Pedagogical Perestroika in Comparative Political Science

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The increased acceptance of interpretivist methodologies in the years following political science’s Perestroika Movement has significantly expanded the range of viable methodological options, yet little has been written about the relevance of this restructuring for the instructional principles and practices of teachers of comparative politics. I argue that the extension of key principles of interpretivist research, and specifically the adoption of teaching strategies which encourage reflexivity, can enhance undergraduates' learning outcomes. I identify methodological, evaluative, and ethical objections to calls for increased reflexivity, and borrowing from Somers and Gibson's work on narrativity in the social sciences (1994), propose that in each case, the use of narratives as heuristic devices can enhance learning by giving students the opportunity to embed their own experiences within broader sequences of events, thereby familiarizing them with key issues in comparative politics and demonstrating the relevance of the field beyond the classroom.

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Political science began the new millennium by engaging in some scathing self-criticism. In October 2000, a pseudonymous email to the American Political Science Association by a “Mr. Perestroika” admonished members for their rigid adherence to positivist, quantitative, and statistical modes of inquiry, the concomitant marginalization of interpretivist methodologies, constructivist, postmodern and critical theories, and little appreciation for historically and regionally situated analyses. Three years later, Harvard professor Peter Hall argued that a sizable gap had developed between the techniques used by scholars of comparative politics to observe and infer on the one hand, and the basic assumptions they hold about the nature of causal relationships on the other, resulting in a situation where “the ontologies of comparative politics have substantially outrun its methodologies” (Hall, 2003, p. 375). For political scientists, these criticisms mounted a
serious challenge to the scientific and scholarly legitimacy of the discipline; for comparativists in particular, practitioners within a subdiscipline named not for the content under study but for a dedication to systematic, controlled comparison, these problems were especially troubling.

Unlike its Soviet namesake, however, the Perestroika movement in political science did not ultimately result in the collapse of the discipline. Quite the opposite transpired as there soon emerged a large and diverse body of literature extolling the potential virtues of interpretivism and qualitative methods. Yet strikingly absent from this increasing methodological pluralism has been the emergence of an accompanying pedagogical restructuring. For all the books, articles, and conferences devoted to demonstrating what interpretivist, qualitative, and constructivist methodologies can bring to the study of politics, comparatively little effort has been expended on understanding how these transformations impact the instructional principles and practices used by teachers of political science, particularly in undergraduate education. In this sense the gap Hall identified in 2003 is not just about methodology and ontology, but about a broader division between a scholarship of research on the one hand, and a scholarship of teaching and learning on the other (Clarke, 2002, p. 223).

Accordingly, in this paper I argue that the extension of some key principles of the Perestroika movement to political science teaching, and in particular the adoption of instructional strategies which encourage the type of reflexivity or attention to lived experience valued in interpretivist research, can enhance learning experiences and outcomes for undergraduate political science students. I identify three principled objections to calls for increased reflexivity—methodological, evaluative, and ethical—and argue that in each case these challenges can be productively addressed by using narratives as heuristic devices. Narratives, themselves important elements of the ‘literary turn’ in interpretivist political analysis (and well established within neopositivist research techniques), can promote the kind of active learning essential to favourable educational outcomes. This can be accomplished primarily by giving students the opportunity to embed their own experiences within broader sequences of world events, in so doing familiarizing them with key issues in, and approaches to, comparative politics, and demonstrating the relevance of the field beyond the classroom.

Rebellion, Reform, and Retrenchment in North American Political Science

The “raucous rebellion in political science” (Monroe, 2005) that was the Perestroika movement led to a series of major debates about how the discipline approaches the governance of professional associations, peer-reviewed publishing, and arguably most significantly, its methodological standards and practices. One of the manifesto's primary criticisms was that for far too long, neopositivist approaches to inquiry had dominated the discipline and marginalized other approaches to scholarship. Since its emergence as a discrete discipline in the 1950s, political science has been largely driven by methodological considerations rather than the content under study. This position is famously articulated by King, Keohane, and Verba in their classic book Designing Social Inquiry (1994): “The content of ‘science' is primarily the methods and rules, not the
subject matter, since we can use these methods to study virtually anything.”¹ Broadly, the neopositivist paradigm upon which this position is based emphasizes the construction of falsifiable and internally consistent theories, the use of formal, predictive models, the substitution of proper names with variables, and the minimization of both bias and complexity in order to maximize efficiency and reliability.² The role of the researcher in carrying out data collection and analysis is essentially instrumental and therefore replicable by anyone with the appropriate methodological training. By adhering to this approach, research findings are understood to be the objective results of systematic controlled inquiry fundamentally based on the empirical and material world.

The Perestroika movement's call to take other research traditions and epistemological positions seriously challenged the hegemony of the neopositivist approach, and although the scientific method still remains the discipline’s dominant mode of social inquiry, interpretivist methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies have gained considerable traction. To the extent that it is possible to write of a singular interpretivist paradigm, researchers are broadly united insofar as they view social reality as historically situated, socially constructed, and structurally conditioned, and are interested in “the economy of signs and symbols in terms of which humans construct, inhabit and experience their social lives” (Wedeen, 2009, p. 81). As a consequence of viewing research as an intensely human rather than technical endeavor, interpretivists “indwell” in their data (Yanow, 2006, p. 71) by paying close attention to historical and cultural context and the symbolic and rhetorical dimensions of social interaction. In practice, and in contrast to the neopositivist preference for parsimonious statistical generalization and formal modeling, such scholars use a range of methodologies including ethnography, participant observation, and discourse analysis. The role of the researcher, meanwhile, tends to be more explicit both in the process of data collection and in subsequent analysis, with many choosing to directly acknowledge and account for how their presence and background may shape their interpretation of the findings and the knowledge they produce.

The increasing acceptance of interpretivist methodologies notwithstanding, the reach of the Perestroika movement has thus far been limited when it comes to strategies and practices of teaching. Several important texts take stock of the discipline and its various subfields with reference to graduate education (Monroe, 2005; Munck & Snyder, 2007). However, there is little that addresses the unique challenges of teaching political science at the undergraduate level, such as stimulating student interest and introducing complex concepts and theories to students for the first time. This is a striking

¹ Those who are unfamiliar with the methodological preoccupations of political science may be taken aback by this approach, yet the idea that "the unity of all science consists alone in its method, not in its material" (Pearson, 1892, p. 16) has anchored positivist and neopositivist social science for over a century. Simply put, the idea is that whether one is studying voting behaviour, ethnic conflict, social movements, or democratization, adherence to the scientific method's rules of inference will produce valid results. The popularity of *Designing Social Inquiry* indicates the extent to which this approach dominates political science and is assigned in graduate classes on both qualitative and quantitative methods.

² According to Wedeen (2009) “no book in recent years has been as powerful as this one in authorizing experts and disciplining the discipline” (p. 78): it had sold over 20,000 copies in its first seven years of print, had been reprinted six times, and purchased by over 500 libraries.

shortcoming, and one that is unfortunately compounded by the discipline’s general marginalization of pedagogical strategies based on principles of active learning. For example, a recent survey of 491 syllabi of introductory political science courses at American colleges and universities showed that only 14.7% included common active learning techniques such as simulations or structured debates (Archer & Miller, 2011, p. 431). When further disaggregated, a troubling pattern of stratification by subfield emerges: 24.6% of international relations courses utilized active learning techniques, while only 11.1% of introductory comparative politics courses employed such methods (Archer & Miller, 2011, p. 431). Although some may attribute this deficiency to unfamiliarity with different teaching strategies, at least one critic argues that “the discipline of political science has not simply been apathetic about [the question of engaging students], but has actively resisted efforts to build into the discipline serious thought and debate about our role as motivators to students to be engaged in politics” (Keeter, 2002, p. 225).

It would be an overstatement to argue that the discipline’s traditional adherence to the scientific method is singularly responsible for this tendency toward an essentially sclerotic pedagogy in political science, but research shows that the knowledge instructors possess about a given subject tends to significantly condition the pedagogical approaches they use and, consequently, the learning outcomes of their students (Kember & Gow, 1994; Hutchings, 2002, p. 224; Prosser, Martin, Ramsden & Lueckenhansen, 2005). When a subject is taught as a segmented series of discrete topics unrelated to the larger discipline or context, students tend to have difficulty assimilating what they learn into a broader field of knowledge. In contrast, when the subject is taught to the student as part of a larger disciplinary or intellectual context, “students are more likely to be helped into a relationship with the field as a whole and to develop a personal understanding of that whole” (Prosser, Martin & Trigwell, 2007, p. 153). For instructors deeply committed to the principle that the content is the method, and especially those instructors who lack appropriate knowledge about how students learn and/or have a limited range of teaching methods, the link between an adherence to the scientific method and an inflexible pedagogical approach may be particularly enduring (Entwistle & Walker, 2002), even if on the whole social science instructors are “found to think in broader and more integrated ways than science lecturers about both disciplinary knowledge and ways of teaching” (Prosser et al., 2005, p. 56).

What the last half-century of educational research overwhelmingly demonstrates, however, is that students do not learn as much, or as well, as they may be capable of in instructional situations where nontraditional ways of learning and of knowing are proscribed. Like the interpretivists who reject the notion that the only valid form of inference can come from the scientific method, many educational researchers hold that rather than trying to find the “best method” in university teaching, “we should ask which method—or which combination of methods—is best … for which goals, for which students and under which conditions” (Dahllof, 1991, p. 148). In other words, encouraging the higher-order thinking needed to successfully grasp key issues in political science requires instructors to recognize that the proceduralism of the scientific method can neither realistically nor justifiably be expected to attend to the diversity of ways that students make sense of complex phenomena, and that it is prudent to employ an array of appropriate teaching techniques. The incorporation of active learning strategies is one
way to foster the kind of vibrant intellectual engagement that leads to meaningful learning.

Active Learning and Pedagogical Restructuring

The literature on active learning is clear on its substantial benefits for the student. For example, Astin (in Prince, 2004, p. 226) identifies student engagement as one of the most significant predictors of success in post-secondary education. Encouraging students to “do meaningful learning activities [such as cooperative learning, collaborative learning and problem-based learning] and think about what they are doing” (Prince, 2004, p. 223) disrupts patterns of student passivity (Entwistle, 2010, p. 23; Weimer, 2010, p. 83), stimulates motivation based on intrinsic orientations toward the subject rather than extrinsic concerns such as grades (Entwistle, 2010, p. 22), increases the use of long-term memory (Entwistle, 2010, p. 21; Weimer, 2010, p. 83), encourages metacognition (Cowan, 2006, p. 69; Meyer, 2010, p. 200), deepens how students understand the basic foundational values and norms of the discipline (Cowan, 2006, p. 74), promotes interaction between and among students (Cowan, 2006, p. 76), and provides the opportunity for students to make decisions about or resolve situations of uncertainty (Moon, 2004, p. 84). In other words, by enjoining students to become active and engaged participants in their own learning process, they are much more likely to achieve successful educational outcomes.

At the risk of extending the analogy beyond its historical moment, I propose a pedagogical Perestroika based on the extension of general interpretivist methodological principles to matters of teaching. This does not mean that teaching strategies drawn from, or influenced by, the scientific method should be cast aside. Rather, much like the turn to 'mixed methods' research, they should be accompanied by additional pedagogical practices which are shown to assist students’ motivation to learn (in turn facilitating meaningful learning itself) and which expose them to a wider range of practices in political science research. In the same way that there is a basic incommensurability present when the subject of democracy is taught in an authoritarian classroom (Becker & Coutu, 1996), there is a fundamental tension between teaching goals that stress student success on the one hand, and teaching practices which are limited to demonstrably less successful pedagogical approaches on the other. Such restructuring, accompanied by a concomitant commitment to glasnost (openness), is at the core of a genuine pedagogical liberalization in political science and of what I provisionally call an interpretivist pedagogy. In the remainder of this paper, and following Entwistle's (2010) useful reminder that “it is not sufficient for a pedagogical theory simply to explain how people learn; it has also to provide clear indications about how to improve the quality and efficiency of learning” (p. 17), I outline what an interpretivist pedagogy might look like and address some of the foreseeable problems that practitioners may encounter.

Space considerations prevent me from fully detailing here what an interpretivist pedagogy could consist of, but key elements might include flexibility (a willingness and ability to adapt to students’ needs and changing circumstances), a readiness to pay close attention to cultural context (the kind of detail ethnographers seek in thick description), an understanding of social reality as that which can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways (with an attendant sensitivity to the complex relationships between verification,
evaluation and subjectivity), a reflexive epistemology that locates students (and educators) as active participants in knowledge production, and an appreciation for knowledge that develops out of personal experience. To be clear, this is not to imply that such approaches are foreign or inherently opposed to the teaching repertoires of scholars who emphasize the scientific method. The point is simply that as a diverse collection of pedagogical values and practices, these strategies constitute a different style of instruction that has significant promise for teaching in political science. In what follows, I expand upon the last of the elements identified above: encouraging the use of reflexivity and lived experience as legitimate, if necessarily limited, sources of knowledge.

**Reflexivity and Personal Knowledge**

The relationship between active learning and reflexivity, defined in its most basic form as the examination of the assumptions made in the course of research including those made about the role of oneself in a given project, should be self-evident: by drawing from students’ own experiences, reflexivity facilitates a variety of outcomes associated with active learning such as student engagement, critical thinking, and deep understanding. Put simply, “the more deeply or elaborately [sic] processed, the more situated in context, and the more rooted in cultural background, metacognitive, and personal knowledge an event is, the more readily it is understood, learned and remembered” (Hopkins, 1994, p. 17). It is precisely for this reason that researchers emphasize the importance of leaving the office and engaging in fieldwork (Wood, 2007) as the most useful or relevant information often comes not from books but from immersion and similar types of direct, personal engagement. Undergraduates, while generally lacking experience in research-oriented fieldwork, nevertheless bring to the classroom life histories of their own which can have significant relevance to comparative politics.

Even after the Perestroika movement, however, few undergraduate political science students are usually provided with options to engage in sanctioned reflexive practice. Reflexivity is often subordinated to the neopositivist-directed expectation that students must first learn what have traditionally constituted the basic foundations of political science—those bodies of knowledge taken to be neutral, empirical, and objective. Particularly in introductory classes, students are discouraged from reflecting on their own experiences, are told to stick to ‘the facts’ as articulated by professors and contained in assigned reading, and are then evaluated according to their ability to demonstrate mastery of this knowledge in research essays and tests.

The persistent disciplinary resistance to the incorporation of reflexivity in the classroom, despite the clear benefits associated with active learning, can be attributed to at least three major objections. First, the practice of reflexivity challenges some of the central tenets of the scientific method such as generalizability, verification, and parsimony, and in so doing destabilizes the foundational values of the discipline. In this view, permitting students to openly reflect on their own experiences and incorporate them into their formal education invites a type of self-indulgent, solipsistic relativism that does not distinguish between systematically collected, carefully analyzed data on the one hand, and individuals’ subjective, particularistic, and anecdotal accounts on the other. The authority and rigor of not only the scientific method but of orthodox social science in general, in other words, are diminished when subjective, particularistic, and unverifiable
anecdotal data is afforded the same status as research that is situated within preexisting literatures and subject to scholarly review.

Second, if instructors elevate the kinds of knowledge that emerge from personal experience, they must also take the initiative to develop new modes of evaluation that take into account the diverse and potentially contradictory knowledge-claims made by their students. In other words, instructors must develop ways to evaluate student performance even in contexts where portions of content are unverifiable or experiential, and to adjudicate whether personal contributions demonstrate that the student is performing at a level that meets predetermined thresholds of knowledge acquisition. Clearly being reflexive does not in and of itself demonstrate that the student has actually learned anything; instructors therefore need to construct some mechanism to determine whether learning is occurring.

A final objection to the use of reflexivity in the undergraduate classroom is that doing so invites a number of ethical challenges that the instructor must be prepared to confront, including concerns about privacy, coercive disclosure, and the maintenance of professional boundaries. Because the teaching practices in question essentially press students to disclose personal information to others, adequate safeguards must be put in place to ensure that the student, the instructor, and other classmates are not put in inappropriately vulnerable positions. Of particular concern is the need to eliminate the possibility that students may feel compelled to share personal experiences, to identify themselves in ways that they would prefer to avoid, or to use the opportunity to work through personal issues that would better be addressed with a professional outside of a classroom setting. This can be a particularly dangerous risk when reflexivity is part of pedagogical philosophies which understand teaching and learning as radical political projects, sometimes leading to situations where a “knee-jerk equation between publicity and progress” (Diamond, 2011, p. 30) treats reflexivity as an end rather than a means and the very act of disclosure is valorized and accepted as a contribution often regardless of its appropriateness to the context at hand. This can have negative implications not just with respect to the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching, but with respect to legality and professional conduct as well.

These methodological, evaluative, and ethical objections to the use of reflexivity in the classroom should not be taken lightly, but neither should they foreclose the

3 Bleich (1998), for example, argues that at the beginning of a course students should be expected to publicly state their “terms of membership” as part of a “pedagogy of disclosure,” including but not limited to “family, school, ethnic [sic], gender history, one’s vocational and economic reasons for choosing courses, one’s clothing, eating, and traveling styles, one’s aspirations, fantasies, values and plans” (p. 17). Similarly, hooks (1994) expects her students to take the risk of “confessing” personal narratives to their classmates in order to stay registered in her courses, which she views as part of a process of healing and self-actualization that constitutes learning (p. 21). What neither Bleich nor hooks consider in any great detail, however, is that “a classroom context like this places extraordinary confessional pressure on students, since those who abstain from its injunctions to share are operationally defined as resistant freeriders, as malcontents perversely withholding trust and ultimately depriving fellow participants of course ‘subject matter’” (Diamond, 2011, p. 30). Indeed, hooks refers to students who do not engage in this form of confession as “resisting” (p. 9). In this way personal disclosure becomes ethically coercive and part of a moral economy that shames and/or penalizes students who, for whatever reason, do not wish to participate in this mandated vulnerability. The effect, in other words, seems to undermine the ostensibly transformative purpose identified by the instructors.
possibility that it may very well be precisely in the realm of teaching where reflexivity can be most usefully and effectively incorporated into the discipline. The learning process does not usually follow the same steps as the preparation of original research for scholarly review. Learning, as demonstrated above, can take many forms and is often most meaningful when freed from the limitations imposed by disciplinary orthodoxies. As part of an approach to teaching that emphasizes active learning, reflexivity may therefore be more appropriate in the context of learning and teaching than it is for making serious evidence-based claims with the intention of contributing to bodies of peer-reviewed scholarship precisely because of its demonstrated effectiveness. This is not to say that the standards of teaching should be lower than those of research or that the two are entirely separate activities. The point is simply that there are substantially different stakes associated with enrollment in a lower-level or introductory undergraduate comparative politics class than with publishing an article in the American Political Science Review. Recognizing this difference does not cheapen its value or importance, but rather calls attention to the fundamentally different objectives and institutional settings associated with each.

Narrative Matters

How, then, to incorporate reflexivity in the classroom while taking steps to avoid the methodological, evaluative, and ethical problems outlined above? The interpretivist research tradition again offers inspiration and guidance by demonstrating how narratives can be employed as heuristic devices that assist appropriate reflexivity. Narratives, “discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xvi), have long been central components of (neopositivist) political science as both the method of inquiry and the phenomenon under study, well before the interpretivist turn (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 21). Historical institutionalist, rational choice, and constructivist theories of political phenomena all rely on elements of narrative in the assembly of discrete facts and evidence in carefully arranged sequences to explain essential concepts such as development, industrialization, class conflict, and nationalism, by using concepts like path dependence, critical junctures, and punctuated equilibriums (Patterson & Monroe, 1998; Pierson, 2000; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007).

Additionally, the literary turn of some interpretivist research has pushed the use of narratives in a somewhat different direction based on the presupposition that all social science is at its core hermeneutical and that political actions can be “read” as though they are analogous to text (Ball, 1987, p. 103). Narratives’ core function remains the same: they organize, structure, and ultimately make sense of complicated and diverse political phenomena. In Hopkins’ (1994) words, “narrative has to do with the fundamental preoccupations of education—with words, representations, ideas, forms, structures, quantities, qualities, and judgments. It is, among other things, an exercise in critical thinking” (p. xvii). It is this sense-making function of narrative that affords it enormous purchase to interpretivist pedagogy.

Broadly speaking, narratives can assist reflexive educational practices by providing structure for instructors and students alike as they navigate reflexive teaching
and learning. More specifically, and drawing from Somers and Gibson’s work on narrativity in the social sciences (1994), it is possible to identify four features to which instructors and students can continually refer as they engage in reflexive practice (and, crucially, in evaluation and assessment): 1) relationality of parts; 2) causal emplotment, or the location of the student in a causal narrative; 3) temporality, sequence and place; and 4) selective appropriation (p. 59).

First, narratives emphasize the “relationality of parts,” or the interconnectedness of discrete events or phenomena. Instead of taking an atomistic view of political phenomena, narratives draw attention to other events and broader socio-historical processes. The act of constructing a personal narrative, then, may contribute to active learning when it begins with an individual’s experience but is accompanied by attention to the historical, political, and social forces within which both they and the narrative are located. Rather than detailing their experiences in an ahistorical vacuum, narratives encourage students to contextualize them “with reference to their role in the history of the setting or settings in which they belong” (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 6). “Indwelling” in personal experience is thus most usefully complemented when students look outward as well, connecting personal experiences with potentially unfamiliar processes, events, systems, cultures, and histories.

The second feature of narrative identified by Somers and Gibson—“causal emplotment”—reminds students to consider the issues of cause and effect, arguably the two most essential concepts within political science. Isolated events become embedded events when they are inserted into a larger plot, and hypothesized causal pathways can be explored in relation to actual events. It is not chronology that matters in this feature of narrative but the conditions, necessary or sufficient, that facilitate cause and effect and which distinguish narrative from non-theoretical representations of events. While it is unlikely that an individual’s personal reflection can fully illuminate the complex dynamics of cause and effect, or that lower-year undergraduates will have more than a passing familiarity with concepts like necessary and sufficient conditions, this element of narrative has the potential to remind students that causality must be continually taken into account in political science scholarship.

Third, Somers and Gibson emphasize “temporality, sequence and place” (p. 59) in their definition of narrativity. Whereas causal emplotment is primarily concerned with conditions rather than chronology, this temporal dimension calls attention to the crucial variables of timing and process, which in turn provide guideposts for students as they attempt to map out historical or personal experiences. It is by emphasizing these temporalities and sequences within narrative structures that a discrete episode or phenomena becomes historicized, coherent, and interpretable. In the context of reflexivity, students can easily situate their own experiences within or alongside other events as temporal markers. To take one dramatic but not uncommon example, students who immigrate to Canada from conflict zones may chart their experiences alongside critical political junctures such as orders of expulsion that lead to massive forced migration and which in turn may result in international intervention. In this way they can use their own experiences to gain a better understanding of how sequences of political events develop.

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4 I have reversed Somers and Gibson’s third and fourth points for coherence.
Finally, narratives can assist reflexive learning by teaching students to determine which elements of their personal experience should be incorporated or omitted from the narrative they are constructing. This “selective appropriation” (p. 59) not only encourages students to learn how to determine what kinds of data are relevant, but also addresses many of the ethical concerns addressed above as it allows students to choose the extent to which they opt to disclose personal details. Instead of undertaking narrative-based exercises like journaling, where students are expected to keep logs of their reactions about a given subject in relation to their own lives (and which implicitly requires some degree of disclosure or self-revelation to do well in the class), narratives can in fact mediate concerns of privacy by providing multiple opportunities for students to omit, stylize, or include information as they see fit and/or in accordance with guidelines provided by the instructor. In this sense the construction of a particular narrative, personal or otherwise, operates as a selection process akin to a form of editorial control; students may feel free to make appropriate disclosures but can also refrain from doing so, focusing their attentions instead on broader or external narratives that do not require unwanted disclosure.

Together, these four elements of narrativity can act as signposts that guide students and instructors in reflexive learning. When made explicit to students, instructors can evaluate students based on the extent to which they demonstrate the ability to: insert their own experiences within the broader context; consider issues of causality; pay attention to how sequence can condition outcome; and exercise restraint when determining what evidence is relevant to the issue at hand. In this way, narratives become much more than pathways to explanation; they anchor the process of learning itself.

The promise of narrative reflexivity is significant but, as with every other pedagogical approach or process of knowledge production, it is also limited. Narrative safeguards, as it were, cannot in and of themselves guarantee that student reflexivity is done skillfully and in a way that is beneficial to learning outcomes. There is still the very real possibility that students will share in a fashion more appropriate for a clinical or therapeutic environment, interpret the value afforded to personal reflection as the legitimation of solipsistic epistemologies, or neglect to situate their own experiences alongside broader external contexts. Still, as one element of an interpretivist pedagogy that values diversity in teaching strategies and an emphasis on meaningful learning, narrative reflexivity provides the benefits of exposing students to key methodological issues and debates, affords instructors explicit, yet flexible, criteria upon which they can assess student performance, and gives students first-hand experience with adjudicating what evidence, either in the form of personal reflection or the construction of impersonal narratives, is appropriate to a given scholarly question.

**Conclusion: Comparative Political Science and Pedagogy in 2012**

Twenty-five years after Gorbachev's Perestroika, and 12 after the initial email circulated to members of the American Political Science Association that spawned the Perestroika movement in political science, it is clear that the latter has had a much more positive outcome than the former. Unlike post-Soviet Russia, the discipline of comparative politics has weathered its period of restructuring remarkably well, seizing the opportunity to diversify, expand, and recommit to a type of interactive, rigorous scholarly synthesis.
To continue this trajectory, instructors can extend this same spirit of pluralism to matters of teaching and learning. Popularizing an interpretivist pedagogy may function as one of the most promising ways to do so.

References


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