Introduction

MARINA DÍAZ SANZ
Universidad de Deusto

LUCÍA FERREIRO PRADO
IE University
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

The adoption of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) flagged major changes in the conception of university education. The change to a student-led model implied an extension in the range of available teaching and learning methods and the growing salience of active learning. Active methodologies encompass skills needed in the labor-market and have been regarded as particularly fit to successfully tackle the challenges that tertiary education faces in the beginning of the 21st century. Research provides conflicting evidence as regards the effectivity of active over traditional learning with respect to knowledge retention (Machemer and Crawford, 2007). By contrast, it is less debatable that active pedagogy significantly increases students' motivation and satisfaction with learning (Hancok, 2002; Katt *et al.*, 2009; Ferreiro Prado, 2020a). This explains the popularity of active learning or mixed methodologies[1].

Doubts about the use of active pedagogy are well reported in the literature and include a wide array of individual, student-based and institutional constraints (Lean *et al.*, 2006: 235). So, even when teachers overcome the difficulties and decide to include active learning methods in their courses, there remain challenges they will have to deal with. First, for active pedagogy to properly achieve its goal, precise activity designs are needed along with the measurement of learning outcomes. Since designing a good activity is not an easy task, instructors must have access to pedagogical materials that provide the necessary know-how to do so properly. Then, the activity must be validated by testing what students have learned by doing it. This is time-consuming (Strachan, 2015; Ferreiro Prado, 2020b), and can be perceived as excessively taxing for the

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1. With "mixed methodologies", we mean a combination of conventional (i.e., teacher-centred) and active (i.e., learner-centred) methodologies. The contributions to this special issue will show that instructors seldom design courses with an exclusive reliance on active methodologies (see also Ferreiro Prado, 2020b). On the contrary, active methodologies tend to be used together with conventional teaching methods. For instance, lecturing on a specific topic is usually employed by instructors before students are asked to get involved in an active learning task such as running a simulation, preparing a debate or doing discourse analysis.

professor in terms of career development if the employing institution has not embraced the Boyer Model of Scholarship (Boyer, 1990), which values the scholarship of teaching and learning in its own right.

This special section on *Active learning in Comparative Politics and (critical) International Relations* pursues two aims. The first one is to investigate the situation concerning the implementation of active learning methods in the Political Science and International Relations (IR) classrooms of Spanish universities. The focus here is on undergraduate pedagogy. Up to now, no research has been conducted on this topic, nor do we have a sense of teacher's motivations when it comes to their instructional choices. Why, for instance, is lecture-centered teaching being replaced by, or used in combination with, other teaching methods (and to what extent is this so)? Is the preference for active or traditional teaching related to career stages? What is the impact of new regulatory frameworks on teaching and learning styles? Do instructors seek better accommodation to the necessities and cognitive styles of 21st century "digital native" students by changing their teaching methods?

The opening article by Ferreiro provides answers to these questions. Based on survey and interview data, the author examines the extension of active methodologies in Political Science and IR classrooms of Spanish universities. The analysis of semi-structured interviews with instructors at different stages in their careers serves the purpose of digging into the reasons why instructors opt for developing an active pedagogy in their courses or prefer to stick to traditional teaching models. Results confirm the increasing adoption of active learning methods by IR and Political Science teachers, and that instructional choices are often made without prior pedagogical expertise. Results also show that instructors do not always conduct proper assessments of students' learning, which is one of the golden rules of active learning.

Second, the special section contributes to the extant literature on active teaching and learning in Political Science and IR. The last decade has witnessed the publication of volumes such as the *Handbook on Teaching and Learning in Political Science and International Relations* by Ishiyama *et al.* (2015) and *Teaching politics beyond the book. Film, Texts and, New Media* by Glover and Tagliarina (2013). These edited books provide the teaching community with a wide-ranging catalogue of works that offer orientation on everything from how to internationalize a curriculum, how to design a course syllabus, how to tackle the teaching of controversial issues, and how to teach politics with non-canonical texts. In Spain, the recent publication of an edited volume entirely devoted to teaching and learning with simulations must be mentioned —*Metodologías activas en las aulas de Ciencia Política y Relaciones Internacionales. Simulaciones de procesos políticos en organizaciones internacionales y nacionales* (Ferreiro, 2020). Top-tier journals such as *Journal of Political Science Education*, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *International Studies Perspectives* or *Politics* also play an important role in the dissemination of scholarship on teaching and learning Political Science and IR. This monographic section hosted by *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* (RECP), thus, joins in these wider efforts.

The pieces collected in this special section have in common a focus on pedagogical and scientific value. By *pedagogical value* we mean that the articles should be of help to those teaching IR and Political Science seeking inspiration for their courses. Accordingly, the articles offer detailed descriptions of real activities conducted in real courses by the different contributors to this section. Authors argue why a particular active learning technique is adopted for a particular teaching end, and the steps taken by students for the fulfilment of intended learning outcomes.

Additionally, this collection of articles has a *scientific value*. By this, we mean that these are research pieces seeking to answer research questions and follow scientific conventions. Rather than being merely descriptive, the contributions to this section conduct different kinds of analyses. Generally, they examine the validity of active pedagogies and elucidate their potential superiority over traditional pedagogies. This concerns student acquisition of knowledge and/or enhancement of competences (objective knowledge acquisition dimension) students' perception about the acquired knowledge and the activities' intended goals (subjective dimension) and satisfaction with the learning process (attitudinal dimension). Offering evidence on the effectiveness of a technique to the fulfillment of certain learning goals requires that data on students' knowledge or level of competence are collected before and after the conduct of the activities —although each contributor to this section does this differently and according to different factors (course content, student population, learning goals, learning method, course assessment, etc.). Authors also gather evidence from metacognition sessions or exercises. Metacognition is related to thinking about the learning process and the particular situations, obstacles or challenges associated with it.

The collection encompasses Ferreiro's state of the art article and five additional research papers, all of them empirically driven. Readers of this special section will notice that only the paper by Cruz-Martínez, Soto and Benito deals with teaching a (typical) Political Science subject, whereas the articles by Díaz, Martini, and Tomé and Alaminos deal with "international issues", thus falling more easily within the International Relations category. Macías' piece stands somewhere in-between these neighboring (and complementary) disciplines. About the IR articles we can say that they have in common a concern for the teaching of critical theories, discourse, and representation. Altogether, the works in this special section offer insights and resources applicable to instructional contexts that are not necessarily identical to the ones described here.

The article by Cruz-Martínez, Soto and Benito tests the effects of game-based learning on knowledge acquisition about political systems. The experiment is run by the authors with Political Science students sitting in the mandatory course Comparative Politics. The article allows conclusions to be drawn about the varying impact on knowledge acquisition of the use of an active teaching-learning strategy (role-play) *versus* a traditional learning strategy (lecture). Each of the authors is a teacher of a group of students. Two groups are experimental, and one is a control group (namely, the group receiving traditional instruction on political systems). Based on statistical analysis of data collected throughout the activity and discourse analysis of debriefing

sessions, the article shows that retention of current and procedural knowledge is higher among the experimental groups than in the control group.

Díaz's article presents an activity that seeks to teach students how to do a postcolonial analysis of an animated drama film about Afghanistan. On a more general level, the activity aims to develop students' analytical and critical thinking skills. The activity builds on the premise that cultural narratives are embedded in all kinds of world-political texts, including films and traditional study texts. Through a thematic and narrative analysis of reflection texts written by the students, the author discusses the effectiveness of the activity for the development of the aforementioned competences and for the theoretical and practical understanding of the postcolonial approach in IR.

Macías' article offers valuable reflections on the use of the Case Method (CM) as a teaching-learning strategy. The piece presents and evaluates a pedagogical work carried out with students in a course on Contemporary Arab Political Thought. The author links a course activity centered on the analysis of the case of the shutdown of the pan-Arab newspaper *al-Ḥayāt* in March 2020 with learning about ideology, (Arab) nationalism, media, and capitalism. Starting from postcolonial theoretical premises, the activity manages to generate a space for critical reflection on concepts that have informed Arab political thought over the last few decades. Other than developing research skills typical of CM, in the case of students with mixed cultural backgrounds, the activity also triggers reflection on their own transcultural identity.

Martini's article presents a critical geopolitical analysis activity. The activity builds on the concept of "geopolitical code" as a central category and sets the analysis of the U.S. geopolitical code as a learning outcome. Students analyze the construction of the enemy "Saddam Hussein's regime" in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the legitimization of the War on Terror through the production of Self/Other relations. Martini's article presents a practical experience of pedagogical work based on the OPAR (Orienting, Presenting, Activity, Review) framework. The evaluation of the process sheds light on how active learning facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and the development of higher-order cognitive skills. Martini's piece also helps to underline the importance of assessing learning at different stages of the learning process.

Finally, Tomé and Alaminos' article investigates the advantages of using popular cultural texts —in this case, graphic novels— to learn about the so-called "Arab Spring". The article starts from the premise that graphic novels situate the analysis of politics at the level of individual narratives, thereby assigning value to lay people's experience of political change. The article presents an activity aimed at analysing short comic strips by Egyptian authors narrating events during the Arab Spring. The activity's learning outcomes include understanding of social movement concepts such as "window of opportunity" or "alliances", and their application to the analysis of Arab Spring graphic representations. Following a collaborative learning strategy, Tomé and Alaminos show that the critical reading of comic strips fosters the emotional connection between students "here" and young protestors from countries like Egypt.

All in all, the scholarship of teaching and learning in Political Science and International Relations is a relevant and increasingly important area in our discipline. It

seems, therefore, appropriate that the *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* provides the scholarship of teaching and learning its share within their journal. As guest editors, we hope that this selection of works will serve as an inspiration to our colleagues and as an invitation to continue to support this line of research.

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