

Conceptual Analysis In Economics

An Educator's Reference Desk Lesson Plan

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Endorsed by: These lesson plans are the result of the work of the teachers who have attended the Columbia Education Center's Summer Workshop. CEC is a consortium of teacher from 14 western states dedicated to improving the quality of education in the rural, western, United States, and particularly the quality of math and science Education. CEC uses Big Sky Telegraph as the hub of their telecommunications network that allows the participating teachers to stay in contact with their trainers and peers that they have met at the Workshops.

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Grade Level(s): 9, 10, 11, 12

Subject(s):

- Social Studies/Economics

Overview: To imbue students with their own personal views about economic policy is not the proper function of a teacher. By using Conceptual Analysis, an approach that I developed, students may meet the challenge of productive growth for our country through an increased understanding of economic problems of the United States. Students will have the opportunity to think critically and should be able to make logical decisions.

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to involve students in making decisions and pursuing their own interests within a social and economic environment. Students should develop skills such as critical thinking, decision making, and assertiveness; attitudes, intuition, and the kinds of knowledge and understanding that will enhance continuous change and growth.

Objectives: As a result of this activity, the students will:

1. Devise an opinion poll listing pros and cons pertaining to an economic policy.
2. Debate opposing economic issues that will lead to a better understanding of a particular economic policy.
3. Write a critique of the issue their group discussed. They are to express how their group handled the topic listing both pros and cons. They are to state their own opinions and how they reached their conclusions. Also, let them give their ideas about using the Conceptual Analysis process--if it was beneficial to them or not.

Resources/Materials: Supplemental economic texts, pamphlets, library resources, and computer on-line database searches should be available for the students to use in their research. Allow class time for the groups to work together. The teacher could use a liquid crystal display

during the lectures to present material graphically, etc. This is also a good time to use a multimedia program for a review before testing or to reinforce a concept. Involve students in developing the multimedia project by putting their work on diskette.

Activities:

Divide the class into several small groups.

Explain the objectives.

Group members select a topic they wish to work with from a list prepared by the teacher. A selection of topics could be as follows:

The federal government should guarantee a minimum annual income to all its citizens.

The U.S. should have advertising in order to create mass production.

The U.S. should pursue a policy that will strengthen public enterprise.

The federal government should pursue a policy to control inflation.

The U.S. should take steps toward achieving a more nearly balanced budget. The federal subsidization of agriculture should be eliminated.<7>

The federal anti-trust policy should be strengthened.

Each group prepares a list of pros and cons for their topic. For example, Group 1 chooses topic number 2 and states: "Advertising is Necessary." Their compiled material might include these facts:

Pros:

1. Provides information to use in making rational choices
2. Supports national communications media
3. Stimulates product development
4. Provides disclosure of product integrity for successful competition
5. Expands production and utilizes greater economics of scale
6. Promotes employment by inducing high levels of consumer spending

Cons:

1. Uses persuasion, not information, as the basic objective
2. Contributes to gross misallocation of resources
3. Entails significant social costs
4. Stimulates buying on an emotional level rather than rational appeal
5. Promotes unreasonably high costs per unit
6. Reduces total quantity of goods consumers can buy.

Each group devises a Concept Inventory relative to the topic. Use the inventory as both a pre-test and post-test. Group 1 might present a poll similar to this:

Advertising is Necessary

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Use the following abbreviations: SA--Strongly Agree; A--Tend to Agree; U--Undecided; SD--Strongly Disagree; and D--Disagree.

1. Once started elimination of advertising has deteriorating effects on sales
2. Advertising redistributes income rather than increasing income
3. In some industries advertising is such a large part of costs that it constitutes an important financial barrier
4. Advertising helps to create demand and adds to sales, consumption, investment, jobs, mass production, and profits
5. Although the majority of advertisers are honest, some are unscrupulous
6. Advertising is unnecessary and wasteful
7. The cost of advertising increases consumer prices
8. An economic benefit of advertising is that it creates many jobs for many people
9. Advertising adds little or nothing to the well being of society
10. Advertising is misleading. Some is helpful and informative, and some is meaningless
11. Advertising should be studied carefully as a guide in buying
12. State laws are effective in providing barriers against deceptive and fraudulent advertising.

Conduct the inventory poll prior to any discussion. It is then re-given following classroom discussion to see how many opinions were swayed or changed after refuting the concept. The teacher's role becomes that of consultant now. The possible swaying of opinions as a result of open discussion is the instructor's only interest in the inventory; therefore, students should omit names from the tests.

Class members need to be seated in a circle and have two chairs in the center which are called "hot seats." You now want any two class members to occupy these chairs. This does not necessarily mean the group who prepares the issue. One chair is for the student who says that advertising is wasteful and unnecessary; the other is for a student who feels advertising is necessary. If you are unable to get a student to volunteer for one chair, have the other student state his proposition. This should elicit a response. When class members are hesitant, the teacher may function in this capacity. After the initial hesitancy, students will normally respond quite willingly. Both chair occupants use evidence such as fact and opinion and deductive and inductive reasoning in presenting his case.

Before a discussion begins, the instructor should make a contract with the class. The contract states there will be no verbal contributions at any time from students not in the "hot seat." If a person decides he would like to fill one of the chairs, he simply taps a "hot seat" participant. If that person wishes to retire, he returns to the circle. When an argument is mounting, have the students exchange roles and play the other side of the issue. The contract method should eliminate any discipline problem that might otherwise occur.

Discussion of a particular concept may continue until the teacher decides no additional benefit is to be derived.

After thoroughly discussing the issue, give the opinion poll. Then develop the class composite for both the pre-test and post-test. Tally the scores by giving a +3 for each strongly agreed check mark, a +2 for agreed, and a 0 for undecided. Subtract from this positive score a -3 for strongly disagreed marks and a -2 for disagreed. Report the findings to see if there was a significant change. A positive increase for Group 1 indicates that more students feel advertising is necessary

for mass production now than before the discussion. A decrease shows students now feel that mass production is possible in the U.S.

The teacher should spend some class periods lecturing on this issue tying all these points in with the principles of economics stated in the textbook before presenting another topic.

Tying It All Together: Each student writes a critique of the issue his group discussed expressing how he feels his group handled the topic. Also, include a brief description of Conceptual Analysis in analyzing economic concepts. Ask the student to tell how he feels the group communication helped in gaining insight into views of opposing issues. In grading, check the overall content including the student's ability to express himself and his ability to show insight gleaned from the discussion. Also, check for neatness, grammar, and the student's grasp of material presented in the lectures. Administer an objective test from the text as part of the grade.