Williams, A. J., Jeffrey, A., McConnell, F., Megoran, N., Askins, K., Gill, N., Nash, C., and Pande, R. (2013) *Interventions in teaching political geography: reflections on practice.* Political Geography, 34 . pp. 24-34. ISSN 0962-6298

Copyright © 2013 Elsevier

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

Content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/98219/

Deposited on: 15 October 2014

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
http://eprints.gla.ac.uk

Interventions in Teaching Political Geography: reflections on practice

INTRODUCTION

Nick Megoran, Fiona McConnell, Alex Jeffrey, and Alison Williams.

In 2011 Rex Walford, who played such an important role in encouraging generations of geographers to reflect on how and why they taught the subject, died in a tragic boating accident. His obituarist, Mike Morrish, recorded that he had said after a lifetime's dedication to geographical teaching:

> I remain convinced of geography's potency to teach both a stewardship of the physical world and an understanding of the need for harmony in the human world and of its great value in a properly humane education (Morrish 2011: 107).

Walford's influence was in large part due to the care that he took to provide clear, practical ways to teach new geographical ideas in the classroom – for example, through games and simulation (Walford 1969; Taylor and Walford 1972). Yet there is a dearth of published material on creative ways of teaching the specific content of contemporary undergraduate political geography courses. Leading textbooks, such as Jones, Jones and Woods (2004) and Painter and Jeffrey (2009), are valuable in sharing with colleagues the structure and content of courses taught: this is extremely useful when it comes to design new courses and to set readings. However, they lack practical suggestions for the innovative delivery of material. Recent editions of Taylor and Flint's textbook have been improved by the addition of suggested 'activities' at the end of each chapter (Flint & Taylor 2011; cf. Taylor & Flint 2000). This was a change from the fourth edition, which lacked such a section, to the fifth, and has been preserved in the sixth. Although potentially useful for instructors, they are intended for the individual student reader.

In emphasising the practicalities of teaching, this collection builds on and extends the 'Interventions in teaching political geography in the USA' published by Raento *et al* in this journal in 2010. Originally conceived as a tribute to the inspirational teaching of Julian Minghi, it is a welcome and engaging set of reflections on teaching the sub-discipline today. We extend their discussion by focussing on two areas that are underemphasised in their paper: practicalities and politics.

In particular, we concentrate on filling a gap opened in their intervention: what we can practically *do* in the classroom as we teach political geography. Their focus is more course-based than activity-based and is largely self-reflective, considering how the content of political geography lecture series have changed over time. Thus, for example, Cox thinks that teaching should be

'critical' and be 'built around a consistent set of ideas' (on p.193), and Flint advocates the adoption of a framework for teaching such as 'Grounded Geographical Knowledge System.' There are only brief references to what is actually done: 'role-play' and 'fieldwork' (Minghi), 'exercises… to deal with a variety of simulated problems' (Davidson, p.194), mobilizing a 'feminist geopolitical perspective' to 'interpret the politics of humanitarian aid' (Flint), for example. These are tantalising because they are short on detail, and do not allow interested readers to easily replicate these activities in their own classrooms. The exception is Herb's fascinating and helpful outline of a student exercise on redrawing the boundaries of Iraq.

The purpose of this intervention is to follow the direction that Herb points us in by outlining a series of innovative practical teaching activities currently being used by political geographers teaching in the UK, with a view to making them replicable in whatever adapted form the reader chooses. Kye Askins describes a module in which students set their assignment, coming to consensus through participatory debate, to encourage students from a non-diverse background to confront issues of diversity and difference. Nick Gill uses debates as a way to encourage students towards thinking critically and argumentatively. Catherine Nash explains how a field trip to Belfast is used to help students engage with the emerging geographies of peace debates. Lastly, Raksha Pande, Alex Jeffrey and Nick Megoran illustrate an exercise that obliges students to connect their studies to current affairs by writing a letter for publication to the editor of a newspaper. We believe that these contributions will be of high practical value to political geographers.

At the same time, we recognise that teaching is shaped by the political and social context within which it takes place. Changes to the global, national and local politics can stimulate new pedagogic approaches and reflections and, as the contributors here outline through their focus on individual agency and the possibility to enact change in the world, there is considerable transformative potential of teaching political geography,. It is such possibilities that return our thoughts to the forms of stewardship and harmony expressed by Walford in our opening excerpt. Consequently the following interventions should be read as provocations to action, to continue and extend debates concerning the practice of political geography in the classroom, seminar room, lecture hall and beyond.

YOU DECIDE: POLITICS, PEDAGOGY AND AGONISTIC PLURALISM

Kye Askins

As a lecturer, I have long been concerned with both capital 'P' and little 'p' politics. I am interested in the ways in which agreement may or may not be reached among diverse groups and diverse

interests, and how experiences of trying to reach consensus can deepen our understandings of what living together may be or mean in practice. I support increasing calls for geographers to make social justice explicit in the classroom, which must be linked to good pedagogical practice if such efforts are to resonate *beyond* teaching spaces (kinpaisby-hill 2011). My own epistemological approaches to learning attempt to recognise the capacities of students and disrupt traditional power relations in the classroom (Askins, 2008). This is in line with a participatory pedagogy that has much in common with 'border geographies': encouraging students to take their own and each other's knowledge seriously, and to learn from one another as well as recognize and work with different opinions and knowledges (Cook et al. 2001).

Here, I briefly describe an optional final year undergraduate module, 'The Geopolitics of Ethnic Identities', which I have been teaching annually from 2005 to 2012, in which students (35-50 in any given year) set their own assessment. They must *reach consensus as a group* as to *one form of assignment*, and whether it is to be individual or group-based. Depending on choice, there are further negotiations to define specifics. This assessment strategy has two key aims. First, pedagogically, to engage students in ways that engender deeper learning and enable the 'active learner' (Brown et al., 2000). Second, and subject specifically, to raise issues of democracy and diversity in practice.

To offer some context, the student cohort on Northumbria University's geography degree programme is non-diverse in terms of ethnicity and age, typically white British and under 22 years old. Students are largely drawn from the north east of England, where we are situated. This is the least ethnically diverse region in England, with less than 5% of its population from black and minority ethnic groups (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Most have little experience of living in a diverse ethnic society. The module deals with issues of power and social inequalities embedded in racism and racialisation across a range of scales (see Table 1), which students coming from these specific backgrounds and geographies often have difficulty connecting with.

Nevertheless, they do have diverse learning styles, and by final year are well aware of which types of assessment suit them best. It is crucial to consider assessment as central to learning, in line with Biggs' (2003) concept of 'alignment', to ensure that assessment *drives* learning and enables a deeper engagement with the subject. The objective in this module is to develop an assignment in which students engage with issues of diversity, difference, and how certain positions and identities may be made more or less central in processes of decision-making. In directly discussing a range of possibilities regarding the assignment, the students draw upon different personal positions, enacting these through peer social relationships, most often embedded in gender identities.

This is important because the module considers a range of theoretical perspectives regarding anti-racism, identity politics and multiculturalism. Central within these is agonistic pluralism, a critical approach regarding geopolitics and the negotiation of ethnic and cultural differences in society. Agonism rejects attempts to negate what it considers the inherently conflictual nature of democratic society, foregrounding instead the ineradicability of adversarial belief systems and the impossibility of 'shared values' around social problems. Mouffe (2000: 93) explains that, within dominant forms of liberal democracy practiced in the west, "what is misguided is the search for a final rational resolution", because it denies the fundamental tension between the logic of liberalism and the logic of democracy. As such, resolution refuses the possibility of a value-pluralistic society and pluralism is instead restricted to the private sphere. In contrast, agonistic politics call for a process of constant negotiation, and a project open to opposition. This emphasises participatory and ongoing engagement between empowered citizens, which examines confrontation and difference. Vitally, such an approach eschews any attempt to 'achieve' one common set of shared values, a process that ultimately resorts to dominant values as 'right'.

However, agonism recognises that certain limits will always remain necessary for legitimate confrontation in the public sphere. The key is that it is the *political* nature of such limits that must be recognised, rather than these limits being presented as requirements of morality or rationality, or as an inherent quality of some fixed or normative identity position. Students generally struggle with such a perspective, conceptualising non-resolution as total pluralism. They tend to conflate the need for consensus decision-making (in political democracy) with actual agreement (regarding personal values). Having to reach consensus on an issue that has direct consequences for them (their final degree classification) goes some way towards making the difficulties of negotiating difference personal and immediate.

The assignment is set in a two hour facilitated session in week five of twelve teaching weeks. This is so that students have some understanding of key module content and theory to base their decision on, utilising participatory appraisal techniques. This involves preparatory work: students must bring their 'top 10' from 51 assessment techniques (Knight & Yorke, 2004; see Figure 1) to the session, provided in a handout the week before that also includes the learning outcomes (which they already have listed in a module handbook). The session incorporates a variety of techniques and exercises, including:

- 'beancounting' to assess the six most popular or common assignment types from diverse choices of 'top 10';
- 'matrix diagramming' in small groups to verify the four most appropriate to the module learning outcomes (see Figure 2);

- ‘forcefield analysis’ discussing the positives and negatives (pedagogical and personal) regarding these four, also in small groups; and
- a ‘proportional representation’ vote to reach final decision. T(For more information see VSO (2004) and Figures 3 and 4.)

Throughout, groups are mixed up and students negotiate with a range of their peers, some they know well, some less so. Among these peers, there is agreement and non-agreement on different issues, –and agreement often does not match friendship groups. Ultimately, there are always ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.

My own participant observation and student Reflective Diary entries are enlightening, and I draw on them here to evidence some of the impacts of this assignment setting on learning. Significantly, it is an emotional experience for many: anger, happiness, relief, concern, disappointment, and anxiety are all mentioned in the Diaries (and I offer ongoing support and advice to all students through the rest of the module, face-to-face and via email). Students experience ‘reasoning’ in debate as connected to embodied responses. They literally *feel the politics at play*, and many discuss how this affects their understanding of negotiating difference, explicitly connecting this to rethinking what it means to have to reach consensus:

> “The way the assignment was picked was very interesting. It made us think individually and considered all our strengths and weaknesses. I felt really uncomfortable at times – it got a bit personal. But I think it was a good group exercise, taught us to make decisions as well as consider each other in a group.” (Student Reflective Diary, 2009)

> “Setting the assignment […] forced us to work things out between ourselves AND made us more aware of, and perhaps sympathetic to, others’ circumstances. There was such a male/female split, I was surprised, and it made me realise how divisions between different groups are quite easy to slip into – and wonder how that works on ethnic lines.” (Student Reflective Diary, 2008)

Certainly, most reflect on whose voices ‘were loudest’, often recognising subtle shifts in dominance as participatory exercises destabilise such power imbalances. This is not to suggest that all becomes equal, or that voice disappears altogether. Rather that there are new circulations of power enacted. Interestingly, the lobbying starts well before this session, with students attempting to influence one another’s choices, thus making a critical geopolitics of the everyday very real:

> "Everyone was talking about it from the start of the module, and some people were clearly trying to persuade others to choose what they wanted. When we started [the session] it seemed most people wanted what a certain popular group had been pushing, but by the end we chose a totally different option! We all got to have our say in smaller groups and other people seemed to speak up more." (Student Reflective Diary, 2011)

> "Before we set the assignment, me and my friends thought that we would all agree (all the group) on what the assignment would be. Not at first of course, we went into the session with lots of different ideas about the best assignment, but we thought that by the end we would agree [...] But afterwards, after we had come to the consensus, lots of my friends didn't agree with it, they are unhappy with the choice made by the group overall. I'm OK with it [*that year group chose a critical review of a relevant contemporary film or novel*], it suits me, I think I can do it well, but I know several people who are really worried about it. This made me realise that agreeing and making a decision as a group aren't quite the same thing. " (Student Reflective Diary, 2010)

Reaching a consensus decision on their assignments enables the students to distinguish between a political necessity - there has to be an assignment to complete the module and gain sufficient credits for a degree – and their own individual values regarding preferred assignment type, which remain at odds across the group. That is, the students begin to appreciate some sense of the ineradicability of difference first hand, and that such an understanding of difference *does not preclude the possibility* of finding political consensus, but throws it up as a potential amid pluralism.

Of course, having to set an assignment in the classroom is far removed from negotiating issues around religious clothing in public space, positive/affirmative action in welfare provision, or 'freedom of speech', to highlight just some of the controversial debates across societies. But from this session, my experience is that students can move on to consider the geopolitics of inter-ethnic and inter-cultural relations as temporary, context-driven and fragile settlements, with greater understanding.

<u>GEOGRAPHY, IDENTITY, BELONGING: ENGAGING WITH PEACE-BUILDING THROUGH FIELDWORK.</u>

Catherine Nash.

Contemporary arguments about the pedagogic value of fieldwork in geography, informed by the discipline's reflective critique of its history of exploration, stress the significance of fieldwork as a form of active learning (Hope 2009). How might fieldwork be a means of engaging more specifically with emerging interests in the political geographies of peace? Writing in this journal Nick Megoran has recently called for geographical attention to the meanings and practices of peace and especially to the overlooked but crucial everyday processes by which 'peace in its fullest senses is lived, created, sustained, and struggled for' (Megoran 2011: 187). Education, he argues, is one dimension of a political geography committed to peace. He invites us to consider 'how field trips can contribute to peace education' (Megoran 2011: 186). Here I want to reflect on my experience of taking a small group of undergraduate students on a week-long fieldcourse in Dublin and Belfast, whose focus on efforts to address violent conflict and social division through practical and creative strategies resonates with these emerging interests in political geographies of peace.

Geography, identity, belonging is the title of a semester long (twelve week) module offered to second and third year geography students in which the fieldwork component is preceded by eight weeks of preparatory lectures, seminars and group project development. As its title suggests, the module addresses themes of identity and division that span political, social and cultural geography but it does so through a specific focus on Ireland and Northern Ireland. It addresses themes of cultural diversity, social inclusion, belonging and citizenship in relation to traditional categories of national and ethnic identity and new patterns of immigration and racialised difference in these contexts. Students are encouraged to consider the concept of 'belonging' in terms of people's sense of cultural location, inclusion and shared identity, and in the sense of cultural ownership and property. The module also fosters students' exploration of the ways in which these issues are central to political conflict and accommodation, to anxieties about social and cultural change and to tensions between different versions of collective national identity in Ireland and Northern Ireland, but also more widely.

While the depth of our focus on these two contexts in advance and in the field is an important pedagogic dimension of the module, it also encourages students to consider these issues of nationhood, race and ethnicity in Britain and in their own lives and experiences in ways which are sometimes quite difficult to do sensitively when engaged with more directly. In this respect at least, it is the oblique rather than direct approach of a module that is ostensibly about other places, that make class discussions about the politics of national identity in London or Britain possible. In other instances students encourage each other to be more reflective about their own senses of national identity as they begin to explore the making of national and ethnic identities in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Despite the geographical proximity, many and often most students have never been to

Ireland or to Northern Ireland. Others have family connections. Our discussions of these patterns of family links or previous lack of knowledge, and students' reflections in the field on what is similar and what seems different in both cities, feed into our consideration of the wider interconnected history of the making of ideas of Irish, British and English identity and difference.

Much is also gained from the simple but effective comparative nature of the fieldwork. Students ideally bring to the field an understanding of the historical processes (of colonialisation, nation building and modernisation) and events that created the two political units and some sense of the similarities, distinctiveness and entanglements of the configurations of cultural belonging and difference in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Students consider the cities comparatively in multiple ways: comparing Dublin and Belfast to cities in Great Britain or other places they know; comparing Dublin and Belfast. In exploring the politics of heritage and commemoration, for example, in Dublin and then in Belfast, students gain more understanding of the broad issues and their distinctive dimensions in each place. The order of their work, first in Dublin and then in Belfast, is deliberate. It means to intensify their sense of what is shared and distinctive about each context: new stark evidence of ethno-national division in Belfast but overlapping issues of class-based segregation and the politics of urban redevelopment. It is set up as a way of thinking about Irishness and Britishness in an 'Irish' city whose 'Irishness' is performed and remade in diverse ways, and then in a 'British' city, whose 'Britishness' is deeply defended, contested and challenged, not least by the city's official St Patrick's Day Carnival that we focused on for the last day of our most recent fieldtrip. It is also meant to highlight the political geography of state boundaries and provide some insight into their intensely politicized nature. We travel from Dublin to Belfast by coach crossing the now relatively invisible and open but deeply contested border, and so back into the United Kingdom but on the island of Ireland, picking up hints of where this has happened by changes in road signage, car registrations and post boxes (Nash and Reid 2010). I ask students to look out for the border; most miss the moment of crossing over or realise only when their mobiles switch back to UK service providers. But this anti-climax is often prompts much discussion later about the historical making of borders and boundaries, the everyday work of the state at the border (Painter 2006), the changing nature of this border over time, and the continuities and shifts in its political status, material form and symbolism.

As with many approaches to undergraduate fieldwork in geography, the emphasis of the module is on active learning and engagement. Making this happen in practice is helped by several weeks of pre-trip preparation. The emphasis throughout is on collective effort and shared responsibility. The fieldwork is presented as a collective research project in which students work within small groups to develop specific research projects in Dublin and undertake pre-arranged

interviews in Belfast to feed into our shared knowledge and understanding. The focus of our work in both contexts is on their material geographies: their key symbolic sites, public spaces, institutions, monuments and redevelopments. These material geographies are then contextualised and explored n relation to commemoration and urban regeneration, inequality, identity and exclusion, and the ways in which different organisations and groups are engaging with issues of identity, diversity, inclusion and division in both cities.

It is this focus on the practical and creative work of organisations addressing questions of exclusion and division that the students engage with most directly in their project and interview work. In Dublin this has included meetings with those working in asylum seeker support and advocacy organisations and anti-racism sports organisations, with those addressing Traveller rights, identities and experiences, and those developing radical visions of public art and social change. We have undertaken walking tours and had presentations of innovative projects such as the 'Placing Voices – Voicing Places' project which is exploring questions of heritage in relation to national and local, and long settled and migrant versions of historical value. Students are encouraged to consider those they encounter not simply as research subjects to be interviewed but as people themselves engaged in creative and constructive public geographies (Fuller 2008). They are encouraged not only to understand the problems of certain models of national belonging, for example, but to consider how people are working to address these issues in active and practical ways. Theoretical debates that sometimes seems abstract and disconnected from the world are made concrete and come alive through this work. At their best these encounters are opportunities for engaged and mutually enriching conversations between staff, students and activists.

This is carried forward and has a heightened significance in our work in Belfast. The aim is to foster a depth of understanding of Belfast as a divided city in relation to the long history of colonialism and more recent history of conflict. However it is also, importantly, to encourage students to consider the work of well-established and new organisations and groups who have addressed and continue to address the multiple strands of division in the city and Northern Irish society more widely. So, while our work in Belfast includes visits to the 'peace walls' that separate working class Protestant and Catholic residential areas of the city, and for many students this is the most remarkable aspect of the fieldtrip, considerable effort is made to avoid a voyeuristic 'tourism of the Troubles' style visit or to reinforce an over-simplified and reductive image of 'two communities' locked in an anachronistic and intractable conflict. This is done partly by working with the students in the weeks before to address the complex and changing dimensions of division and accommodation (Douglas 1997), including new issues of ethnic diversity. This is achieved by discussing the ethics of tourism in post-conflict contexts, and Northern Ireland more specifically

(McDowell 2008), but also, and most significantly, focusing in our fieldwork on practical and creative responses to conflict and division in Belfast.

This has included collective and small group student-led meetings with organisations such as Groundwork Northern Ireland based in a well-known interface area of north Belfast which works in partnership with local communities to address division and promote environmental, social and economic regeneration, or the Belfast Interface Project, an umbrella group representing community organisations on both sides of interface areas addressing questions of safety and cross-community relations. Rather than only introduce the students to the divided nature of the city, students are encouraged to consider the inventiveness, patience, persistence and creativity of a wide range of social and cultural groups who engage with the causes and effects of this division. However, our focus is not just on the most visible manifestations of division and responses to them but on wider issues of the legacy of conflict, on new patterns of division, new forms of 'peace building', the politics of 'neutral' or 'shared' public space and cultural policy (Nash 2005). This has included encountering the work of organisations addressing the politics of memory and commemoration in Northern Ireland in relation to the Troubles, faith-based organisations responding to violence and other forms of hostility directed towards new immigrant groups, or innovative out-reach theatre youth work and music and cultural groups addressing old and new forms of division and diversity in Northern Ireland. We pay particular attention to children's and young people's everyday experience of sectarian territoriality in the city, by encouraging students' engagement with the issues affecting an age group near to their own. This is a starting point for addressing questions of inter-generational reproduction of anxiety and antipathy but also possibilities for change, and for reflecting on the ways in which the disaffection of economically marginalised working class boys and young men intersects with a tradition of sectarian 'recreational' violence. Working with organisations in this way means we are always encountering the latest developments and issues and examples: a newly opened gate in a peace wall, an emerging cross-community initiative, a repainted mural, for example.

Students respond in a variety of ways. They are often shocked, perplexed, disturbed or moved by the 'peace-walls' or accounts of division. Some are impatient with the sensitivities surrounding ideas of cultural rights or commemoration, or frustrated by the apparent slowness of change and what seems like the tentative nature of activist approaches to community relations in Northern Ireland, or the lack of a simple solution through policy-making and legislation. These are reactions that, in turn, other students challenge, question or qualify, making counter-arguments that are equally affective as well as analytical. Others develop new senses of understanding as their reading and our previous discussions suddenly or incrementally begin to make sense over the course

of the week and develop new ways of participating and new levels of interest and critical engagement. Some are inspired to pursue future careers in community, environmental or advocacy organisations or in critical urban planning. At its best there is a sense of the fieldwork mattering beyond the module's assessment, coursework deadlines and credit weighting.

In practical terms, undertaking fieldwork of this kind entails the time consuming organisational work of setting up our collective and student-led small group meetings with a wide variety of organisations that, rather stressfully for me as organiser, often only fall into place just before, or even during the trip. Establishing and maintaining relationships with these organisations is crucial for this sort of fieldwork, and in preparing the Belfast component this also means working hard to convey the nature of the fieldwork so that it does not look like we are giving students a simplified, superficial and even exoticized version the Troubles or blithely intruding on an already heavily researched province and city. It depends on people saying 'yes' to requests to meet up with small groups of students and it is these small group meetings, prepared for and led by students, that are central to giving our fieldwork a sense of being 'real', immediate and meaningful. The generosity of organisations and individuals makes this sort of fieldwork possible at all and enriching for staff and students. The coherence and rhythm of the trip depends too on juggling the balance between, and student expectations about, the amount of active work and less demanding orientation and observation on foot or in the coach. In practice, the fieldwork means responding to the students' reactions in ways which help them deepen their knowledge and understanding through fostering an ethos of collective learning, engagement and exchange between staff, students and those they encounter.

Much of this is common to the pedagogies of fieldwork in human geography. But more specifically, our work in Belfast (and to a large extent, in Dublin) is based on a sense of the value and ethics of attending to agency and activism as a counterpoint to critical scepticism about the possibilities for change and as a source of inspiration for staff and students alike. But this focus on peace-building in this wide sense is not meant to encouragea naïve optimism or a superficial or distorted impression of the political geographies of this city. Students are encouraged to understand the depth of the problems that prompt the constructive responses we consider. Nor are these responses presented as easy solutions. Instead we consider complex questions about the relationship between peace-making on the ground and formal political processes, policy making and political representation, legislative developments and attitudinal shifts, between class and other dimensions of division, and in relation to processes of urban redevelopment and change. Through our meetings and group projects we address the inadequacy of envisioning Belfast either as a peaceful post-conflict city or as place locked in perpetual conflict. Instead we consider what can be

learned from those who in painstaking, practical and inventive ways are peace-making in a divided city. This model of engaging with political geographies of peace through fieldwork could be applied in other post-conflict contexts, with all the attendant ethical challenges, practical issues and rewards of exploring how 'peace in its fullest sense is lived, created, sustained and struggled for (Megoran, 2011: 187).

MAKING CLASS DEBATES WORK IN POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

Nick Gill

Using structured or semi-structured debates in political geography offers numerous pedagogic benefits, including the promotion of active engagement by students which can enhance learning, mastery of the content and the development of critical thinking and oral communication skills, as well as empathy (see Kennedy, 2009). But how do we make debates work on the ground? This intervention gives some ideas about how to use debates as a way to encourage students towards thinking critically and argumentatively through their class experiences, which surely must be seen as key skills for a truly *political* geography. This is a bold claim and of course no pedagogic technique is perfect, but what follows will give at least some idea of the ways debates can be useful. I will treat four aspects of class debates, drawing upon my experience of using these over seven years of teaching on geography courses run by the universities of Bristol, Lancaster and Exeter in the UK. These four aspects include when to use class debates, how to set up a basic class debate, what modifications can be made to class debates and some topics within political geography that have gone down well (and badly) with my own students.

Class debates are generally more flexible than many people imagine: I have used them with groups of over 100, although much larger than this may be impractical. One useful innovation is to use 'adjudicators' to judge the debates rather than to try to judge them as a class teacher. Adjudicators are students picked from the class who deliver a judgement on a debate they have chaired at the end of the session. This allows the class teacher much more flexibility in terms of running parallel debates, listening in to a range of debates, assessing students if required (for a discussion of assessment of debates, see Kennedy, 2009) , or managing the timing of the debate. I have used debates that fit into 25 minute slots in a class, as well as ones that have spanned two one hour class slots, so they are variable in terms of timing. There are, then, few practical limits on when to use a class debate: a minimum group size that is able to sustain a conversation and a suitable room with movable chairs are about the only prerequisites.

It is worth bearing in mind, though, that debates are sometimes daunting for students. This is important because if students become overawed in classes they may learn less, or less effectively, and their attendance may decline over a course.There are various measures that can be taken to assuage the concerns that they may have. First, it is worth emphasising that what is discussed will not leave the classroom (unless it is assessed). This is part of creating a safe space in which to debate that might also involve ground rules like not interrupting when someone is speaking, not using inappropriate language and not getting 'personal' (see Brookfield & Preskill, 1999, pp. 7-14 for a list of ideal 'dispositions' in democratic discussion). In terms of building confidence, I have also found it useful to run preliminary open sessions where students are invited to discuss anything that gets them angry or annoyed as an ice-breaker (and everything from fox-hunting bans, to speeding tickets to prohibitions on cannabis has been discussed).

The basic starting point for any debate is to settle on a question that will hold the attention of the group and has two distinct positions. At the beginning of courses, or if time is short, or if this is the first time that I have used class debates with a group, I generally assign positions to teams of students i.e. tell them which side of the debate they are going to argue for. This is useful for making them think in ways that they would not necessarily support, and students generally understand this reasoning if they ask why they are in a particular team. Then the two teams prepare their cases. Here I try to encourage teams to prepare detailed points, and also to prepare responses to what they expect will be the reaction to their points from the other side. This period is therefore useful in encouraging students to move two or three steps along a line of argument. At this point in the class if not before, I take the opportunity to collect adjudicators (one for every two teams that will debate). I usually ask for volunteers, but they could just as easily be nominated to equalise the strength of the two teams (e.g. by taking an articulate member from an already strong team). The adjudicators are briefed on their role, which is to encourage debate and to 'score' the debate in the way they see fit. These adjudicators are the ones that the teams need to convince, and it is their judgement that will count. The adjudicators themselves are asked to prepare not only a decision (fence-sitting is strictly prohibited!) but also a two-minute justification of their decision for the class.
The debate then runs for a minimum of ten minutes and usually considerably longer (a variety of alternative debate formats are discussed by Kennedy, 2009). I have run debates in first year classes where the teams must simply make a new point in order not to lose – this is effective for getting all team members to speak and can be a great icebreaker at the start of a term or year. For more advanced sessions, I have offered the adjudicators a scoring system that assigns one point for a new line of argument but two points for a direct rebuttal of a previous line of argument (which is more difficult). In practice, this scoring system is rarely carried out, but its real value is in letting the class

know that the adjudicators have been instructed in this way, which can then make them more likely to engage in fertile debate.

At the end of the debate, adjudicators are asked to give their verdict on each debate. It is usually helpful to give all the teams two minutes notice of the end of the debate – this can enliven discussion and ensure that a degree of summarising occurs. The adjudicators themselves are key to this part of the class and invariably rise to and relish the challenge. To support the adjudicators, however, it might be useful to give them a minute or two to prepare their decisions (and the debates can continue at this point), and it is generally helpful to select confident members of the class to be adjudicators, especially if this is the first time that debates have been used with a class. A round of applause for each adjudicator is helpful too, as well as for the team they nominate as the winner. The whole class listens to each adjudicator in turn, so bear this in mind when you are deciding upon the number of debates that will run in tandem.

There are a wide range of modifications that can be applied to this basic debating framework. First, the class itself can be asked to vote 'outside' the assigned positions of the students (i.e. what do the students *really* think). This is particularly interesting if two votes occur, one before the debate has been run and one afterwards: it is surprising how often the class as a whole changes its mind – I've seen almost wholesale changes of heart on the question of UK membership of the EU, for example. A second modification is to invite the class members to prepare cases ahead of the class itself. This will involve two sessions – one to introduce the activity and another for the actual debate – but in these cases we can expect more facts and figures and more quotations to emerge in the debates, and for the debate sessions themselves to be longer. I have provided newspaper clippings during preparatory sessions, although there is no reason why students should not gather their own newspaper stories. I have also found it useful to ask adjudicators to take into account the degree of preparation in these debates. A third modification is to allow students to occupy the positions of their choice for the debate, rather than assigning positions. There are a range of ways in which group membership can be constructed, depending upon learning objectives (see Race & Brown, 1998: 83). Other more minor modifications include allowing the teams to choose a team name before they get started which can give them more ownership of their team and spark their enthusiasm, setting aside a protected couple of minutes at the beginning and end for each team to nominate a member to provide an opening and summation, and combining the debate with a presentation topic, current developments in the news, or a theme from the lectures on a module. For small classes of first year undergraduates who may be less confident, I have also required everyone to speak so that the quieter ones have got over their nerves about talking in front of the group. It is also useful to continue class debates in virtual space after the class session.

Suitable topics for debate in political geography abound, and political geography as a sub-discipline lends itself nicely to debate. There is, nevertheless, an art to avoiding topics that almost everyone would agree about and choosing ones that are likely to divide the class (such as 'no platform' positions on extreme/fascist parties). It is better to choose a debate that is likely to split the class unless there is a very strong and dominant group, in which case they can be assigned the most unpopular position (for a discussion of 'how to get students to stop speaking' if particular groups or individuals are highly articulate, see Habershaw et al, 1992). Topics that have been successful in the past include: "We should fear climate change", "In an age of terror, the state is justified in using increasingly intrusive surveillance measures", "The state should treat men and women differently", "Britain should loosen border controls", "People should be made to vote", "Maximum Devolution = Maximum Freedom", "Peace is always good". So in general, a provocative statement with a clear 'for' or 'against' implication is most conducive to debate.

There are various criteria to use when judging the success of a debate. If discussions seem to have a life of their own and appear to be capable of continuing well beyond the end of the class, this could be taken to indicate a good session, or alternatively if some of the quieter students have taken the lead in a debate, if some of the more confident and self-assured students have had to modify and nuance their arguments or if students draw upon the arguments made in their written work, these can also be positive signs. Debates are not always successful. The more theoretical and abstract debates in particular can tend to fizzle out more quickly or have students talking past each other on the basis of disparate examples. So debates that I have run that have not gone well have usually required students to debate an abstract concept such as 'is the state, at root, no more than an idea' or 'sovereignty and territory are coterminous'. While these sorts of questions might be interesting to established political geographers, undergraduates in general need more time to process these sorts of abstract discussions, and I have generally found it best to provide more mainstream topics that can subsequently be related to the conceptual elements of a course. Debates can also get 'out of hand', although I have never had to stop a debate because it is too unruly or inappropriate. More commonly, students will look to bend the rules in favour of their team – e.g. by debating past the finish of the debate, attempting to shout down or over-rule an adjudicator, or, in one case, insisting on a re-vote after another five minutes of debate in order to persuade the class differently (sadly this did not work). It is difficult to prescribe what to do in situations like these because each class is different, but in general maintaining fairness is more important to students then adhering rigidly to the rules.

From the perspective of the class teacher debates allow you to engage with the class in a hands-on way. As the teams are preparing their cases the teacher can circulate around the group(s)

and hear the dilemmas and convictions of the class members, and over a course (e.g. 10 weeks) groups can get very proficient and creative in preparing and delivering arguments. More broadly, in an era that is marked by the foreclosure of politics, such that an increasing proportion of what passes for politics is really just discussion about how to reach some already-agreed destination or implement some already settled upon solution (Žižek, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2010), it is critical for a discipline that claims to be political to practice genuine disagreement and dissent (Rancière, 2004). Instituting dissensus, not about technical issues but around fundamental and intractable points of contention, should therefore be a priority for teachers of political geography, and debates offer one way to seek to achieve this objective.

CONNECTING CONCEPTS WITH REAL WORLD ISSUES: LETTERS TO NEWSPAPER ASSIGNMENT

Raksha Pande; Alex Jeffrey; Nick Megoran

It was at the end of a seminar on nationalism and ethnicity a student said to one of the authors;

> "Raksha, it is all well and fine when Stuart Hall tells us that we all need to think of ourselves as ethnically located rather than reserve the term for the so called visible minorities ..but what does it matter?... because when I go to the supermarket this evening I'll still get my poppadoms from the aisle marked ethnic foods and I'll still get asked where I am from because I have an unusual surname even though I have always lived in Sheffield ".

What the student was pointing to here was the belief that somehow concepts and ideas taught in the classroom start and end at the threshold of the university and that in the *real world* out there, no one understands what social construction is or why deconstructing established categories is a significant part of the knowledge making exercise in social sciences. In other words, the question for many students is; how does disciplinary knowledge gained as part of reading say a geography degree influences if at all any change in our understanding of and our relationship with the world? This is of particular significance in political geography teaching where we are engaged in trying to help students to question, critique, rethink and hopefully re-imagine concepts and ideas such as nation,

identity, culture, patriotism; all of which students come to the class room regarding as being fixed, given and real.

As an attempt in encouraging students to identify and analyse the links between abstract geopolitical concepts and real world examples, we have been running an innovative assignment as part of the second year Political Geography curriculum at Newcastle University. We call it 'the letters to newspapers assignment'. Taking its inspiration from the letters to editor columns in newspapers, we set students the task of submitting a letter for publication to the editor of a UK national, regional or local newspaper, responding to an item in that paper that in some way relates to the taught material on the course. As we point out to our students, the letters sections of newspapers are important for a number of reasons. They are a prominent public forum that can often set agendas in political debate. The Red Cross and Amnesty International are examples of organisations that have their origins in letters published in UK newspapers. They are also often the only parts of newspapers where genuinely dissenting views to the editorial are to be found. We developed the assignment with the broad aim of encouraging students to take responsibility for relating ideas taught in the classroom to the world around them and to help them to employ their knowledge to actively engage in contemporary political debates.

We take our inspiration from the writings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire argued that critical pedagogy should be one that 'not only supports the practice of students and workers reflecting critically upon their location in the world, but also on their relationship with the world" (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2002: 48). Much of the standard material on assessment and teaching is silent on this issue (eg Bryan, 2006; Bedford & Burgess, 2001), prioritising instead the cultivation of subjectivities that "aspire to become more efficient, professional individuals" (Bryan, 2006: 225) – which might be interpreted as consumers and producers ideally suited to neoliberalism. The letters to newspaper assignment was intended, as Yarwood wrote, to help students "develop as geographers and citizens" (2005: 367). Pedagogically, it was designed "to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge" (Freire, 1998: 49). Differentiated from the 'transmission model' of teaching, it is a form of 'active learning' that as Fletcher argues "encourages learners to make sense of topics by engaging in the learning process through participation in a structured learning activity to obtain desired learning outcomes" (Fletcher, 2005: 313). For our students we believe that, choosing a news item, reflecting on it and managing to *précis* the gist of their opinions in the form of a letter, marked a move away from passive learning to some degree of critical participation in the affairs of the world.

As this was a new form of assessment which required skills not usually taught at school or university, we took care to equip the students to undertake it. An introductory lecture explained the rationale of the exercise, and used examples of letters published by the instructors' to explain how to identify relevant newspaper material to respond to, how to write letters, and the actual process of submission of letters to editors. A separate handbook was produced for the exercise, explaining rationale and process very carefully. The handbook also contained links to web sites providing guidance on writing letters to newspapers, for example from the American Civil Liberties Union (2012). This initial lecture was also followed up by a two-hour workshop where students were encouraged to bring draft letters or recent newspaper articles for discussion in groups. This session provided the opportunity for the tutors on the course to talk to every student about possible letter topics and share ideas on style and content. The formal and informal feedback from the students identified this session as particularly helpful in clarifying the objectives of the assessment and the marking criteria.

In terms of how the assignment fitted with the module syllabus; students were required to submit to the university the original newspaper item they responded to, the letter they wrote to the newspaper with proof of submission (usually an automated email response), and a 1600 word essay on the aspect of the political geography course that their chosen newspaper item and letter engaged with. The letter itself was not marked – if it were, it would be included in the already limited word limit, possibly encouraging students to curtail the length of their letter to allow more space for the essay, to the detriment of the letter. The essay was worth 40% of the overall module mark, the remainder being an examination. In the early iteration of this exercise we asked students to write a 'commentary' rather than an essay, though this approach often led to written work that focused solely on the factors that led to the selection of a specific story rather than the story's relevance to political geography. In order to emphasise the importance of connecting the story to the themes of the course, in subsequent years we have decided to specify that the essay is assessed on its ability to engage with the authors and themes of the political geography course.

All students submitted the letters to their chosen newspapers and each year around 5% would be published. While students would usually be very proud to see their letter providing a contribution to a national debate, sometimes students would distance themselves from the nature of their letter after completing the essay. When students' reflected on this movement from letter to essay, perhaps in a class discussion at a later date, they remarked on the role of the assessment in urging them to think about what arguments are effective within newspaper correspondence, and which forms of communication are most appropriate. These reflections illuminate why we, as tutors, have not included blog or online comments sections within this assessment. Where such arenas

provide an immediate and (almost) certain outlet for opinion, they do not have to go through the process of editorial selection and revision involved in letters to newspapers.

The topics students engaged with varied in focus from the war on terror to Somali pirates, Scottish nationalism to the Spanish claim on the island of Gibraltar. The newspapers they chose ranged from the broadsheets to the regional papers from Newcastle, and topics covered the range of geographical scales from local, UK, to international. After the assignment, we asked the students to return a feedback questionnaire. Overall the students felt the assignment was instrumental in helping them to link abstract ideas with real world issues by helping them in taking their reading beyond academic text. *"I read more newspapers now", "Listen to the news"* were some responses. It also encouraged them to engage with current debates and issues by looking at newspaper reportage in a more critical way. Most significantly they pointed out that writing letters was an empowering experience because expressing their opinions to a public audience made them *"feel grown up and more mature"*. Hence, we believe the *letters to newspaper assignment* was effective in signalling a move away from passive learning by following an 'active learning' pedagogical model. It was instrumental in initiating an autonomous learning process whereby students were encouraged to become more reflexive, responsible and critical when reflecting upon their relationship with the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of some of these interventions were originally presented at a Royal Geographical Society – Institute of British Geographers Political Geography Research Group workshop at Newcastle, UK, in January 2011. We would like to acknowledge the support of the RGS-IBG and Newcastle University. We are also grateful to James Sidaway for encouraging us to assemble this intervention.

REFERENCES

American Civil Liberties Union (2012) Tips for writing letters to the editor. http://action.aclu.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AP_writing_letters_to_editor [Accessed 16/01/12]

Askins, K. (2008). In and beyond the classroom: research ethics and participatory pedagogies. *Area,* 40(4), 500-509.

Bedford, T., & Burgess. J. (2001). The focus-group experience. In M. Limb, & C. Dwyer (Eds.) *Qualitative Methods for Geographers: Issues and Debates* (pp. 121-135). London: Arnold.

Belfast Interface Project, http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org. Accessed 8 July 2011.

Biggs, J.B. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university: what the student does*. Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Brookfield, S., & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brown, S., Race, P., & Rust, C. (2000). Using and Experiencing Assessment. In P. Knight (Ed.), *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education* (pp. 75-85). London: Kogan Page.

Bryan, C. (2006). Developing group learning through assessment. In C. Bryan, & K. Clegg (Eds.) *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education* (pp. 150-157). Abingdon: Routledge.

Douglas, N. (1997). 'Political Structures, Social Interaction and Identity Change in Northern Ireland' in Brian G. ed. *In Search of Ireland: a cultural geography*, London, Routledge, 151-173

Cook, I.J., Angus, T. & Evans, J. (2001). A Manifesto for Cyborg Pedagogy. *International Research in Geographical & Environmental Education*, 10(2), 195-201.

Fletcher, S. (2005). Review of 'Engaging Students in Active Learning: Case Studies in Geography, Environment and Related Disciplines'. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 29 (2), 313-315.

Flint, C., & Taylor, P. (2011). *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State & Locality.* (6th ed.) London: Prentice Hall.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Society.* Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of Hope.* New York: Continuum.

Fuller, D. (2008). Public geographies: taking stock. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(6):,834-844.

Groundwork Northern Ireland, http://www.northernireland.groundwork.org.uk. Accessed 8 July 2011.

Hope, M. (2009) 'The importance of direct experience: a philosophical defense of fieldwork in human geography' *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 33(2): 169-182

Knight, P., & Yorke, M. (2004). *Learning, Curriculum and Employability in Higher Education*. London: RoutledgeFarmer.

Habeshaw, S., Gibbs, G., & Habeshaw, T. (1992). *53 Interesting Things to do in your Seminars and Tutorials*, (4th ed.) Bristol: Technical & Educational Services Ltd.

Hope, M. (2009). The importance of direct experience: a philosophical defense of fieldwork in human geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 33(2), 169-182.

Jones, M., Jones, R. & Woods, M. (2004). *An Introduction to Political Geography: Space, Place and Politics.* London: Routledge.

Kennedy, R. (2009) In-Class Debates: Fertile Ground for Active Learning and the Cultivation of Critical Thinking and Oral Communication Skills. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 19(2), 183-190.

McDowell, S. (2008). Selling conflict heritage through tourism in peacetime Northern Ireland: transforming conflict or exacerbating difference? *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14 (5), 405-421.

McLaren, P., & Farahmandpur. R. (2002). Freire, Marx, and the new imperialism: toward a revolutionary praxis. In J. Slater, S. Fain, & C. Rossatto (Eds.) *The Freirean Legacy: Educating for Social Justice* (pp. 37-56). Oxford: Peter Lang.

Megoran, N. (2011). War *and* Peace? An agenda for peace research and practice in geography *Political Geography*, 30, 178-189.

Morrish, M. (2011). Obituary: Rex A. Walford OBE, 1934-2011. *Geography,* 96(2)**,** 105-107.

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.

mrs. c. kinpaisby-hill. (2011). Participatory praxis and social justice: towards more fully social geographies. In V. Del Casino, M.E. Thomas, P. Cloke, & R. Panelli (Eds.), *A Companion to Social Geography* (pp. 214-234). Oxford: Blackwell.

Nash, C. (2005). Equity, Diversity and Interdependence: Cultural Policy in Northern Ireland, *Antipode* 37(2), 272-300.

Nash, C and Reid, B. (2010). Border crossings: new approaches to the Irish border *Irish Studies Review* 18(3), 265–284.

Office for National Statistics. (2012). Census gives insights into characteristics of the North East's population http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/census-2-1----north-east/census-gives-insights-into-characteristics-of-the-north-east-s-population.html [accessed 04/02/13]

Painter, J. (2006) Prosaic geographies of stateness *Political Geography*, 25: 752-774.

Painter, J. & Jeffrey, A. (2009). *Political Geography: An Introduction to Space and Power* (2nd ed.) London: Sage.

Placing Voices, Voicing Places, http://www.placingvoices.com. Accessed 8 July 2011.

Poudel, M. (2011). *Dealing with Hidden Issues: Social Rejection Experienced by Trafficked Women in Nepal.* Saarbrucken: Lambert Academic Publishing, New York.

Race, P., & Brown, S. (1998). *The Lecturer's Toolkit*, Abingdon: Kogan Press Ltd.

Rancière, J (2004) Disagreement: Politics and Asthetics. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Raento, P., Minghi, J., Cox, K., Davidson, F., Flint, C., & Herb. G. (2010). Interventions in teaching political geography in the USA. *Political Geography* 29, 190-199.

Swyngedouw, E. (2010) 'Apocalypse Forever? Post-political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change.' *Theory Culture & Society* **27,** (2-3): pp 213-232.

Taylor, J., & Walford, R. (Eds.) (1972). *Simulation in the Classroom.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Taylor, P., & Flint, C. (2000). *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State & Locality.* (4th ed.) London: Prentice Hall.

Walford, R. (1969). *Games in Geography.* London: Longman.

Yarwood, R. (2005). Geography, Citizenship and Volunteering: Some Uses of the Higher Education Active Community Fund in Geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 29 (3), 355-368.

Zapata-Martelo, E. Townsend, J.G., Rowlands, J., Alberti Manzanares, P. & Mercado González, M. (2002) *Las Mujeres y el Poder: Contra el Patriarcado y la Pobreza. Mexico City,* Plaza y Valdės.

Žižek, S. (1999) *The Ticklish subject: The absent centre of political ontology.* London: Verso.

Table 1: Geopolitics of Ethnic Identities module content 2010/11

TUESDAYS 1 - 3	**Week no.**	**THURSDAYS 11 - 1**
Introduction to the module	**1**	Participatory exercises: What do we think? What are our expectations?
Global perspectives I: Imperialism and diaspora	**2**	Reading-based seminar discussion
Global perspectives II: geopolitics of 'terror' & the ethnicisation of religion	**3**	Guest speaker: West End Refugee Service
Postcolonial theory and agonistic pluralism	**4**	Video 'Mixed Race Britain' and small group debate
National perspectives I: policy background	**5** **Hand in draft diary**	**setting the second assignment**
National perspectives II: power, place and ethnic identities	**6**	Citizenship workshop
Constructions of whiteness	**7**	Participatory exercises: Who are we ...?
Local perspectives I: micropublics and everyday ethnic relations	**8**	Visit to local community organisation ACANE
Local perspectives II: across ethnic/gender/class identities	**9**	Video '100% English' and small group discussion
Dominant and contesting media discourses	**10**	'representations' workshop
Local case studies: research findings; community films	**11**	Guest speaker: Newcastle Irish Centre
'Ethnicity lunch' – bring a dish to share …	**12**	Module review: Q&A

Figure 1: Different assessment techniques (most appropriate to this module from 51 techniques, adapted from Knight & Yorke, 2004)

Assessment technique	Strengths	Problems and limitations
Personal response assessments	Establishes knowledge acquisition.	Danger of concentrating on 'factual' questions.
Bullet point summaries	Encourages preparation. Efficient.	Copying from friends. Difficult with large classes.
Multiple choice questions	Students put course material into short term memory. Some reach higher-order thinking.	Hard to write MCQs that are not tests of information.
Making glossaries	Efficient way of establishing whether key terms are understood.	Easy to plagiarise.
Structured summaries of readings	Efficient.	Danger of only summarising information rather than offering critical thinking.
Short answer questions	Can be used to extend MCQs. Helps assess the quality of student thinking.	Hard to set questions.
Posters	See how students understand complex content nd relationships. Students learn from each others' work.	Time consuming. Danger of style over substance among student efforts.
Seminar presentations (in or out of 'role')	Encourage better oral communication. Enable teacher questioning and peer assessment.	Time consuming. Group seminars have their own difficulties.
Short evaluations of target papers	Encourage critical, analytic and evaluative thinking.	Students seldom familiar with this and have to learn how to write them.
Statements of relevance – making claims about relevance of workshop/article/field observation to module content	Stimulate reflection.	Difficult to identify grading criteria.

Takeaway exams	Help students show reasoning in good light.	Danger of collusion.
Unseen exams	Traditional and valuable means of establishing an individual's learning.	Legion of objections to exams – too many to cover here!
Writing executive summaries or newspaper reports	Stduents learn to write in a variety of styles.	Students seldom familiar with this and have to learn how to write them.
Contributions to threaded electronic discussions	Authentic.	Some students can lurk rather than contribute.
Concept maps	Efficient way of seeing how students understand complex content and relationships.	Time consuming, difficult to grade.
Annotated bibliographies	Requires students to read widely.	Hard to mark reliably.
Short essay writing	Concentrates attention on key arguments.	May give unfair advantage to slick writers.
Long essay writing	Traditional. Students have much experience of these.	Can encourage narration at the expense fo evaluation.
Bidding for (invented) tenders	Authentic.	Briefing documents must be well prepared by teachers.
Critical reviews of book, website, video, film, programme	Authentic and can inspire students.	Students seldom familiar with this and have to learn how to write them.
Role playing exercise	Authentic, often highly motivating.	Time consuming and difficult to fit in a course.
Web page creation	Efficient way of seeing how students understand complex content and relationships.	Best done by groups, which has its own issues. Danger of style over substance.
Portfolio work	Enable wide variety of work to be considered as learning.	Problems in judging diverse evidence.
Primary research	Draws on first hand learning and inquiry.	Tendency to concentrate on the mechanics of inquiry.
Work-based learning	Authentic. Can inspire students.	Low reliability across cohort

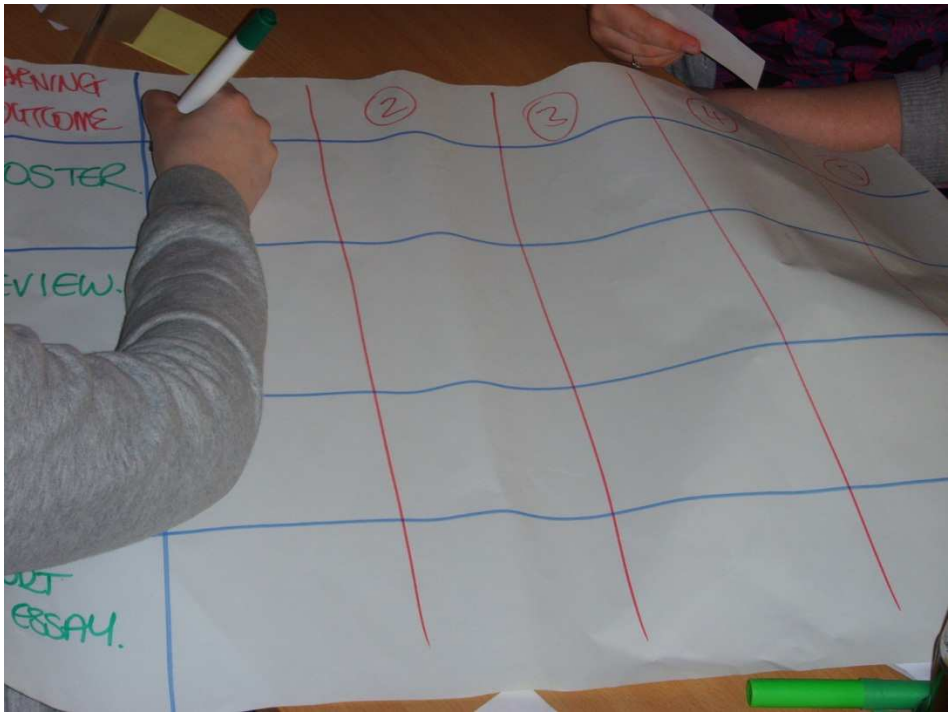
		regarding quality of learning. Difficult to grade.

Figure 2: Learning outcomes of the module

On completion of this module you should be able to: ▪ critically evaluate and reflect upon the construction of ethnic identities with reference to academic literatures, conceptual debates and media representations; ▪ compare the politics and processes behind ethnic relations at scales from the global to the everyday; ▪ abstract and synthesise information on the relationality of ethnic identity production; ▪ describe the relationality of space within social relations; and ▪ apply politicised thinking to issues of racism and ethnicity.

Figure 3: forcefield analysis of positives and negatives, regarding different assignment types.

Figure 4: verifying learning outcomes for different assignment types through matrix diagramming


2
3
1
ESSAY.