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# REACHING MATURITY: TEACHING HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS POLITICAL SCIENCE IN THE 2020S

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#### **Abstract**

Purpose of the research: This article discusses the different aspects to consider when deciding the pedagogical choices by which various political sciences can be taught and learnt. Pedagogy is the educational process a teacher uses to teach a learner a new skill. Pedagogy can be teacher-centred or learner-centred, the latter focussing on students having an active role in the learning process. Research methodology: This critical review was written by conducting several internet searches using clearly relevant keywords. Grey literature, policy documents from numerous state actors, associated democratisation, higher education practitioners and stakeholders, feature extensively in this critical review. Findings: Political science students could be taught using experiential learning-centred pedagogy, to learn how equality, diversity and inclusion affect political processes. A basic understanding of political science concepts e.g., agenda-setting and media manipulation, are crucial in conceptualising the politic of equality, diversity and inclusion. Conclusions: Three factors that have caused a significant increase in political science degree

applications: The 2008 election of Barack Obama as US President heralded digital democracy and E-government participation.; the rise to prominence of Greta Thunberg, climate activist with the environmentalist movement Extinction Rebellion; the #BLM social movement, re-ignited by the death of George Floyd.

#### **Keywords:**

Political Science, Pedagogy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Digital Democracy, E-Government

## 1. Introduction

This paper provides a critical theoretical review of some of the teaching and learning aspects of political studies and political science disciplines (Nguyen, 2020). The pedagogical need for political science education to be up to date and relevant to students has long been recognised. Connery and Leach (1958) inform us that political science must demonstrate; a "greater appreciation for, and alertness to, current educational philosophies," and it must pay "more attention to the strictly pedagogical aspects of the problem."

The first section explores the definition of diversity, equality and inclusion, detailing its relevance in political sciences. The opening section explains the delivery of democratic participation rationale, aligned with good practice. The explanation is provided of the importance of the internet and e-government to the discussion, illuminating the multidisciplinary aspects of political studies (Mihelj & Jimenez-Martinez, 2021). The first section indicates that people who are unable to access digital technology and I/T, are disadvantaged in political studies education. The second part of the paper discusses pedagogy, and how should the political sciences be taught and learnt (Kaufmann, 2021). Critical theory is provided on various issues within political studies, for example, public trust, consensus building and deliberative democracy. The merits of experiential learning or theoretical knowledge transfer are discussed (Glover et al., 2021). The discussion concludes with problem-based learning, role play, or simulation pedagogy groupwork exercise. The questions asked, encapsulate the article's aims and intentions: How will political science students become enabled, and equipped to analyse new economic, social and political phenomena, which affect the political economy of societies? (Hendrickson, 2021; UKRI, 2021).

# 2. Literature Review

During the literature and policy review before writing my discussion paper; I found numerous common features, which affected the teaching of university students with political science. Due to my PhD discussing the effect of experiential learning received by students during work placements, I had substantial previous experience with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Govea (1989) provided a useful precursor with his short article, discussing how political science students would need to learn how to use computers first; before going on to learn the discipline. E-democracy, e-government and e-governance were prominent features, alongside being the ability to engage with information and communication technology (ICT) (Oktem et al., 2014). People engagement and relatedness were also regular features, from the political science perspective, they require active listening and increase critical thinking skills. The Tremblay et al. (2012) AHELO Feasibility Report, commented on the successful adaptation of higher education institutes (HEIs) technological advances, referring to what we call in the 2020s online learning, as: 'non-classroom modes of instructional delivery' (Tremblay et al., 2012). Caryn McTighe Musil (2010) provided my introduction to the interface between diversity, equality and inclusion and experiential learning pedagogy. McTighe Musil (2010) delivered an excellent definition of workbased experiential learning, providing some of the theoretical underpinning, which is present throughout this discussion paper.

Evidence suggests that innovation in pedagogies, especially ones which remove students from their comfort zone place them in a contact zone with unfamiliar people and situations and accelerate knowledge. Evidence is mounting as well that essential learning goals requiring students to apply their knowledge to realworld problems create better thinkers and more responsible citizens. (McTighe Musil, 2010)

Being able to contextualise learning in real-world situations applies in political science, especially in international development. Leask and Carroll (2013) indicate how cultural diversity, equality and inclusion are an essential part of the student learning journey, which student placements can address. Caroline Moser (2005) highlighted the role of political science and human rights when discussing how international development should be implemented in low-income countries. Moser's (2005) work emphasises the importance of rights-based approaches to address power imbalances, which can arise between well-meaning non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and uneducated, vulnerable communities (Moser, 2005). The UNDP, 2006; indicates that

the capacity development of stakeholders which includes internship and work placement students should include political accountability. Often desired personality traits were masked in skills competencies taxonomies, which prioritised the critical evaluation, digital democracy, egovernment and e-governance aspects of political science (UNDP, 2006).

#### 3. Research Issues

Studies discussing which pedagogical choices are more likely to develop students, who are self-critical, self-improving and self-reflexive, were not prevalent from 2020. The higher education landscape is changing faster than we think. If we do not regularly survey our students, we will once again be overtaken by events.

#### 3.1. Problem Identification

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century proliferation of Electronic (E-) government and digital democracy, has changed the nature of political science education. They have helped raise awareness of globalisation, sustainable development and the law in political studies. This paper contributes toward understanding why these changes have happened; and also discusses the crystal ball problem, and how does international higher education, teach students political science in the 2020s.

# 3.2. Hypotheses

This paper posits there will be a significant increase in the use of active pedagogies: for example, gamification, problem-based learning, role-play, simulation and work-based experiential learning, when teaching students political science. There will also be a similar increase in universities globally; with higher education institutions (HEIs) offering many more hybrid degree courses and online teaching, with a concordant reduction in face-to-face student to university tutor time.

# 3.3. Research Objectives

This paper seeks to provide a conceptual theoretical critical review, to identify the development trajectory of pedagogical choices to teach university students political science in the 2020s.

#### 3.4. Scope of the Study

The study considered grey literature in the form of media articles, blog posts, books, journal manuscripts, practice briefs and policy reports. The literary sources analysed, were predominantly

from the period 2019 to 2022. This discussion paper provides a critical theoretical overview of the main pedagogical issues to be considered when teaching students political science during the 2020s.

#### 3.5. Gap Identification

The literature review revealed a paucity of knowledge in key areas, regarding good practice and/or pedagogical choices in teaching student's political science. We would benefit from 2020s research to ascertain if a lecturer's political leanings, effects their pedagogical choices in how they teach their students. Student characteristics need to be considered, for students who began their undergraduate degree program in the 2020s. Students, where neither parent attended university, may respond better to active, hands-on interactive pedagogies; compared to students with professional parents, who may learn better with passive, hierarchal, lecture tutorial pedagogy. I did not find any studies in my literature review: which discussed commonalties where both lecturers and students, felt the pedagogy used to teach them political science had not been particularly effective.

# 4. Research methodology

The internet searches were conducted during the period 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021. The number given at the end of each search term is the approximate number of search results declared for each theme. The search engine for this critical review was Netscape (Anderson & Rainie, 2020).

#### 4.1. Internet Search Strategy

Combinations of the following words were used to compile this critical review:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: 310,000

The teaching of Political Science: 31, 600, 000

Digital democracy and E-government: 15, 500, 000

Pedagogical choices: 5, 900, 000

How the political sciences can be taught: 81, 300, 000.

(Weir, 2021).

Data analysis for this critical review was an assessment of the extent to which clearly relevant keywords appeared in internet searches. The results provide an accurate global picture of the saliency of 'teaching of political science' in higher education discourse. The results also reveal

that 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education, was much less prominent globally in 2021: for example, the pedagogical practice question: 'How the political sciences can be taught'.

It was not possible to ascertain the main pedagogical approaches being used by the approximately 31,6000,000 search results for 'Teaching of Political Science'. Time did not permit such intensive examination and realistically, a small but significant proportion probably would not have recorded such information. Recent studies suggest that historically up to the year 2000, political science was predominantly taught by traditional lectures and tutor groups (Fabriz et al., 2021; Yannier et al., 2021). The higher education landscape changed as we heralded the internet age: Students were not only required to be academically ready, but they also had to be work-ready, and employability began to creep onto the agenda. Another policy driver was new innovative pedagogy, enabled by ICT; pedagogical approaches that could be implemented utilising the proliferation of hand-held digital devices, which from 2000 could access the internet (Barber et al., 2021). The teaching of political science now included technology-enhanced learning, for example, virtual learning environments (VLEs). Watching a short film on international development is a far more active, effective way of teaching student's political science, than passive lecture theatre learning (Lie et al., 2022). VLEs enabled the use of mixed pedagogy, with tutor groups members being able to choose from a menu of pedagogy. VLEs can also implement distance learning, being invaluable with other forms of online learning methods, during the COVID-19 global pandemic (Fabriz et al., 2021). That's how this pedagogy has changed over the years. Experiential learning enables the student to put political theory into practice; it can also be coupled with research to discover, for example, what were the real considerations driving each political decision. Placement learning pedagogy has multiple utilities, for academic learning, networking, employability, research, self-improvement and realisation (Atfield et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2021).

#### 4.2. Digital Democracy and E-Government

This critical review begins with a dual analysis of what is meant by diversity, equality and inclusion. The other strand of the analysis analyses good practice, both conceptualised from the viewpoint of political science (Marx & Van der Loo, 2021). The reader is informed, that the dual analysis was conducted on a politically generic basis, defined broadly for the purpose of this paper, as interpreted by the writer. The politically generic analysis of the two basic strands has the intention of delivering good political practice, to be utilised when implementing democratic

participation (James et. Al., 2020). Issues such as citizenship and e-democracy, being an instantiation of more limited forms of democratic government are introduced. The discussion takes place through a multifocal political science lens, analysing equality, diversity and inclusivity in politics (Hajnal, 2020; see also Moser, 2005).

The politics of equality, diversity and inclusion as part of democratic participation discussion, needs to consider three distinct issues. Political knowledge, itself can be defined as what people know or learn about public affairs. Public trust, the public's orientation and support for a certain approach or the ethos of what the government does (Hartley, 2021). There is also political participation, which could be defined as mainstream, conventionally accepted activities, designed to influence the government, any opposition parties and the decision-making process (Curtice et al., 2019). Political science students delivering democratic participation, need to ensure that people can access political knowledge in their own language (Frahm et al., 2022); and/or if they have a sensorial disability, for example, being visually or hearing impaired (see Human Rights Watch, 2021). If basic equality, diversity and inclusion issues such as fully disclosing all information available are not met, the democratic participation process is flawed. Civic engagement initiatives will be fundamentally flawed in substance, if not in intent. Such a flaw, once discovered, will have a corrosive effect on public trust, a key facet of democratic participation and civic engagement (MacLean, 2021). For example, public support of an agency whose remit was to increase the mobility of elderly people would evaporate, if the public are later informed, the information obtained by this agency was used to reduce people's social protection payments. The political participation facet of democratic participation and civic engagement is also influenced by equality, diversity and inclusion. Certain cultures go to pray on Fridays, from morning to afternoon. In other cultures, women can't be in the same room as men, at certain times of the day (Mindel, 2020). Diversity and equality demand that sufficient political participation takes place at appropriate times and places. Democratic participation requires that certain cultural groups, who are ethnically different from the indigenous majority, receive reasonable opportunities to engage in political processes which affect their lives. Political studies students will implement such good practices at their graduate destinations (Jack et al., 2020).

E-democracy is clearly distinguished from e-government in some respects; e-democracy enables greater accountability, transparency of elected politicians, government officials, government activity and inactivity (Sendag et al., 2021). On the other hand, e-government enables

governments to notify people of the successes of their policies, for example, savings in government expenditure. Voting technology instrumentalises a pragmatic overlap between e-democracy and e-government, digital devices which enable people to vote from their homes cost-effectively. But it is possible for some governments globally to use their electronic voting technology to influence how people vote, alongside being able to control whose votes are actually counted (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). A government could put forward some form of the party-political broadcast before voters can access the part of the technology to cast their vote. Opposition political parties would not be afforded the same equal opportunity. Gamification, problem-based learning, role play and simulation, are all pedagogical choices that can be used to teach political science. The commonalities and differences, the cost and benefits of e-democracy and e-government, can be taught by enactments of various scenarios. Students will be able to develop competencies such as autonomy, deliberative democracy, engagement and relatedness (Spyropoulos et al., 2022; see also Oktem et al., 2014).

E-government is good for democratic participation, it has empowered individuals and hitherto unheard of small, non-governmental and civil society organisations (NGOs & CSOs). Using communication technologies, disadvantaged people can more easily get themselves organised, to have more of a say in the policymaking process of government (Azoulay, 2020). Egovernment has had the emancipatory effect of increasing the number of civic engagement public events, along with the direct democratic participation process of electing government officials. People are better informed, due to having access to more information, better information, nonmainstream non-state actor, sourced information. In turn, people are in a much stronger position to challenge government officials and politicians, now fully informed, more politically aware, effective citizens enabled to address public concerns. E-democracy and the internet enable groups and public campaigns to become more effective. Online network campaigns are significantly affecting political processes in a number of countries. Governments and politicians have responded by using the internet themselves, to promote their own campaigns, or by accepting invitations to support existing non-state campaigns. The combination of face-to-face relationships, online media and social networking sites provided by the internet is increasingly recognised as substantially influencing political engagement (Sadeque, 2020; see also OECD, 2012). Edemocracy is a powerful tool that has re-shaped the development trajectory of civil engagement, democratic participation, political engagement and public scrutiny. The digital age has removed some of the societal structural barriers caused by being disabled, language differences, race, geography and patriarchal societies. Diversity, equality and inclusion are enhanced as people can choose to become informed, observe or engage with online political processes which affect them all. Individual use of the internet enables ownership of that learning. All members of a group have ownership if the whole group have accessed the internet together as a shared experience. Participants do not need any prior connection with any other participant, in order to partake in edemocracy or e-government (Dar et al., 2020). Political science students will be required to coproduce knowledge with stakeholder groups.

Applying Polizzi and Paglierello, (2021): political sciences students need to be able to use digital I/T devices, as well as have a good grasp of politics. The reader is informed that diversity, equality and inclusivity are well served by e-government and the internet. The reader is also informed that political sciences, including the global societal need of implementing democratic participation, are very much with us (Sgueo, 2020). A good understanding of the rudiments of digital democracy has become more pressing, due to the ongoing proliferation of fake news in the 2020s (Herasimenka, & Recenati, 2022; see also Shames & Atchinson, 2020). Political science education is constantly in a state of flux, able to reposition itself as things change. By definition, the teaching of political sciences is far from reaching maturity (Winthrop, 2020; Maschmeyer et al., 2020). Electronic co-production is still in its infancy, it is quickly being recognised as a pedagogical and multidisciplinary tool. It is a must for community development, international relations, journalism, media studies, political science and urban planning students.

# 4.3. Pedagogy: How Should the Political Sciences be Taught

Equality, diversity and inclusivity could be described as soft, sticky, social science attributes, which are person-centred (Local Government Association, 2021; NHS, 2020). The latter part of the definition informs the reader that diversity and equality can be taught, using the pedagogical tool of experiential learning. Learning by doing, is an important pedagogical alternative to traditional instructivist learning. Where graduates learn by receiving a lecture or a tutorial. Studies have shown that equality, diversity and inclusion, when interacting with political studies are better taught experientially (Miller & Gunnels, 2020; see also McTighe Musil, 2010). In order to teach diversity and equality in politics, experiential learning takes place in an external setting away from the university. Once in situ, political studies undergraduates can interact with people from differing ethnic backgrounds, learning how various political issues affect similar

people very differently. This is an example of how critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, would help counteract implicit bias which is decolonising the curriculum (Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2021). Good practice in politics is also learnt by political sciences students, using experiential learning gained in different cultural settings overseas.

This paper discussed earlier the importance of public trust in democratic participation, by definition, the political issue of legitimacy can also be added. Political science students receive experiential learning on how equality, diversity and inclusion affect political processes (Creasy et al., 2019). An unintended consequence of youth work is that ethnic minorities may become more likely to participate in democratic processes by registering to vote. Key to the success of community consensus-building work, is local people being made aware of the political processes around them (Miller, 2021). People from different cultures, become politically aware of issues affecting their community and make their voices heard, increasing the legitimacy of local decision-making. Then once aware, under-represented groups become included on decision-making panels, enabled to engage with those processes to affect political change (Raikes, 2020). Such outcomes serve to underscore that equality, diversity and inclusion in political science, taught by experiential learning pedagogy is good practice. The impetus to change global universities' approach to curriculum design, to include international exchanges to help teach diversity, has slowly been gaining momentum (Rapanta et al., 2021; see Leask & Carroll, 2013).

The higher education landscape is transforming rapidly creating a societal need, manifesting in the global impetus for political science graduates to acquire soft skills (See George Mwangi & Yao, 2021). These are nuanced skills, attributes required to be enabled, to understand the politic of equality, diversity and inclusivity. Such political science skills are crucial in political accountability, civil engagement, effective scrutiny, democratic governance and critical evaluation work (Consuegra, 2020; UNDP, 2006). Although rapid, the change has also been subtle, soft skills acquisition although included in taught politics, was service-based. Pre-2015 equality, diversity and inclusion were barely mentioned in political science learning modules. Person-centred soft skills were more often than not taught as an add-on, a separate entity to politics itself. The teaching and learning terrain in the 2020s has changed. There is a healthy realisation that a person-centred approach requires an informed and active citizenry. The 2020s primary focus is on developing political science disciplines, where civil engagement, diversity, equality and inclusivity are core learning (Kundnani, 2020).

## 5. Conclusion

Barack Obama's 2008 US Presidential Election victory has acted to confirm the importance of digital platforms: in the winning of, and by definition the learning of political science. Social justice movements including climate activism and racial discrimination have come to the fore in recent years, both relying heavily on digital platforms; for example, Extinction Rebellion and #BlackLivesMatter. These three factors have caused a significant increase in the number of political science students in the 2020s.

#### 5.1. Scope of Future Research

It would be beneficial to interview research participants, political science students and tutors, from the period 2013, 2014 and 2015 pre-pandemic; compared with lecturers and students in 2023, 2024 and 2025 in the post-COVID-19 recovery period. An online semi-structured survey could be used to gather initial responses create a focus group and then develop four ethnographies or in-depth case studies. The more intense sub-cohort would consist of two students and two lecturers. NVivo10 would be used for coding and labelling the interview data, followed by critical discourse analysis. It would be good to analyse DELHE (Destination of Leavers of Higher Education) graduate outcomes data, to establish who went to work in a related or non-related political science job role.

#### **5.2. Research Limitations**

As a conceptual theoretical critical review from a global north author, there is something of a Western liberal democracy slant to the discussion paper. It would have been useful to have narrowed down the keywords that were used in the 'Internet Search Strategy'. This would have substantially reduced the results obtained, giving broadly accurate results whilst still remaining a global study. I then could have identified the main pedagogical approach, if stated, in each listed item in the internet search results. With this information, I could have identified the most prevalent choice of pedagogy used, to teach university students political science. Similarly, I could have identified any commonalities or significant differences in the uptake of; asynchronous or synchronous teaching, immersive, game-making, game-playing and/or gamification pedagogy, groupwork, online, problem-based learning, role-play, simulation, or traditional lecture and tutorial group learning.

There is a paucity of knowledge on various aspects of crowdsourcing and e-petitions, both of which are extensions of digital democracy and E-government. What are the social, economic and political reasons for these actions? What effect does favourable or unfavourable media coverage or public interest have on donors? These are the type of critical resource allocation political questions that societally, need to be answered by our political studies students. Therein lies the proof, if proof were needed, that the process of teaching political science is a constantly evolving, dynamic beast, which is slowly reaching maturity.

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