and by Siegfried

¹ See Leet, Paringer and Lopus' (2008) complimentary take on high school textbooks' adherence to Friedman freed market ideology. See also Adams, 2019b.

and Meszaros (1998) that the *VS* would teach neoclassical perspectives and not other viewpoints because doing so would result in confusion.

Agenda setting. Reviews of research are important for setting, or at least suggesting, research agendas and trajectories for a field, that is, what knowledge will be of most worth in the future? Miller and VanFossen noted “[t]here is a large, unfinished agenda in research in economics literacy” that has gone unfulfilled since the Schug and Walstad review in the 1990s. They recommended research into; students’ economic reasoning, the efficacy of instructional strategies such as those from EconEdLink, financial literacy and transition economies and the relationship between democracy and the market. Walstad and Watts (2015) concluded with concerns about economics’ place within a national core curriculum, standardization and the use of curricular materials. Henning did not necessarily make recommendations, but, in the conclusion, stated that “the field continues to look for creative ways to improve economics instruction” and that “resources need to be publicized and updated for economics teachers” (p. 15).

As evident from the reviews, there is a distinct focus on pedagogy and content delivery. Most were concerned with economics courses students take, the curricular materials they use and the teachers who teach them. This is consistent with the larger field of economics education (expanded to the collegiate level) that have focused predominately on pedagogy—new ways of teaching the same fundamental concepts (Underwood, 2007). For example, Henning’s sections entitled “popular curriculum and instructional models,” centers on the efficacy of using lecture, web tools, and popular movies—not on ideology or perspective or knowledge construction. This focus on methods also fits with Earle, Moran and Ward-Perkins’ (2017) critique of the popular, and allegedly reformed and up-to-date, CORE economics curriculum, which simply “teach[es] neoclassical theory in a more engaged and up-to-date manner” (p. 111). In other words, curriculum “reform” is hardly radical and has been mostly concerned with teaching the status-quo curriculum better; repackaging it rather than actually improving or changing the curriculum. This is because “curriculum” as Franklin (1999) pointed out, *is* reform(ing). In a similar vein that “prison reform” is impossible because the modern conception of prison *is* as a reformatory.

Conspicuously absent are calls for increased attention to race, gender and marginalized groups outside of scores on tests. King and Finley (2015) have critiqued the Miller and VanFossen review for failing to prioritize race, asserting that “the agenda that persists in K-12 economic education is one of race neutrality and color blindness” (p. 200). This is consistent with work by Shanks (2018; 2019) and Pouncy (2002) and many others (e.g. Rossetti, 2001) who note the lack of engagement with race and gender in economics curriculum and neoclassical ideology. This is also consistent with racial and gender disparities in the economics profession. Studies by The American Economic Association indicate that women still represent less than half of economics majors in the U.S. (Chevalier, 2019) and that persons from racially minoritized groups make up less than 16% (CSMGEP, 2017; Rosalsky, 2020).

Inclusion and Exclusion

Reading the reviews, it is evident that certain names are consistently included. In this section I attend to those names as well as the commonalities that unite them.

Circuitous citing. In an effort to find out “who counts” and who gets to do the counting, I literally counted citations in each review. From this, I found a pattern of circuitous citing. The earlier chart also reveals four author-groups and a total of eight named, or signatory authors. The

eight reviewers comprise a significant portion of citations in all of the literature reviews. In particular, VanFossen, Miller, Schug, Walstad and Watts, totaled thirty citations in the Miller and VanFossen (2008) review, thirty-one in Walstad and Watts (2015), five out of the (only) seven citations in Schug, Harrison and Clark (2012), and fourteen in the Watts and Walstad (2011) book chapter. VanFossen, Harrison, Schug and Clark all appear in Henning's book, and the introduction has twelve citations from Walstad and/or Watts, five from Miller-VanFossen and four from Schug. There was also a pattern of self-citation. For example, of the seven regular references in the Schug, Harrison and Clark (2012) review, three were written by Schug.

Other authors. When the reviewers are not citing one another, they cite a fairly consistent group of key authors. Studies by Lopus (1997; with Morton, Reinke, Schug and Wentworth, 2003; with Leet 2007) were used to demonstrate the merits of the economics curricula in light of challenges facing the teaching of the subject including low NAEP scores and a lack of instructional time and attention. Lopus (with Leet, 2007) published textbook analyses praising leading high school economics textbooks for their adherence to the *Voluntary Standards* and for their faithful adherence to the free market ideology of Milton Friedman (with Paringer and Leet, 2008 published in the *Journal of Free Enterprise*). Walstad and Watts (2015) deployed Leet and Lopus's (2007) findings to assert that "there are now far fewer publishers and economics textbooks for high school economics than in past decades. The few current textbooks are quite similar in content coverage of economics *Standards*, so there is less product differentiation but not less quality" (p. 334). With that statement the reviewers are able to assure their readership that quality prevails because the books stick close to the *Voluntary Standards* even though mainstream economics would say more variety is usually better. Not included was a study of that same set of textbooks by Neumann (2014) or textbook analyses by Myers and Stocks (2010), Neumann (2012, 2014), Gans (2015) and Marri, Gaudelli, et.al. (2012) all of which are less complimentary of leading high school economics texts that Leet and Lopus (2007).

Most reviews heavily cite studies by William Becker, J.J. Siegfried, Bonnie Meszaros, Ken Rebeck and Stephen Buckles. What all of these named authors have in common is their affiliation with the Council for Economic Education (CEE) and authorship of the *VS*. In the original 1997 version of the *Voluntary Standards* Meszaros is listed as the project director along with members of the writing committee including Watts and Siegfried. In the 2010 version, Buckles is acknowledged as a reviewer. Becker was on the board of directors, Siegfried helped write both versions of the *VS*, Lopus was a director the CEE and Buckles was a senior advisor to the CEE and for the NAEP test. With the exception of Henning's note that MacDonald and Siegfried (2012) were on the *VS*'s writing team, most reviews did not mention these affiliations. One potential problem is that many of these CEE-affiliated authors were producing research and commentary on CEE products such as the NAEP test, the *VS* and state-level teacher workshops (p.13). For example, Henning cites Schober's (1984) findings that teachers who participated in workshops put on by the Louisiana Council for Economic Education (a branch of the CEE) of which he was the executive director at the time (as indicated by the author's biographical information in the article), had "significantly higher achievement scores in economics literacy" among other positive outcomes (p. 7).

Studies published in the *Journal of Economic Education* are well represented, constituting twelve of the citations in Watts and Walstad (2011), seventeen in Miller and VanFossen (2008) and twenty-nine in Henning. The Council for Economic Education is also frequently cited as author and commissioner of research studies such as "What works: A review of outcomes and

effective program delivery in precollege economic education” (Watts, 2005) which contains two pages comprised of two columns each of citations from Walstad, the then-chair of the CEE. This report is cited by both Walstad and Watts (2015) and Clark, Schug and Harrison (2009).

Thus, it is unsurprising that all of the reviews are so similar-they are largely drawing from similar source material. The number of citations speaks to the quantity and quality of scholarship produced by this group and the influence they have had in shaping the field of economics education. They author the field of economics education through their reviews while also serving as authorial sources of knowledge.

Whose Knowledge?

The Council for Economic Education seems to have an outsized role in authoring reviews of literature and the field of K-12 economics education. It is worth examining in greater detail what all of the reviewers and research have in common. That is, whose interests are being served and what seems to drive these circuitous citations? If we look closely at the eight authors of the reviews of literature, we can see that all are affiliated at the local, state or national level with the CEE, as shown in the chart below;

Table 2
CEE Affiliation

Name	Professional Position	Organizational Affiliations
J.R. Clark	Professor & Distinguished Chair of Free Enterprise at University of Tennessee-Chattanooga.	Association of Private Enterprise & managing editor of the <i>Journal of Private Enterprise</i> Council for Economic Education
Ashley Harrison	Professor- University of Tennessee-Chattanooga	Probasco Chair of Free Enterprise’s Center for Economic Education
Mary Beth Henning	Associate Professor of Social Studies Education Northern Illinois University	Co-Director of the Northern Illinois Center for Economic Education
Stephen L. Miller	Professor of social studies education Ohio State	Council for Economic Education Ohio Center for Economic Education
Mark Schug	Professor & Consultant University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Council for Economic Education Association of Private Enterprise and on the editorial board of the <i>Journal of Private Enterprise</i>
VanFossen	Professor of Social Studies Education Purdue University	Council for Economic Education (Purdue) Editorial board <i>Theory and Research in Social Education</i>
William Walstad	Professor of economics University of Nebraska-Lincoln	Editor, <i>Journal of Economic Education</i> Consultant for the Council for Economic Education Developed the NAEP test in economics
Michael Watts	Professor of economics Purdue University	Council for Economic Education

As is evident, the CEE lies at the core of the reviews in terms of content and authorship. The CEE seems to play an outsized role in determining what is considered both official (and appropriate) economics knowledge and curriculum. Taken individually, the reviews appear as mutually reinforcing and confirming. Readers would be apt to believe in what is being said because the same thing is said so many times by so many people in much the same way. Taken together, however, it is evident that the reviews emanate from a singular regime, or source, of knowledge-the CEE. Thus, the CEE might be thought of as the invisible hand for its powerful but largely hidden role in framing K-12 economic education through a variety of avenues including (whether on purpose or by happenstance) reviews of research.

Discussion: The Invisible Hand

Reviews of research are venues that provides insight into the counting and organization of official knowledge. The consistency of the reviews and their similarities to one another seem to indicate a common understanding of what “counts” as economics. As Apple (1993) wrote;

What counts as knowledge, the ways in which it is organized, who is empowered to teach it, what counts as an appropriate display of having learned it, and-just as critically-who is allowed to ask and answer all of these questions are part and parcel of how dominance and subordination are reproduced and altered in this society (p. 222).

Economics seems to mean the *Voluntary Standards*. Those that are allowed to ask and answer questions of official knowledge seem to have ties to the CEE.

In economics, the invisible hand indicates the presence of individual freedom and the absence of a grand “mastermind” (to use Adam Smith’s terminology). It refers to an invisible force that moves markets of individual buyers and sellers toward equilibrium. It is generally used as an argument in favor of laissez-faire economic policies and non-government interference. A disembodied, disinterested “market” system populated by knowledgeable producers and consumers is supposed to create equilibrium between supply and demand, largely without government help save the enforcement of private property rights. It is the belief that there is not, nor should there ever be, a single person, party, entity or organization pulling the strings and thus artificially manipulating the laws of the market. As even Watts (1987) put it, “there is clear reason to be concerned with the potential for bias in instructional and public relations materials that may be promoted as suitable for classroom use” including materials for courses labelled as “free enterprise” and those produced by private companies (p. 195). Yet, this study shows that the CEE might be thought of as a kind of not-so invisible hand, a hiding-in-plain sight force that creates demand, offers supply (workshops, curriculum, standards, tests) and uses its power to determine and legitimate knowledge.

Economics is as Economics Does

There are structural similarities between the reviews of literature and the field of neoclassical economics. Those critical of neoclassical economics contend that it presents itself as the only economics (Adams, 2019a) and minimizes and discourages multiple perspectives. Although not mentioned in any of the reviews, the writers of the *Voluntary Standards* acknowledge their neoclassical ideology (CEE, 2010, p. vi; Siegfried and Meszaros, 1998). It is not so surprising

this is done at the K-12 level considering it is what happens in higher education and even economics graduate programs, “most students are not even told that there are other ways to think about the economy and as a result they do not see economics as a subject with debate and disagreement (Earle, Moran and Ward-Perkins, 2017, p. 56). As the economist Jacob Viner is reported to have stated “economics is what economists do” that is, actions count more than conflicting definitions (cited by Backhouse and Medema, 2009, p. 222). Mirroring the field as a whole, the reviews emphasize points of consensus and agreement, not dissention.

Dissention

Walstad and Watts (2015) and Henning (2017) provide good examples of what happens when dissention is acknowledged. After praising the *Voluntary Standards* as “the most important and influential set of concise content about what economics should be taught” Walstad and Watts acknowledge that “the debate over content continues within the discipline and provides alternative perspectives on what should be taught or emphasized in high school economics” (p. 329) and devote one paragraph to this topic. The papers they cite are from a special session at the 2012 American Economics Association meeting and a 2012 issue of *JEE*. Several authors are listed in parentheses, including Marglin (2012). However, Walstad and Watts do not tell readers the nature of this dissention, pivoting, instead to write that “significantly less discussion takes place across disciplines taught in the K-12 curriculum” (p. 329). The “debate” over content is never mentioned again and no one in that list is quoted directly. Henning also cited Marglin in a section on “standards and assessment” that specifically address the 2010 update to the *VS*. Henning explained that Marglin “argued that the standards over-simplified the ‘consensus’ of what economists hold true” and that they do not introduce controversies. Henning then noted that what ought to be taught is always a political matter. The paragraph ends and the next begins with a discussion of the C3 Inquiry Arc. Yet, both reviews minimize the vehemence of Marglin’s argument. Marglin, an economist, was not simply questioning consensus but called the *VS* “a catechism of establishment economics” (p. 288), accused it of being hostile to critiques of the discipline (p. 289) and said it failed to address present day issues such as the 2008 financial crisis, poverty and Occupy Wall Street. Miller and VanFossen (2008) mention critics of the *VS* and its predecessor, but these are mostly disagreements about technicalities such as principles versus skills and not content. The authors do mention that some question whether consensus exists in the field (p. 288) but note that this exists mostly at the college level “than to the more fundamental economics principles for K-12 students found in the *Standards*” and that they met the criterion for general consensus “by the diverse committee that drafted them and the creators of the NAEP test (p. 289).

The silencing of Marglin is indicative of a larger silencing of those who critiqued textbooks, standards and neoclassical theory. As I have shown, the past twenty years have seen an uptick in critiques of neoclassical theory, yet the reviews of research show the opposite (Adams, 2019b). Left out of the reviews and the historical record(s) are Raymond Miller’s (1993) suggestion that neoclassical economics was destroying the planet, Hahn and Blankenship’s (1983) study of how economics textbooks represent women, Romanish’s (1983) study of ideological, free-market bias in high school economics textbooks, Myers and Stocks’ (2010) analysis of textbooks, Neumann’s (2012; 2014) studies of textbook bias towards socialism and lack of engagement with wealth inequality, Conrad’s (1998) critique of/rebuttal to Buckles & Watts, Gans’ (2015) study of neoclassicism in high school textbooks, and Marri, Crocco, et.al. (2012), and Marri, Gaudelli, et.al.’s (2012) study of the lack of attention to the federal debt and deficit in

K-12 standards and in high school textbooks. Most of these are empirical studies and all can be accessed from peer-reviewed journals².

These insights shed light into the selective tradition at work and who or what gets to count as legitimate economic research and knowledge. The overviews and discussions of the field and curriculum are positioned in ways that, to readers, sound value-neutral and comprehensive and therefore have the potential to go unquestioned. While it is likely that it is CEE-affiliated authors did, and currently are doing, much, if not most, of the empirical research, this is no reason to ignore or minimize viewpoints that do not toe the CEE's line or that are critical of the *VS*. Without these alternative viewpoints, it is easy to assert that consensus exists and, more implicitly, that there is no need to interrogate the potential ideology or bias, upholding the notion that legitimate economics, as a positive science, is and ought to be objective and value-free (Watts, 2001).

Taking the Red Pill

The literature reviews follow neoclassical theory, and economics' the modus operandi. Varoufakis (2017) writes of the difficulties of overcoming neoclassicism in academia, writing that "as long as you accept the dogma...You are guaranteed a decent job. Maybe you could get a mortgage by the time you are 26" (p. 68). In other words, aligning oneself with the dominant narrative can mean material success and comfort. However, working against the neoclassic norm, or taking the red pill, as Varoufakis puts it, is "at your own peril" (p. 68).

We cannot be ignorant of the politics and economics of academic publishing and the power of official knowledge, as "meanwhile in academia, economists publish their theoretical papers in the journals which the priesthood of neoclassical economics give the most brownie points" (p. 72). The same could be said for economics educators. They publish in particular journals and hold positions on editorial boards. Heeding the call for more scholarship on economics education, it behooves scholars to supply the demand rather than go against the grain, because "to go in a different direction by biting the red pill and questioning all these models is likely to condemn you to a much more difficult existence" (p. 72).

The author-function, then, extends to publishing. Book and journal editors are part of the author-function. Reviews of literature, and publishers of those reviews, have a powerful discursive function in shaping perceptions about what is and is not economics, that is, what an editor may or may not recognize as legitimate. The reviews of literature and body of work of the authors in this study suggests the expert status conferred on these individuals. Crucially, I purposely chose to analyze non-CEE commissioned reviews. None of these publications are directly affiliated with the CEE-which only adds credence to the CEE's discursive power and the echo-chamber effect and makes their role all the more anonymous and hidden and therefore more powerful (Cherryholmes, 1983).

Challenging the orthodoxy leads to more personal obstacles" in the academic and business sectors (p. 68). Helburn (1997) recounted the difficulties of breaking into the economic textbook and curriculum industry. The CEE who "could not take positions on the materials of other groups, although they did promote their own," mostly ignored the author's ECON12 project since "they had their own materials and program to promote" (p. 274). This speaks to the interests

² See Schug (1993), Miller (1993) and Walstad & Watts (1984) for viewpoints on the R. Miller and Romanish articles.

organizations have in their own products. Organizations like the CEE have the potential to use their power to shut out material and ideological competition.

Watts (1987) expressed concern about the various corporate, financial, business and labor groups attempting to influence and finance economics education (Junior Achievement, labor unions and labor studies at universities are listed; the CEE is not) accepted uncritically by cash-strapped school systems (p. 195). The CEE operates with funding from the Department of Education, individual donors, the selling of curricular products and corporate sponsorships. For example, their “Never too young” personal finance curriculum was sponsored by ING Bank’s foundation. The CEE’s board consists of persons employed by and affiliated with various corporate and financial entities including Wells Fargo, Verizon, Ford and several asset and wealth management companies (e.g. Chaffetz Lindsey). I am not saying any preference or marginalization of viewpoints is necessarily done on purpose, but with purpose, that is, within a particular discursive regime that gives power to an organization to make knowledge official and to have at least some control over the curriculum, testing and teacher training.

Conclusion

In this study, I wanted to know how the produced knowledge (in the form of published studies of K-12 economics) is made significant through reviews of literature and their authors. As I reviewed the literature reviews, I attended to the people who were writing them as well as the non-human, non-individualistic discursive and institution mechanisms that also and anonymously author. Moreover, the study points to the importance of reviews of literature in determining official curriculum and official knowledge. While it is well recognized that “economics textbooks are central to how the discipline of economics reproduces itself and how it convinces society of the legitimacy of its conclusions” (Thornton, 2018, p. 7), less has been written about the ways researchers legitimize (or not) the textbooks they analyze and the ways reviews of literature legitimate those analyses. In the case of the reviews in this study, it would seem that all is well in the field of economics and in the content of textbooks and standards, but, upon further review, it is clear that the curriculum is not alright (Adams, 2019a,b,c,d; Earle, Moran and Ward-Perkins, 2017; Shanks, 2019; Sober, 2017).

The analysis reveals the presence of the CEE all the way through—from the reviewers’ affiliations to the authors they cite (or don’t). Thus the answer to the question “whose economic knowledge is it, anyway?”

The extent to which the CEE has its hand in training teachers, administering standardized tests, and writing curriculum and research reviews speaks to the extent to which students (and their teachers), in learning “economics” are actually learning CEE. History scholar Jenkins (2003) noted what happens when students’ knowledge is mediated through a particular author (in this case, textbooks);

...when the exam came along you wrote in the shadow of Elton. And when you passed you gained an A level in English history...But really it would be more accurate to say that you have an A level in Geoffrey Elton, for what, actually, is your reading of the English past if not his reading of it?” (p. 7).

Jenkins' point is that students could be said to have learned not history, per se, but they have learned its author, Elton. Using similar logic, it could be said that students in the U.S. do not learn economics, or even the economy; they learn the CEE.

Implications

Recognizing authors and the author-function can make for more critical consumers of scholarship, especially economics scholarship, and reviews of literature. The study provides insight into the power of reviews of literature. I hope that the study can prompt readers to ask “whose knowledge”? is framing a review of research and a field of study. I should also hope that journal editors who might not realize economics' underlying ideology to ask authors to reveal their affiliations and interest in the name of transparency and honesty. These revelations make all of us more informed, savvy and economically literate consumers of reviews of literature and of economic education materials. This study also raises questions about the power and interests in and of reviews of research.

After all, no one, not even economists or economics educators, are devoid of interest. Although often masquerading as neutral, disinterested and dislocated, economic knowledge, like all knowledge, “is local and contingent and connected to a community in which that knowledge was produced or interpreted or otherwise made significant” (Weintraub, quoted by Culleberg, Amariglio and Ruccio, 2001, p. 19).

Although I have pointed to a particular author-function at work, I am not trying to accuse the reviewers of being deceitful or malicious. I do not think they are up to no good. Quite the contrary, they are good scholars who have dedicated their careers to improving precollegiate economics education. The abundance of their work speaks to the impact they have made on the field and the value of their work. Individual authors are not the problem. The eight authors named here, the signatories, could be anyone; Walstad could be replaced with Smith. The larger point is that people operate within disciplinary structures that privileges individuals, demands a named author (Foucault, 1994) and, in doing so, conceals the other productive and authorial functions at work. The reviewers are part of a larger system pernicious to disciplines and fields of study in general (Cherryholmes, 1983) and economics in particular (e.g. Varoufakis, 2017). I doubt that they are purposely withholding information or promoting the CEE. Even if they were, purposeful and conscious promotion could be acceptable under some circumstances and if those potential conflicts of interest and purposes were revealed. After all, everyone, even economists, have perspectives, viewpoints, agendas to promote and audiences to be persuaded (McCloskey, 1983). More serious, perhaps, is the anonymous, hidden and even inadvertent ways that one organization, the CEE, undergirded by one ideology (neoclassicism), supported by political, corporate and economic trends and interests in education, is able to so completely author a field to the extent that dissenting viewpoints are at best marginalized or misrepresented and at worst outrightly concealed.

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Author

Erin C. Adams is an assistant professor at Kennesaw State University where she teaches courses on elementary social studies methods and teacher leadership. She is interested in the teaching and learning of economics, discourses about work in schools, and using poststructural theories and theorists to understand our socio-economic contexts.