**The pedagogical role of digital democracy and e-government:**

**Teaching political science, equality, diversity and inclusion**

**Abstract**

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. Political science students could be taught using experiential learning-centred pedagogy, to learn how equality, diversity and inclusion effect 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. The 21st 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 explains why higher education curricula must reflect University student’s political interests, in order to teach equality, diversity and inclusion. In recent years political science undergraduate courses have seen a significant increase in applications, mainly from young people. Three factors which have caused this uptick need to be considered. The 2008 election of Barack Obama as US President, heralded digital democracy and E-government participation. Since 2018 the rise to prominence of Greta Thunberg, climate activist with the environmentalist movement Extinction Rebellion. In May 2020 the #BLM social movement re-ignited, due to the death of George Floyd in Police custody. These three factors delineate the importance of democracy and e-government, alongside equality, diversity and inclusivity.

**Keywords:** Digital democracy and E-government pedagogy; Teaching equality, diversity and inclusion; Teaching political science; Inclusivity

**Introduction**

The pedagogical need for political science education to be up to date and relevant to students, has long been recognised. Connery and Leach (1958, 125) inform us, political science must demonstrate; *“greater appreciation for, and alertness to, current educational philosophies,”* and it must pay *“more attention to the strictly pedagogical aspects of the problem.”*

This paper’s aims are presented in the three main sections of the text. This paper provides a critical review of some of the teaching and learning aspects of political studies and the political science disciplines (Nguyen, POLITICO, 2 June 2020). 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. Explanation is provided of the importance of the internet and e-government to the discussion, illuminating the multidisciplinary aspects of political studies (Mihelj and Jimenez-Martinez, 2021, 336). The first section indicates that people who are unable to access digital technology and I/T, maybe disadvantaged in political studies education. The second part of the paper discusses pedagogy, how should the political sciences be taught and learnt (Kaufmann, 2021, 327). Critical theory is provided on various issues within political studies e.g. public trust, consensus building and deliberative democracy. The merits of experiential learning or theoretical knowledge transfer are discussed (Glover et al., 2021, 1). The discussion concludes with effectively a problem-based learning, role play, or simulation pedagogy homework exercise. The questions asked encapsulate the article’s aims and intentions: How will political science students be enabled, become equipped to analyse new economic, social and political phenomenon, which affect the political economy of societies? (Hendrickson, 2021, 312; UKRI (United Kingdom Research and Innovation), 4 May 2021).

**Internet search strategy**

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

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

**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.

(See also Weir, 2021, 299).

The internet searches were conducted during the period 1st to 31st 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 that was used in this critical review was Netscape (le Blanc, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Working Paper 163, January 2020, 3; see also Anderson and Rainie, Pew Research Centre, 21 February 2020, 37).[[1]](#footnote-1)

**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 a political sciences viewpoint (Marx and Van der Loo, 2021, p265). Early on in this discussion, a problem arises in the form of definition. The reader is informed, the dual analysis will be 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, p73). Issues such as citizenship, e-democracy, governance and/or scrutiny, being an instantiation of more limited forms of democratic government are introduced. Discussion takes place through a multifocal political science studies lens, analysing democratisation, equality, diversity and inclusivity in politics (Hajnal, 2020, p219).

The politics of equality, diversity and inclusion as part of democratic participation discussion, needs to consider three distinct issues. Political knowledge, which 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, 1). There is also political participation, which could be defined as mainstream, conventional accepted activities, designed to influence the government, any opposition parties and the decision-making process (Curtice et al., British Social Attitudes 36, 2019, 59). Political science students, delivering democratic participation, need to ensure that people can access political knowledge, in their own language (Frahm et al., 2021, 31); and/or if they have sensorial disability for example, being visually or hearing impaired (see Human Rights Watch, May 2021, 12).[[2]](#footnote-2) 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 upon public trust, a key facet of democratic participation and civic engagement (MacLean, 2021, 139). For example, public support of an agency whose remit was to increase 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 the afternoon. In other cultures, women can’t be in the same room as men, at certain times of the day (Mindel, Chabad.org, 7 May 2021). Diversity and equality demands 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 opportunity to engage in political processes which affect their lives. Political studies students will implement such good practice at their graduate destinations (Jack et al., Institute of Government, May 2020, 42).

E-government has been good for democratic participation, it has empowered individuals and hitherto unheard of small, non-governmental and civil society organisations (NGOs & CSOs). Using media and communication technologies, disadvantaged people can more easily get themselves organised, to have more of a say in the policy making process of government (Audrey Azoulay, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 8 March 2020). E-government has had the emancipatory effect of increasing the number of civic engagement public efforts, 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 (Ross, Global Government Forum, 15 June 2019). 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 enables 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 accepting invitations to support existing non-state campaigns (see Sadeque, Global Issues, 17 February 2020). 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. E-democracy is a powerful tool which has re-shaped the development trajectory of civil engagement, democratic participation and political engagement. The digital age has removed some of the societal structural barriers caused by language differences, ethnicity, race and geography. Diversity, equality and inclusion are enhanced as people can choose to become informed, observe or engage with online political processes which affect them all (Dar et al., The Guardian, 17 June 2020).

Applying Polizzi and Cino Paglierello, (London School of Economics, 27 April 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 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, is very much with us (Sgueo, 2020, 7). A good understanding of the rudiments of digital democracy has become more pressing, due to the ongoing proliferation of fake news in the 2020s (Oxford Internet Institute, (forthcoming 2021); see also Shames & Atchinson, The Conversation, 29 April 2020). Political science education is constantly in a state of flux, with the ability to reposition itself as things change. By definition the teaching of political sciences is far from passé (Winthrop, Brookings Policy Brief, June 2020, 5; Maschmeyer et al., 11 June 2020, 4).

**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 (see also Local Government Association, 24 May 2021; NHS Royal Free London, 2020, 4). 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). 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 affects similar people very differently. This is an example of how critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, would help counteract implicit bias decolonising the curriculum (Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2021, 8-9). Good practice in politics is also learnt by political sciences students, using experiential learning.

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 effects political processes (Creasy et al., Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN) and University of Edinburgh’s Centre for Carbon Innovations (ECCI), August 2019, 30). 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 work is local people being made aware of the political processes around them (Miller, 2021, 2). 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, IPPR North (Institute for Public Policy Research), February 2020). Such outcomes serve to underscore that equality, diversity and inclusion in political science, taught by experiential learning pedagogy is good practice.

The higher education landscape is transforming rapidly creating a societal need, manifest in the global impetus for political science graduates to acquire soft skills (See George Mwangi and Yao, 2021, 560). 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: Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance (IDEA) 1, 23 March 2020, 25). 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, being 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 primary focus is upon developing political sciences learning strategies, where civil engagement, diversity, equality, inclusivity become core learning (Kundnani, Chatham House, March 2020, 31).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, one can see that teaching of diversity, equality and inclusion is finally coming of age. Due to the effects of substantial societal forces, a primary source being globalisation, issues of diversity, equality and inclusivity are increasing, both in number and complexity. In these contemporary times, the discipline of political sciences and political studies are encountering new forms of social interaction, which can be defined as politics. The current social behaviour, with existing and new, different social actors needs to be analysed. There is paucity of knowledge on various aspects of crowdsourcing and e-petitions, both of which are extensions of digital democracy and E-government. What are social, economic and political reasons for these actions? These are the type of critical resource allocation political questions which societally, need to be answered. Therein lies the proof, if proof were needed, that political studies is a constantly evolving, dynamic beast, its anything but passé.

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2. This Human Rights Watch (2021) report discusses mainly the effect of COVID-19 globally has had upon children’s education. The issues raised would prevent disabled students at university from being able to access, understand and participate in political processes or political science education. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)