

Teaching politics after the practice turn

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The practice turn has reconceptualised the conventional sites of politics, opened up new arenas of investigation, and developed new ways of knowing what politics is and does (Bevir and Rhodes 2010; Rhodes 2011; Freeman, Griggs, and Boaz 2011; Wagenaar 2011; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Bueger and Gadinger 2014; Graef, 2015; Schatzki, 2001). In particular, as we describe in detail below, many practice theorists argue that (i) politics happens on the ground, in the here and now; (ii) the actions it comprises are invariably relational, that is inter-actions of some kind; (iii) those interactions operate according to norms yet also remain irreducibly contingent; (iv) politics happens, in practice, in a continuing tension between knowledge and uncertainty.

These understandings of power and knowledge, however, contrast with the logics that often organize the politics classroom – whether structured as conventional top-down ‘knowledge delivering’ or lecturing, or as small group work in which students gain abstract knowledge through reading and ‘apply’ it instrumentally. Thus in this paper we seek to identify and explore a pedagogy grounded in the core principles of practice theory. This involves, centrally, a pedagogy in which students *do* practice theory and experience it rather than learn *about* it.

To do this, we draw on existing pedagogies (particularly case-based and placement-based approaches) as well as an account of a course we taught ourselves and organized around practice theory principles. First, we identify four principal components of a practice theory of politics. These set the parameters for developing a practice-based pedagogy. Second, we review precedents for the task of connecting students with practice. We focus on case-based and placement approaches because we have learned much from them; ultimately, however, neither fully realised the core tenets of practice theory. Third, we describe our own practice-based course, ‘Political Work’. Fourth, we read this case study as an example of immediate, interactive, contingent and uncertain practice-based pedagogy. Finally, fifth, we discuss some

of the effects and limits of teaching in this way: in working with and against institutional norms and material conditions, as well as broader societal relations and conceptions of politics. These point to opportunities and challenges for developing practice-based pedagogy more broadly.

Overall, we hope this article will challenge scholars who use practice theory in their research, or who teach students about practice theory, to think about what practice theory might mean for *how* we teach. We also hope it might provide those scholars with some practical inspiration – not necessarily a ‘model’, but a starting point and a framework for thinking about their own practice-based pedagogy, as well as an exploration of some of the challenges of teaching ‘practice’. We mean it to be of special interest to those scholars who are already engaged in ‘the practice turn’ across the social sciences, though we hope it will raise questions for all scholars and teachers of politics whether in the discipline of Political Science or in other politically engaged disciplines. In particular, it invites these scholars to think about what we teach our students implicitly as well as explicitly, about how power and knowledge operate in the politics classroom, and how we might intervene intentionally in these pedagogical arrangements.

practice theory and the study of politics

In the ‘practice turn’ social scientists have turned to practice as the basic, irreducible element of social life and therefore a key site of social and political inquiry. Like other such ‘turns’, this attending to practice reflects a variety of theoretical and practical concerns and is expressed in a variety of disciplinary and substantive applications; it is a sensibility, an ‘approach’ rather than any single theory or school.

In the discipline of Political Science, practice theory has been taken up principally in the sub-fields of policy studies (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, Rhodes 2011, Freeman, Griggs, and Boaz 2011, Wagenaar 2011), critical international relations (Adler and Pouliot 2011; Bueger and Gadinger 2014) and peace and conflict studies (Graef, 2015). However the study of both practice and politics is not limited to political science. Political Science scholarship on politics as practice draws on a range of theoretical and disciplinary resources, including critical social theory and philosophy (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1976, 1980, 1997), ethnographic methodologies from Social Anthropology (e.g. Pader, 2014; Wooward, 2014), and developments in Science and Technology Studies (e.g. Haraway, 1988; Latour, 2005; Mol, 2003).

Here we draw principally on Theodore Schatzki's (2001) account because it makes practice explicit, synthesizes many of the diverse traditions noted above, and can be translated into broad principles (described below) for practice-based pedagogy. For Schatzki, 'practice' refers to 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki 2001, p 11).¹ Institutions, actors, action, agency and knowledge all come into being through and remain constituted in practice: 'Actions... are embedded in practices,... whereas institutions and structures are effects of them', as Schatzki puts it (Schatzki, 2001, p 12). In this way, practice theory offers a space for thought and inquiry beyond conventional dichotomies of structure and agency, and continuity and change. Practice theory also draws attention to previously unconsidered sites and objects of politics, seeing the state, government and policy, for example, not as large-scale objects or abstract concepts but as constituted on the ground, by embodied actors, and produced in their

¹ For theoretical introductions, see Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny (2001), Nicolini (2012) and Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012); for a useful review of different constructs of practice, see Wagenaar and Cook (2003).

interactions and communications in meetings, through documents and in other mediated forms.

For these reasons, practice theory points to the value of ethnographic, autoethnographic, reflexive and other methodological approaches in the study of politics. (Rhodes, t'Hart and Noordegraaf 2007; Schatz 2009; Miettinen et al 2010: 1312, 1313; Marcus 1998). Practice theory also, however, troubles any straightforward account of practice, as by 'encountering' practice researchers become (or already are) entangled with it, necessitating reflexivity (Haraway 1988; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). This raises questions for how we can know or 'capture' practice, make it available for interrogation and reflection, and render or represent it in a discourse other than its own (Pritzlaff and Nullmeier 2011).

In order to create a working framework with which to develop and evaluate practice-based pedagogy, we summarize our reading of practice theory in the following four principles. First, practice is always located in the here and now: practices are not generic or universal phenomena but are made and remade in the local and everyday: politics is conducted on the ground, in immediate, embodied and concrete ways (Miettinen et al 2009, p 1309). Practices are always located somewhere, in a place, among people: by the same token, they may often appear mundane (Enloe 2011).

Second, practice is always relational: all action is interaction. For the practice theorist, action is always in some sense 'collective' (Barnes 2001): this collective is not simply an aggregate of individuals, but is generated by bodies, materials and actions existing only in relation and in reference to each other. And it is important to emphasize that these relations are not only social but socio-material: we engage in action with other people and also with things, tools and materials. Practice is a property of the relation between people, but also of the relations

formed between human bodies and material things. Each practice, in turn, is related to others and acquires logic and meaning in relation to them.

Third, as in many accounts, practice consolidates into routines and norms (Feldman 2000; Reckwitz 2002); this is the way that social life is afforded a degree of stability and predictability. At the same time, the contingencies of interaction, and the inherent unpredictability of the environment in which it takes place, mean that practice is always emergent, in flux, never fully fixed, only ever enacted.

Fourth, practices always entail specific ways of knowing the world: practices are 'knowing' or 'knowledgeable'. Doing something invariably assumes knowing what to do, whether or not that knowing is implicit or explicit, formal or tacit, settled or insecure. It is in practice that we come to know the world and each other. Knowledge itself is contingent, as in Bourdieu's habitus (1977), upon the embodied activities that create it; the knower and actor is always 'in, alongside and toward the world' (Pickles 1985, p 17). Associated with knowing is also always a degree of not-knowing and of uncertainty.

To reiterate: we are not only interested in delivering these four principles of practice theory as 'facts' to students. Rather, we are interested in examining our own teaching of politics as a practice itself in light of these principles. We are concerned, like practice theorists, not only in the political knowledge that is stated, but also that political knowledge which is embodied in our knowledge practices. In this way, 'practice' appears in multiple interconnected ways in this paper: as a theory of politics and knowledge, as the reality of politics itself and as our own pedagogical activities.

Precedents for connecting teaching to practice

In higher education, politics and practice are most often brought together through case-based pedagogy or work integrated learning (work placements). Both approaches facilitate encounters between students and the worlds of practice. Both approaches draw on traditions in professional education and training, including law, business, medicine, psychiatry, nursing, teaching and the armed forces. In this section, we review these precedents for connecting students with practice in relation to the four elements of practice theory described above: the here and now, action and interaction, routines and contingency, and knowledge and uncertainty. Both case-based and placement-based pedagogy contain elements that we see as necessary to practice-based pedagogy: transferring agency to students and positing active and interactive methods of teaching and learning. Both also, however, stop short of realising what we think are the essential elements of a practice-based pedagogy.

Case-based learning

Case-based approaches to pedagogy are diverse, ranging from the legal casebook developed by Christopher Langdell to teach common law at Harvard Law School in the late 1800s (Chase, 1979; Kimball, 2006), the case method developed in business schools (Barnes et al 1994), and the problem-based learning developed at McMaster University Medical School in 1960s by Howard Barrows (Barrows and Tamblyn, 1980). Their shared purpose is to remove the abstraction from professional knowledge and to teach inductively, beginning with the specificities of practice, rather than deductively from the postulates of generic rules and principles.

In the casebook method in law, for example, many already-solved cases are collected in order to answer a legal question. Students and instructors discuss the meaning of cases in relation to each other, developing a sense that, in practice, the meaning of law is not fixed but relational, subject to norms of application, and remains open to interpretation. In case-based teaching in business and medicine, cases are researched or devised and written up specifically for teaching purposes: they are presented unresolved, requiring students to adopt a role or position and make a decision about how to understand and act on a specific set of circumstances. Differently again, in problem-based learning, students themselves must go out and do the research – acquire the knowledge – necessary to address and resolve a problem.

We draw two related lessons from these methods of case-based teaching. First, cases are a way of shifting teaching and learning from abstract analytic knowledge delivery to a form of knowledge embodied in contingent, that is underdetermined and variable, action. This exemplifies practice theory's critique of knowledge-as-object in the classroom. Case-based pedagogy aims to shift agency if not authority from teacher to students, and to students' interactions with materials, practices and each other. Second, in their capacity to capture social interaction at the smallest level, cases have a realistic quality other forms of teaching often do not: they seem to enable students to encounter the world directly.

However, case-based approaches are self-limiting in their ability to convey the realities of practice when they focus on technocratic knowledge or on forcing decisions. Case-based pedagogies often aim to equip students with technical know-how. That is, they are generally used for teaching students how to do things – and particularly how to diagnose and/or solve problems. This is why they are so widely used in professional education. The problems that case-based approaches deal with are articulated and resolved within the logics of the disciplines in which they are used. The students' objective is to solve problems according to those logics. Cases are designed or selected with this goal in mind: cases have problems and decisions built into them.

Placement learning

Many disciplines look to work integrated learning - placements and internships – as a way of generating a student’s encounter with practice (Cooper, Orrell and Bowden, 2010). Like case-based learning, this belongs to a long tradition of professional education that is increasingly being taken up in social science, and specifically in politics and policy programmes (Curtis et al, 2009; Norton, 2008). The placement offers no single problem or solution: learning consists in the student observing and doing some aspect of the job they are training for, in the workplace in which it is done. It is often assessed by a reflective, written paper or report.

Like case-based pedagogy, work integrated learning casts students as active agents in their own learning. On placement, they act and learn within the much messier constellation of practices that constitutes a workplace, further emphasizing the experiential, contingent and uncertain aspects of professional and/or political practice. In common with case-based approaches, however, placement-based approaches aim to equip students with technical know-how. This holds not only for specific topics, contexts and disciplines, but also in the form of transferable skills. Thus work integrated learning, like case-based approaches, ultimately reproduces the logic of a particular community of practice.

In all these ways, case-based and work integrated learning both go some way towards disrupting conventional pedagogy and creating an awareness of the affordances of practice: transferring agency to students, situating students in relation to the knowledge they are acquiring. They are both necessary, important approaches for teaching students how to do a particular job and to solve particular sorts of problems in particular ways. They both enable students to encounter the nitty-gritty everyday realities of the worlds they study – making visible aspects of politics obscured by more conventional abstract or issue-based analyses.

Both case-based and placement-based pedagogy also, however, stop short of the necessary components of practice-based pedagogy. Both have a single over-arching logic: the successful and better practice of governance, business, medicine, law and so-on. Both risk reproducing the assumptions at play in a particular case or workplace, teaching students how to work in those logics. In contrast, we believe a pedagogy grounded in practice theory should do precisely the opposite: it should reveal the construction and contingencies of any single definition of a problem, or single way of articulating and addressing it; it should reveal the construction, contingencies and multiplicity of logic and knowledge at work in any given case. Case- and placement-based techniques seem principally concerned with how to practice successfully rather than with the nature of practice itself. We now turn to describe what teaching 'practice' in and of itself might look like.

Practice-based pedagogy: a case study

Political Work was designed to help students 'acquire and explore a conception of politics and policy making as a domain of practice or work', as the course guide explained. It was developed for advanced undergraduate students in Politics and International Relations, but designed so that it might be taken by students in any field of Social and Political Science. The course covered the political worlds of activism, administration and representation; the practices of meeting, talking (speechmaking) and writing (documents), and the material properties and effects of political artefacts, spaces, buildings and human bodies. It was delivered in ten two-hour sessions, organized around the discussion of ethnographic case studies presented in journal articles. Nineteen students took the course the first time it ran, in semester 2 of session 2014-2015. Two were following the single honours programme in politics; ten were doing joint degrees in politics and economics (2), history (2), philosophy (1) and sociology (5). Seven were in Edinburgh on study abroad and exchange programmes. The course was assessed by means of a 4,000 word case study, for which students did their own primary research by means of interviews and ethnographic observation.

We have described the course here in routine, institutional terms to make it intelligible in the dominant discourse of higher education. We now turn to describe what the course looked like 'in practice'. This account illustrates how insufficient these institutional terms are for understanding what happens in the classroom.

The course was taught in two-hour sessions, meeting once a week for ten weeks and consisting solely in the discussion of case studies. We met in a basement room, with chairs initially positioned in rows in front of a whiteboard screen, as if for a lecture. We had selected case studies on the basis of their strong descriptive and narrative components that gave a sense of 'being there', of action unfolding in time and place. As one student wrote in their end-of-course feedback form, the cases were selected to enable students to '[learn] a lot about what *Political Work* really means to people doing it.' Or, as another student reported, to 'think of politics in a different way, more interdisciplinary, more embodied, more localised, more concrete'. Almost all cases were presented in published journal articles; many came from disciplines outside politics, including sociology, anthropology and science and technology studies. The readings we assigned included accounts of: a policy officer agonising about UN Security Council inactivity in respect of Rwanda (Barnett, 1997); a day in the life of an MEP (Wodak, 2009); the hidden work of a strike (McBride, Stirling and Winter, 2013); political deliberation in a qaṭ chew in Yemen (Wedeen, 2007); the experience of being Nixon's speechwriter (Gavin, 2001); the effects of arrangements of space in an airport (Salter 2007), and other ethnographic and autoethnographic accounts of political practice like these. Selecting these cases was one of the most labour intensive aspects of the course: instead of spending our time preparing lectures, we spent it assembling an archive of case material.

Before attending the first session, students were asked to read a journalistic insider account of Occupy Wall Street, which then served as subject of discussion for that week. After no

more than brief introductions - students gave their names and said which programmes they were studying - we talked about what had happened in Zuccotti Park, about who had done what, about how the occupation had developed. That is, we began the course by *enacting* rather than explaining a practice-based approach to studying politics. We quickly established what were to become enduring thematic questions: what's going on in this case, who's involved, what do they do, what's at stake for them, what's interesting about it for us and why? Students regularly also described how the case stretched or disrupted their existing knowledge and experience. In the later part of that first session, we talked briefly about how and why we had conceived the course and how and why we wanted to teach it, and covered expectations about how classes would run, and how to prepare for them, and answered some limited questions about assessment. This was intended both as practical information on how the course would run and to add a reflexive layer of thinking to the course.

We asked students to come to all subsequent classes with observations about each reading, things they found surprising or interesting, questions they wanted to ask, reflections and comments they wanted to make. These then directed our discussions. We – the teachers – gave the discussion very minimal direction, giving some order to turn-taking, and sometimes opening up new aspects of a topic for questioning. In earlier sessions we would simply go round the room, students speaking in turn according to where they sat. Later sessions were broken up more quickly by spontaneous interventions and exchanges taking place across the room. All sessions went on in this way, through the discussion of case studies. At no point did we lecture, and nor did we give any sustained or explicit account of theory. After the first session, there was no further 'delivery' of information or knowledge to students. In this way, as one student described in their end-of-course feedback form, we began by '...exploring ideas without necessarily having a pre-formulated goal (except for understanding politics better)'.

Class time in week 5 was devoted to initial discussion of students' ideas for their own case studies. This was largely topical, exploring what might make a good case, though research methods readings on interviewing, observation and working with documents were also

prescribed for that week. Students had the opportunity to share, in turn, their ideas: again we addressed the question of what makes a good case through the cases themselves. Each student then had a follow-up one-to-one meeting with one of us a week or so later, to further elaborate and specify their case studies, and to complete a research ethics review. We met students individually once more, at the end of the course, as they were completing whatever empirical investigation they were doing and beginning to write it up. This was another labour-intensive aspect of the course: we offered them supervision in their own projects similar to that we might offer other students doing dissertations.

Students generally found case study projects close to home, through contacts they had, in groups and meetings they could get to. This was in part for feasibility's sake, and in part to give students the kind of up-close access that underpins practice-based research. One student looked at a women's conference she planned to attend; one watched an eviction take place in her home town; one followed a student's vote from hustings through the ballot-box to the count and the announcement; one watched a student society respond to a new member joining a discussion; one worked through her mother's objection to a planning application; one attended the party stall in her local high street. In this way, students found politics in clubs and societies they belonged to, in their communities, in the work of close relatives, in their own high streets, at their own kitchen tables.

Students used a range of data collection methods, including ethnographic and autoethnographic observation, interviews and documentary analysis. We offered some readings on these methods on the reading list, but once again our aim was for students to learn through their classroom engagements with other researchers' case studies. Students analysed the data interpretively. Inspired by the cases we read in class, students were particularly creative in how they presented the data: one, for example, wrote her paper as a walk through the building she had studied (a law court). Another wrote her essay as the chronology of investigating a local planning process, with an emphasis on her experience of

making sense of the documentation that process had generated. Another studied a political party's campaign stalls – and organised her essay around photos of that stall. These essays offered genuinely original, compelling analyses and were in our view a delight to read.

The quality of these essays was affirmed in conventional institutional terms. Ten students were awarded marks in the first class range 70-79, and nine in the range 60-69. The external examiner commented on ‘a fabulously innovative course that has coaxed some quite wonderful work out of the students’, noting ‘the quality of work that can be produced when we take students away from the standard academic essay form’. Sixteen students completed course evaluation questionnaires. On three indicators summarising responses to 21 questions, the course scored 4.5, 4.6 and 4.8 out of 5. While our account here and the course itself seek to challenge some aspects of these conventional institutional measurements of success, the intelligibility and success of the course in institutional and professional terms still matters greatly for us: we address this and other tensions that arose during the course in the final section of this article. We turn first to read *Political Work* above against our four components of practice theory in turn: i) that politics happens on the ground, in the here and now; (ii) that the actions it comprises are invariably relational, that is inter-actions of some kind; (iii) that those interactions operate according to norms yet also remain irreducibly contingent; (iv) that politics happens, in practice, in continuing tension between knowledge and uncertainty..

Aligning ontology, epistemology and pedagogy

We use our course here to explore how students can build, explore and experience an understanding of politics as constituted in practice – via a pedagogy grounded in practice theory. We are concerned not to romanticize our own teaching: not only did we often continue to operate according to institutional conventions, we were also acutely aware of the limits of our teaching, which we discuss below

First, we went straight to the 'here and now' of politics through a close-up empirical encounter with political practice. As we describe above, the texts we chose helped students imagine being there, 'on the ground'. The case studies we chose documented the words, feelings, bodies, thoughts, actions and interactions of people in specific places and times as they engaged in different forms of political activity. Immediately, then, political practices were, for students, always somewhere, in a place, among people, and often mundane (Enloe 2011; Miettinen et al 2009, p 1309).

This working *with* cases meant working *without* much prescribed theory or method. Students often began commenting on a case with 'What I thought was interesting was...', which is to say that we began with impulses, reactions, micro-observations rather than with theory or analysis. At no point did we offer students a theory of practice or refer to the existence of something called practice theory. We simply invited students to engage with practice itself, and we joined them as they did so. We discussed all the aspects of practice that concepts and theory often obscure: impressions we got, our disliking of an actor, an actor's personality, a related anecdote from our own experiences.

Working in this way meant students had to rethink some of the abstract concepts and figures or large-scale processes that feature in the study of politics. Though students had encountered social movements, for example, few of them had considered much of the hidden and often emotional work which lies behind activism; though students had a sense of what diplomats do they hadn't thought of the personal and ethical dilemmas diplomats face; though students often referred to MPs, they hadn't seen how an MP's encounters with constituents are managed. Conversely, some students had participated in and/or experienced these everyday practices of politics, but had not yet had the opportunity to think of these practices as legitimate objects of political study and analysis. In this way, students learned theory and method implicitly, *ad hoc* and vicariously as they read and talked about cases written by others, and as their existing ideas about politics were challenged and reworked.

Second, *Political Work* made interaction a constitutive and central dimension of politics and its pedagogy, both explicitly and implicitly. This echoes the practice theory's focus on interaction and the relationality of practice. Interaction occurred between cases, between students, and between students and their research participants. Each case study was concerned in some way with problems of political interaction; each existed and was made meaningful in relation to the others we discussed. Students also made connections between those cases and their own experiences. Similarly, the form of the class emerged in interaction, explicitly and reflexively – evolving, as we described above, as class participants' relationships evolved over the semester. At the same time, students' case studies entailed sometimes quite profound, collaborative interaction with research participants in trying to understand, and getting those respondents to explain, what it is that they do.

Students also interacted, in a different way, with the authors of the case studies we engaged. We were trying to 'get at' practice' but always aware that that practice was in part mediated by the researchers reporting it. Students appreciation of this, and questions regarding the researchers' practices, led to ongoing methodological and reflexive class discussion about how those studying practice should represent and access it. It also underscored the contingency of knowledge in practice.

Of course, much of this is the case in any class. Yet often interpersonal relations and other contingencies are issues to be worked around or overcome: in *Political Work*, they were an intentional part of the fabric of the course. It follows from this that we anticipate that a future class might arrive at different conclusions.

Third, our approach was constituted in both the routine and the visibly contingent. This echoes practice theorists' emphasis on the consolidation or disruption of norms (Feldman 2000; Reckwitz 2002). Often in teaching we work to hide experimental or uncertain aspects of our curriculum, but in this course we were open about its experimental aspect. Like Foucault's 'critique', the course functioned to make visible conventional university pedagogy as only one mode of knowledge by demonstrating that knowledge could be done differently (Foucault, 1997). In particular, the empirical core of the course not only allowed students to encounter practice, but to start to see how more abstract analytic forms of study obscure aspects of politics in practice (Law, 2004). We validated the lived experience of students (making that experience a core object of the course) and brought our own to the classroom (repeatedly drawing attention, for example, to our experience as teachers). All this made knowledge and the meaning of practice once again immediately contingent and open to question.

When students went into the field and encountered political practices for themselves, they furthered explored the contingencies of politics. By asking their interviewees 'what do you do?' and by observing politics in practice, students became aware of the roles of circumstance, feelings, career trajectories, personal relationships and daily life in politics that are generally obscured by analytic or issues-based approaches (in several cases students began with a concern with the theories, models and issues they had learned previously, only to be confronted with the exigencies of practice. Conversely, students also became aware of the political nature of everyday practices not usually counted in the realm of 'politics'. They documented this growing awareness in their written work.

Fourth, and finally, in all these ways students were actively and reflexively *doing* – creating and experiencing – political knowledge. They were doing their own analysis and reaching their own conclusions using a practice-based approach – an approach they did not read about, but rather learned through doing it themselves. Sometimes that knowledge took the form of an awareness of not-knowing and of uncertainty, a knowledge of questions and openness,

particularly in regards to what politics means in the first place. In the words of one student in their end-of-course feedback form, for example, ‘The question “what is politics” central to this course will accompany me when uncovering everyday instances of what I now know as *“Political Work”*’.

Power, knowledge and practice-based pedagogy

In this final section, we turn to examine the broader effects of teaching politics in the practice-based way we have described so far, specifically in relation to how power is configured in the classroom. Power was not simply the object of our teaching (like others, our concern with practice was intended to unsettle students' understandings of politics, and so of the operation of power): our efforts to teach practice theory also had to navigate relations of power in the classroom. Like Alan Jenkins (1995) and Penny Welch (2002), we wanted to challenge conventional hierarchies of pedagogy. In our efforts to do so, we encountered power manifested as norms, legitimacy and relationships – some of which we had to work against, or reconfigured, and some of which worked against us. Thus power was an object, a condition and an effect of our pedagogical work, in ways that we describe here as both productive (furthering our aim of teaching practice-based approaches to studying politics), but also risky and sometimes counterproductive.

As in the case- and placement- based approaches we discussed above, we attempted to transfer some agency to the students. We did so in part by reconstructing ourselves as learners and participants. We did not act out our roles as experts in the classroom: we did more-or-less what the students did, we let them generate the class direction, and we openly disagreed with each other. Students' interpretations of the case studies we read led the class. This disrupts, we think, the more conventional top-down lecture and expert status of the lecturer. Of course, we did this in a context where lecturers are constructed as authoritative

(more on this below) and we remained authoritative in both implicit and explicit ways. We designed the course, for example, and we marked the course papers.

At the same time, we necessarily appealed for our legitimacy to the very power/knowledge nexus we wanted to critique. Our efforts were bounded by the necessities of making the course legible according to the professional and administrative logics of the university. We had to write a course proposal that looked like other course proposals and was approved by a Board of Studies. We had to do assessment of some sort, and our marking of that assessment had to meet the standards of internal and external reviewers. We were concerned that practice theory (and practice-based pedagogy) be taken seriously by the school in which we worked. This was primarily because we needed legitimacy to make the course possible, but also perhaps because status and recognition help shift understandings of what teaching is and what form it should take.

We also had to work with students towards the end of their degree: they were already products of that degree and had internalized to some extent its norms. One or two students were especially attached to those norms – particularly to abstract or issues-based analysis – and we found it challenging to get them to engage with practice directly, on its own terms. We too, of course, are products of many more years in the university and come with our own internalized norms. Yet, at the same time, these were the forms of knowledge and pedagogy we (and practice theory) seek to challenge. We were pleased by the external examiner's affirmations of the students' high grades, for example, even while we wished to decenter the grade as the primary marker of successful learning. In this way, the course operated in a 'dynamic interplay between that which repeats and that which transforms' (Foucault, 1997).

Teaching the course was always uncertain and indeterminate. Sometimes this uncertainty was productive, achieving our aims, but at other times it was risky or counterproductive. Certainty and control are co-constitutive and often our uncertainty undermined our authority in the classroom. This contributed to the centering of student agency as students were

revealed as being as authoritative (or uncertain) as their teachers. This was, however, a bounded uncertainty and transfer of agency: it was in our power to stop or shift the mode of interaction should any discussion break down, or return to a conventional lecture format if the class had not worked at all. Meanwhile, the absence of a strong structure may have allowed implicit power relations in the room (as in society) to shape the classroom. This is known in activist contexts as ‘the tyranny of structurelessness’ (Freeman 1971). On one hand, it was precisely hierarchical power relations we sought to replace with interactive, collaborative discussion. On the other, it was true that some students spoke more than others, and that this may have played out along lines of class, gender, race, ability or nationality, among others. The structurelessness of *Political Work* was simultaneously both a fraught, risky dimension of the class and one of its most productive and powerful features.

We also suspect that existing power structures and academic norms contributed to the success of the course even as we sought to challenge them. For example, visiting students who have ‘less to lose’ might be more likely to take an experimental, uncertain course like ours. High-achieving students might also be more confident in engaging an unknown course and/or more likely to achieve highly on any course. While we suspect that these factors did play a role in the success of the course, we also know that some students who had not achieved high grades in other courses, went on to achieve unusually high grades in this one.

In sum, the *Political Work* demonstrates precedents and possibilities as well as some challenges for practice-based pedagogy. Practice-based pedagogy has – or should have – the potential to disrupt knowledge/power norms in the university and in society. Yet it must also strike a careful balance between the real, the desirable and the possible, not least in securing legitimacy and negotiating implicit power relations without imposing rigid structures or otherwise repeating the very knowledge/power forms it is intended to challenge.

Conclusion

Knowledge and politics are, according to practice theorists, constituted in practice regardless of how they are understood or taught. That is, just because practice is taught as an abstract concept in a top-down way does not mean that the activities in those classrooms should not be seen as 'here and now', routine or contingent, interactive, and knowing or uncertain. In fact it is precisely through an analysis of pedagogy *as practice* that we the limits and contradictions (though also necessities) of teaching politics come into view. Similarly, just because established precedents for case-based and placement-based teaching are not explicitly based in practice theory does not mean they do not connect students with the everyday realities of practice. This is certainly one of their strengths in preparing students for professional workplaces, and the messy practicalities of professional problem solving. But they do not necessarily meet our specific goal of introducing students to the immediate, relational, contingent and knowledge-entwined nature of practice as such. In their focus on a singular logic of, for example, 'better governance', or problem-solving, they risk obscuring the production and contingency of particular logics, problems, modes of 'solving' and their normalization.

In this paper and in our own case study, therefore, we have explored what a pedagogy that is explicitly and deliberately grounded in practice theory might look like: explicitly and deliberately 'here and now', interactive, both normal and experimental, both knowing and uncertain. We have presented it in the form of a set of case studies, wanting to replicate the knowledge mode in which we worked. Our purpose has been to draw on the theoretical ontology, epistemology and methodology of practice-oriented political scientists as well as scholars in other disciplines in giving students the materials, space and support to *do* practice-based learning. In doing so, we find that power, structure and agency are potentially reconfigured in the classroom – but whether and how this reconfiguration occurs remains a challenge for the further development of a practice-based pedagogy as it would for any other critical project.

Given the contingencies of teaching practice theory that we have described in this paper, we are hesitant to offer a set of prescriptions for others to follow. In many ways, *Political Work* was an intervention into a particular curriculum, degree and institution. Nonetheless, the following reflections on our experience might prove helpful as other scholars develop their own interventions: (1) We learnt that students do not always need theories or information in order to learn – they derived their own profound lessons on the basis of having the space and conditions in which to do so. Trusting in and supporting students’ capacities was essential to this process. (2) We found that a degree of uncertainty was integral to the process for all participants. A willingness to experience discomfort is therefore necessary to teaching in this way, as is the ability to mine the productive elements of uncertainty and manage its riskier elements. (3) Just like knowledge and politics themselves, we found our classroom practices were inevitably entangled with the institutional and broader political contexts of which we were part. Attentiveness to this entanglement, and often intervention in it, were integral to our project – but that same entanglement was often a source of frustration. Each of these points (1), (2) and (3) make teaching practice theory in part an affective project (or perhaps make visible that all teaching is affective in nature). (4) We found that our four principles of practice theory – ‘here and now’, contingency, interaction, norms and knowledge or uncertainty – functioned as a working framework for both developing and evaluating our approach. Future research might expand or refine this framework: what does teaching practice theory tell us, for example, about practice theory itself? Finally, rather than resolving the question of what practice-based pedagogy might be, we have explored the necessity and complexities of asking this question.

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About the authors

Darcy Leigh (d.leigh@sussex.ac.uk, [@leighdarcy](https://twitter.com/leighdarcy)) is a Teaching Fellow in Law at the University of Sussex. Darcy's research is on queer, decolonial, feminist and mad politics; critical theories of liberalism and the state; and collaborative, auto/ethnographic and film-based pedagogy. Darcy teaches in these areas, as well as on Sussex's Social Science Foundation Year which aims to widen participation in higher education. Darcy was previously a post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, where she also completed her PhD which won the British International Studies Association's 2016 prize for 'best thesis in international studies'. Darcy has also been a researcher and/or instructor at the universities of Alberta and Ottawa, and with multiple decolonial higher education programs in Canada.

Richard Freeman (Richard.Freeman@ed.ac.uk) is Professor of Social Science and Public Policy and Co-Director of the Academy of Government at the University of Edinburgh. He teaches on the Academy's Master's programme in Public Policy, as well as in the Graduate School of Social and Political Science. He is a former Fulbright Scholar and Jean Monnet Fellow, and has held visiting positions at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg, Bremen, the Institut d'Études Politiques ('Sciences Po'), Paris and Yale University, New Haven. His most recent books are, with Steve Sturdy, *Knowledge in Policy: embodied, inscribed, enacted* (Policy Press, 2014) and, with Jan-Peter Voß, *Knowing Governance: the epistemic construction of political order* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

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