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Title

"Everyone gets to think and talk" – a gallery-walk seminar on contrasting European futures

Abstract

Gallery-walk seminars offer an effective form of visible learning that encourages students to practice retrieval, reflection, and peer learning. Prompted to visualize European futures based on different political ideologies, and then communicate their results in the form of a vernissage and Q&A session, the students work in groups in which they negotiate with each other what a particular ideological future would mean for Europe before agreeing on the content of a shared "magic chart" poster. These posters are then presented by each group member in cross groups, meaning that each student must understand and develop a sense of ownership of the material in order to present the work of the original group in the new cross group. Through this design, student knowledge from preceding lectures is activated and visualized in relation to the students' pre-understanding of the subject matter. The shared posters mean that the teacher can see the learning through the eyes of the students and give situated feedback. Based on student evaluations, it can be concluded that students appreciate the novel seminar format as it gives everyone an opportunity to talk while deepening the students' understanding of political ideologies in a European context.

Introduction

In *Play Matters*, Miguel Sicart talks of "playfulness" as in bringing "the creative and free personal expression that play affords to a world outside play" (2014:30). With university studies becoming increasingly instrumentalized and subject to a constant stream of criteria-based assessments, it feels important to think of new ways in which playfulness and the immediate joy of learning can be brought into the classroom (Nørgård *et al.*, 2017). In this chapter, we present a gallery-walk seminar that seeks to inspire undergraduate students to think about European futures through the lens of different political ideologies. By prompting the students to visualize the future, rather than the present, a degree of freedom is introduced that goes beyond summarizing the course readings and which calls on them to independently make their own assessment of current social and political trends

The gallery-walk seminar encourages a form of learning that centres on the capacity to seeing the other side of an argument; a capacity that seems especially important in this time of increasing polarization and ideologically motivated cognition (Kahan, 2013). In an empirically oriented discipline (insert reference to Marsh?), this also appears to be a particularly important element of political science education more generally (Baylouny, 2009).

Psychological research has long emphasized the role of retrieval in consolidating learning (Karpicke & Roediger, 2008), as opposed to merely encoding ("studying"), yet university courses are often designed in ways that leave little room for retrieval except at the end in the form of a final exam. With this in mind, one objective with the seminar activity presented in this chapter is to encourage students to articulate what they are learning throughout the course and, also, making their learning visible to both themselves and us as teachers. Believing that learning is to a large extent a social activity (Kolb, 2015), we have designed the seminar activity in a way that encourages as much interaction and peer modulation of core concepts as possible.

Drawing on the theoretical work of Diana Laurillard (2002, 2013), we first seek to offer a general introduction to this form of active learning/learning activity before turning to the design decisions informing the specific seminar exercise. After this, we present some of the artwork created by the students during the seminar sessions before concluding by looking at the student perspective as it is expressed in subsequent course evaluations.

Theory

Seeing university teaching as being more about mediating learning than imparting knowledge (Laurillard, 2002), we have for many years experimented with different active learning activities, such as role-playing and short-form student videos (Karlsson & Eriksson, 2022). Among such pedagogies and practices, we, in the following, suggest that gallery-walk exercises are particularly well-suited to allow students to build on their prior understanding and incorporate newly acquired knowledge while promoting equity and inclusivity in ways that traditional seminar formats often fail to do as they tend to be dominated by a few vocal students. With OpenAI and other tools for academic text generation now further undermining traditional forms of assessment such as take-home exams, there is also a growing need to ensure authenticity in higher education (Kreber, 2013).

At a theoretical level, gallery-walk seminars reflect many of the key insights in Laurillard's "conversational framework" (2013), in particular the importance of iterative feedback cycles and the modulation of theoretical concepts through continuous peer and teacher communication. With this in mind, we have used Laurillard's work to develop the design of the seminar exercise. Another stream of inspiration has come from the literature on "playfulness" that has emerged in response to

extrinsic goal-oriented behaviours, both among students and teachers. While the commodification of higher education is hardly a new phenomenon, and something that was visible already in the contested role of "academic values" in the Bologna Process (Miklavič, 2012), recent emphasis on quantifiable "learning outcomes" and criteria-based forms of assessment has accelerated this development and gradually reduced the room for the unexpected. By introducing an element of uncertainty, the relatively limited instructions for the gallery-walk seminar (as detailed below) prompt the students to construct their own understanding of the course material. To ask the students to envision the future enables a playful approach to learning as the future as such is essentially open and indeterminate (Karlsson, 2005; van Lente & Peters, 2022), and the exercise, thereby, becomes less about being "right" or "wrong" respectively. In order to apply what they have learnt about the political ideologies during the preceding lectures requires the students to work creatively when visualizing contrasting European futures.

Desirable as this level of freedom is, it is important to recognize that the students are still being assessed and that the power relations are never equal in a classroom (Nørgård *et al*., 2017:279). As teachers, we may have taught the same course for many semesters but, for the students, this may be their first encounter with university studies. As such, it is important to recognize that talk of "playfulness" reflects a position of privilege and that the cost of "failure", perceived or real, is much higher for the students. With this in mind, we strive to assure the students that what matters in the seminar activity is not so much the final product as their genuine engagement in the collaborative learning process.

Structuring and facilitating the gallery-walk seminar

Scheduled three weeks into a five-week long undergraduate module in political science at Umeå University in northern Sweden, the teacher begins the seminar by dividing the students into groups of 5-6 students, which are assigned one political ideology each and then asked to visualize what their assigned ideology would mean for the future of Europe. With seminar groups of 25-30 students each, typically divided into four or five smaller groups, major ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism and socialism appear alongside newer ones such as feminism and ecologism. During the first two hours of the seminar, the students work in these original groups, combining their own pre-understanding of the subject matter with the knowledge they have acquired during the preceding lectures through negotiation at the intersection of introspection and communication. This is where Kolb (2015) locates the primary impact of the pedagogical relation (see also Biesta, 2021).

By assigning ideologies to the students rather than allowing them to pick an ideology of their choice, students are prompted to work with ideologies that they would perhaps otherwise not have engaged with, might feel uncertain about or might out reject the underlying values of. The pedagogical point here is to challenge the students to engage with subject matter that they perceive to be located outside of their comfort zones and thereby encourage learning by stretching these comfort zones (for a critique of this pedagogical approach, see e.g. Brown, 2008).

The students agree in the groups on the style of their presentations. Typically, their visions of the future of Europe are presented as key words, mind-maps or advanced drawings on erasable electrostatic posters known as "Magic Charts" that each resembles a 60 x 80 cm whiteboard. The details of the instructions given are few to leave room for the students to negotiate their decisions in the groups and thereby offering them a chance to elaborate on the expected impacts of each decision as a part of the negotiation process that goes into the poster production. The creation of the posters invites different forms of interaction and modulation as the students compare lecture notes with each other, elaborate on and discuss their different readings of the course materials, and search

the internet for clarification and inspiring new ideas. This process supports higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis (Miri *et al.*, 2007).

During the following two hours (including a break), we as teachers interact with one group at a time, answering questions, asking Socratic questions (Faust & Paulson, 1998), and offering formative and situated feedback. While this collaborative form of learning allows each student to engage in cyclical communication with their peers, our intervention adds to this a prompt to intersect what Laurillard in her conversational framework names the conceptual and practice levels (2013:95).

When the two hours of elaboration and negotiation have come to an end, the students hang their posters on the classroom walls with enough space between them for a cross group to stand in front of each poster. The gallery-walk only starts once the original groups have dissolved and new (cross) groups have been assigned. With one representative of each group presenting the group's work in the cross group which move from one poster to the other when the teacher instructs a swap, each member of the cross group gets to present their original group's poster when the cross group arrives in front of their own poster.

During the gallery walk, each student is given four minutes to present their poster. The presentation is then followed by four minutes of Q&A. This allows the cross groups a measure of freedom in case the presentations run out of steam. Often the presentations and Q&A end up merging organically; crystallising into a conversation among the members of the cross group. All groups do this simultaneously in different corners of the classroom and rotate clockwise at the teacher's signal every eight minutes. A seminar with four to five posters (and, thus, four to five cross groups) requires roughly 35-40 minutes in total for the gallery walk. As teachers, we, again, move from one group to the other to interact with the students during the activity to prompt questions that encourage higher-order learning through reflection. That each student is faced with the challenge of presenting their own group's work and responding to the other students' as well as the teacher's questions about it in the cross group ensures active participation among all students. This differentiates the gallery walk seminar from conventional group presentation formats where one or a few assertive group members might take over and dominate the presentation and is therefore preferable from gender and intersectionality-aware perspectives (Diller, 2018).

While the classroom temperature and noise levels tend to rise during this activity, our experience is that a regular classroom (ideally with moveable tables) suffices for this activity, as the intensity of the activity enables the students to focus; often easing speaker's tension among those affected.

The most tangible outcomes of this learning activity, apart from sowing seeds for further learning, is to initiate conversations about both the ideologies as such and their role in contemporary European politics. What emerges here is an appreciation of politics as essentially a question about how problems are represented (Bacchi, 2012) as opposed to a mechanism for solving already given problems. The gallery-walk seminar calls for reflection on the premises according to which a particular ideology envisions the future of Europe; the subject positions that each ideology makes available to the student; and on what goes missing in the perspective that each ideology offers. In this way, learning *about* political ideologies entails both acquiring course content and reflecting on the ways that that content is approached (learning *through* political ideologies). From this perspective, learning as much relates to the students' lifeworlds as it provides a theoretical vocabulary and historical background to the study of political ideologies.

In the final round up once the gallery-walk has come to an end, we as teachers provide the students with summative feedback based on concrete issues that we encounter during the exercise. We also summarise some general tendencies that we observe. In concrete terms we reflect on the content of

the individual posters and the processes that went into their production as well as on the gallery-walk activity. We also ask for the students' experiences having just immersed their time and energy in the exercise. While it would be possible to ask the students to revise their posters after the gallery walk, we refrain from doing so as a means of encouraging the students to open up multiple learning processes at this early stage of their university education and keep these dialogues ongoing for the time being. Many students chose to reflect on how they would change their group's poster at this stage and we have observed that some of them leave the seminar room together with their original group members elaborating on these new ideas.

The gallery-walk seminar requires prior learning and is not to be approached as a stand-alone activity. This makes it difficult to assess its impact apart from the other forms of learning that are encouraged in this introductory political science module. The synthesizing function that allows students to apply what they have learned through passive listening to lectures and active work with highlighting and paraphrasing the course readings hinges on the prior activities at the lower knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's (1964) taxonomy. In Chi and Whylie's (2014) cognitive work model, the gallery walk seminar facilitates both constructive and interactive learning in addition to the passive and active learning that preceded the seminar where students both summarised and paraphrased what each European future means to their own values and ideological assumptions from the vantage point of the ideologies in question and try the common knowledge that emerges in dialogue. In addition to what the students themselves convey in the written course evaluations, we take the sharpening of the original arguments (in response to the feedback that the students received at the seminar) in the reappearance of the themes on the posters in the final take-home exams as indicators of the ongoing learning processes that the gallery-walk seminars have initiated. That no chatbot will be able to simulate the students' learning experiences in the gallery-walk is an additional feature. While the gallery-walk seminar format is fairly time consuming in university classes with hundreds of students and only one teacher compared to conventional forms of instruction, our experience is that a shortening from for instance three to two hours per seminar group significantly takes away much of the modulation and peer learning.

Imagining European futures

The four examples that are given here of work that was created during this exercise are all in Swedish, as Swedish is the language of instruction in this course. They were chosen for ideological variety and accessibility to a non-Swedish speaking audience (with priority given to artistic qualities over content). Having said this, the overall quality of the posters has made a lasting impression on us as teachers as well as on the colleagues of ours who have seen them. Our intuition is that well-thought out mind maps have most effectively facilitated peer learning and higher-order thinking (Laurillard 2002).
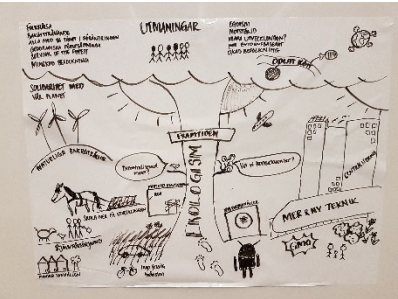

[Figure 1]

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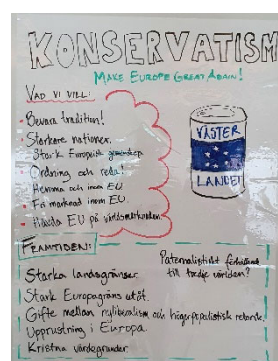
The first poster (figure 1) that we would like to showcase is one about conservatism. With its "Make Europe Great Again" message, this poster opens with an ironic reference to contemporary populism (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Appearing as a bullet list of "What we want" (as in what "conservatism" as a political ideology wants), the poster brings up key conservative themes such as law and order and the importance of traditions (Heywood, 2021:52). Contrary to recent developments though, the students who created this poster see the future of Europe as one in which neoliberal economics and right-wing populism again merge and a strengthened European community does not stand in opposition to strong national communities. Emphasizing strengthened external borders and military build-up, the poster and the discussions that followed during the gallery-walk portrayed the EU as a means of protecting Europe from the effects of globalization, rather than, say, a political cosmopolitan outlook that would see European integration as a precursor to further global integration.
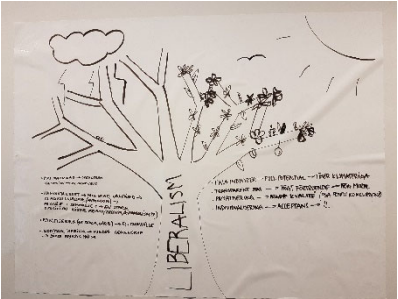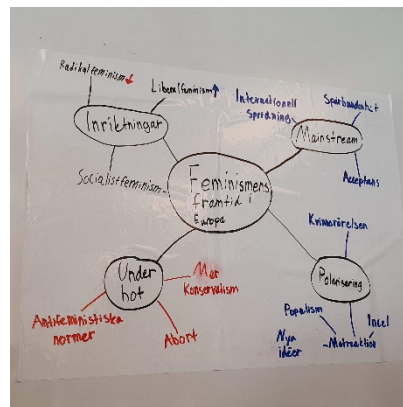

[Figure 2]

The second poster (figure 2) that we have chosen for this chapter is about liberalism. This poster uses a tree to divide dystopia (left) from utopia (right), a mode of representation that we have found is fairly common way of structuring posters. This structure enable the students to express two very different futures and their associated causal chains. On the left-hand side, free-market economics spurs uncontrolled consumption and a worsening climate crisis. Meanwhile, on the right-hand side, free-market economics makes it possible for people to fully develop their potential and thus solve the climate challenge. Similarly, the minimal or nightwatchman state of classic liberalism (Heywood, 2021:117) on the left leads to class conflict, poverty, and discontent whereas, on the right, competition and transparency leads to social trust and higher welfare quality. Finally, greater individualism is envisioned to either can either be seen as leading to worsening mental health due to a loss of community (to the left) or greater tolerance for individual differences (to the right).

[Figure 3]

Moving on, the third poster (figure 3) is about ecologism and one of the most elaborated posters that we have come across with some impressive artwork. Similar to the previous one, it is split by a tree and points to two very different futures for Europe, one of traditional romantic environmentalism that emphasizes restraint and one ecomodernist future that emphasizes decoupling through

technological innovation (Symons & Karlsson, 2015). One interesting feature with this poster is that it focuses on tensions *within* one ideology, in this case ecologism.

[Figure 4]

The fourth and final poster (figure 4) is about feminism. Consisting of a mind-map, one central theme in the poster is polarization and how feminist advances have been met by a fierce populist response. During the presentation, Mark Lilla's work (2016) on political reaction came up and Lilla's argument that the conservative of today is not a dispassionate Burkean figure of old but rather a radical revolutionary who is particularly opposed to feminism and different forms of "wokeism". Along those lines, the poster highlights how the recent anti-feminist backlash, perhaps most visible in relation to abortion rights, threatens a feminist future in Europe while simultaneously acknowledging how feminism is being mainstreamed into European policy documents.

Student feedback

While the Covid pandemic led to a pause for four semesters as campus teaching was disallowed, we have collected about 80 student evaluations (with an average response rate of 40%) from students who have taken part in the gallery-walk seminar as outlined in this chapter (although the exact instructions have differed somewhat between semesters). Reviewing these responses, we find only a few negative remarks and the vast majority of the students being extremely positive (even if the relatively low response-rate means that some caution is warranted when interpreting the results).

Those who do express negative views find the seminar to be "too speculative" and "unfocused". Quite a few students also express a wish for more detailed instructions as to what is meant by "Europe" or "future". While fully understandable, we suggest that there is a distinct pedagogical value in not providing specific spatial and temporal limitations to this exercise but rather letting these limitations become a starting point for the group discussions. After all, uneven geographies, diverging timescales, and contested borders are all fundamental to the question of what is meant by "Europe".

Going through the evaluations, many students write that the gallery-walk seminar gives everyone a chance to think and talk, that it is something "different", "fun" and "educational". Others write that the seminar offers a deeper understanding of the ideologies, that it is less stressful than a traditional literature seminar and that it is more inclusive as it allows more voices to be heard. A common theme in the student evaluations is how the gallery-walk seminar prompts the students to re-evaluate the different ideologies in response to peer and teacher feedback as they recall what they have learnt and gradually deepen their understanding. As such, gallery-walk seminars appear particularly well-suited to make student learning visible and fostering meta-cognitive skills as the

students reflect on the posters that they have created and how differently the groups have interpreted the assignment.

Conclusions

Seeing university teaching as being more about mediating learning than imparting knowledge and approaching learning as a social activity (Kolb, 2015), where the quality of the pedagogical relation defines the impact (Biesta 2021), we have brought together Diana Laurillard's (2002, 2013) "conversational framework" with Miguel Sicart's notion of "playfulness" to design a seminar activity that takes seriously the role of retrieval in consolidating learning (Karpicke & Roediger, 2008), and encourages students to reflect on their learning in a way that makes it visible both to themselves, their peers and us as teachers. As such, the gallery-walk seminar offers an antidote to the increasing instrumentalization of higher education by bringing the immediate joy of learning into the undergraduate classroom, thus meeting the growing need to ensure authenticity in higher education.

Building on knowledge acquired in a series of lectures on core political ideologies where students predominately take on the role of passive listeners, actively read the course materials, and take notes or underline what somebody else has already conceptualised, the first part of the seminar is dedicated to the students' constructive summarising and paraphrasing of the materials (together with their prior understanding) according to what the material means to them (Chi & Whylie, 2014). The gallery-walk activity introduces a degree of uncertainty that demands an engagement that goes beyond summarizing the course readings and activates each and every student in the seminar room as a representative of their own group and, thus, individually responsible for that group's respective vision.

The degree of freedom that results from the limited instructions, together with the quality of the future as essentially open and indeterminate and, thus, authentically free of judgements about "right" and "wrong", encourages genuine engagement in the collaborative learning process and challenge the students to engage with subject matter that they perceive to be located outside of their comfort zones as a means to stretching those comfort zones to encourage learning.

By initiating conversations about both the ideologies as such and their role in shaping European futures in a learning activity that supports higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis, the collaborative form of learning that is encouraged in this seminar allows each student to engage in cyclical communication with their peers to intersect the conceptual and practice levels.

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