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Modern Imperatives: Essays On Education and Health Policy

Publication status and date:

Published: 27/09/2019

Document Version

Other version

Citation for the published version (APA):

Coveney, M. (2019). *Modern Imperatives: Essays On Education and Health Policy*. [Doctoral Thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam]. Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam (EUR).

[Link to publication on the EUR Research Information Portal](#)

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Propositions

1. Policies aiming to exploit ability peer effects in classrooms must ensure that assigned peers socially interact. (Chapter 2)
2. Students left to their own devices tend to drift into homogeneous groups over time, even despite initial randomization. (Chapter 2 & 3)
3. Forced exposure can help to promote friendships between native and foreign students at university, but only for pairs that are from sufficiently similar cultural backgrounds. (Chapter 3)
4. The sticky nature of pensions helps to reduce health disparities by income during times of economic crisis. (Chapter 4)
5. Austerity policies dampen the ability of government transfers to reduce health disparities by income during times of economic crisis. (Chapter 5)
6. In analyses that aim to make causal claims, the first and most important requirement is an intimate knowledge of the context. Only after this is achieved is it sensible to think about econometric methods.
7. Economists are sometimes too keen to be contrarians. Setting out to challenge conventional wisdom can be appealing, but should be avoided if only done for its own sake.
8. Mahbub ul Haq (1990): *“The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth”*
9. Joan Robinson (1977): *“There is no such thing as a ‘purely economic’ problem that can be solved by purely economic logic; political interests and political prejudice are involved in every discussion of actual questions.”* This statement also applies to empiricism in economics.
10. The scale of the negative externalities imposed by cars and car infrastructure in urbanized areas is enormous and under appreciated – most cities should be doing far more to reduce private automobile use in favour of bikes and other alternatives.
11. The best approach for dealing with large and daunting tasks is “swiss cheese”; patiently and consistently punching out small, manageable holes.