

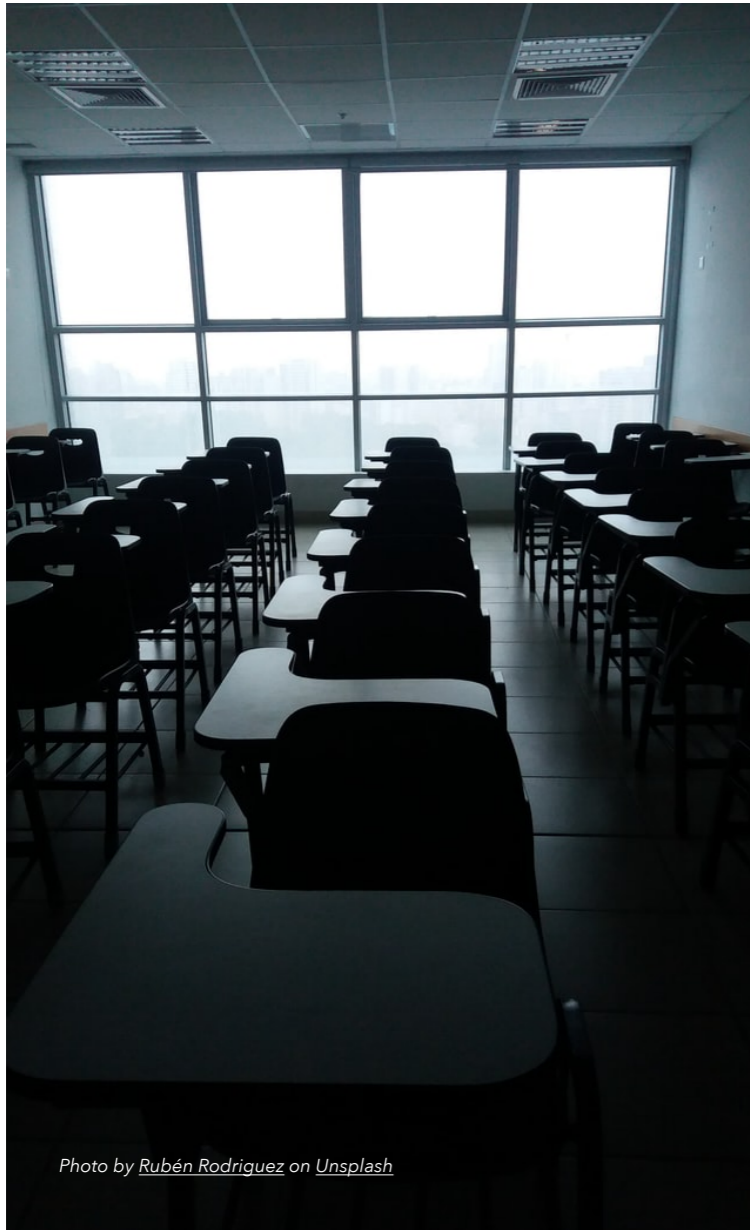
Teaching and Learning in Digital Humanities

MA in Digital Cultures - DH 6006



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Introduction



*Learning is a constant and continuous process
but what about teaching?*

Learning to Teach; Unlearning How Things are Taught

My experience of learning has been lopsided, of course, because I have always been the student. It never seemed that hard and it never stopped me or my peers in learning being able to criticise the poorer teachers and, less often, praise the good teachers. Or at least those we *perceived* as being good, usually based on some metric unrelated to what was being taught in any case. It is a pattern from junior infants through to the university gates.

So what happens when the proverbial shoe is on the other foot? Teaching and learning go together, of course, and *learning to teach* is something that cannot be overlooked. Being a product of a system means you run the risk of perpetuating the system - perhaps one thing to look out for is looking to teach in a certain way because it has always been done this way. I probably have to learn to ask "why?" more often.

The course I have chosen is seen as a MOOC in my mind's eye but if I am honest, I still have doubts that it can be delivered without *somebody* steering the ship - a facilitator, a lecturer, a teacher - but perhaps I am still being taken in by the older preconceptions of education. Part of the process seems to be learning that students can (and perhaps should) make many of these learning discoveries themselves. It is intended to give information on how the parliamentary system in Ireland works but with a practical rather than exhaustive outlook; I want people to understand how it works but not at the cost of overwhelming them with an encyclopaedic syllabus. I hope successful completion of the course would leave a person would no certificate, *per se*, but with a greater and more responsible role to play in civil society.

Choosing a Path for My Students (And Me)

What is Worthy? What is Worthy and can be Taught?

It is hard to disagree with either of the perspectives put forward by Robinson and Seeley Brown as we have probably all lived it through our education; I still remember the left turn that my educational experience took going to university when I was encouraged *not to give the right answer but to think about what an answer might be and to support it*. That said, schools still churn out the packaged goods as referenced by Robinson because, I suppose, what is the alternative in practical terms? How do you educate people on a global industrial scale without being industrial?

It is not satisfactory, of course, but will people not continue to place value on the knowledge being inputted to students in this way? You must learn algebra and you must learn these historical facts, although you may never use them in a practical or useful sense. Is it a case of distinguishing between training and education? Yet even some of the more highly sought third level courses are the professions like medicine and law, which lean to such a training mindset.

Is it the case that the more knowledge is out there and the more ways people have to access it, the more chance there is to break this cycle? That seems to

be what Seeley Brown describes but does this not contribute to the “distractions” mentioned by Robinson? How do we decide what is education and what is just a distraction outside of known and trusted structures like universities or schools?

With all this in mind, I’ve been fascinated by the MOOC structures and how something that may be taught in an educational sandbox can be made available to a vastly increased number of people. I work in the political sphere

and now more than ever I believe people need to truly understand the value of how democracy is practised, so would a MOOC structure to a course on politics and democracy be helpful?

With that in mind I’ll be looking to harness some of the popular concepts behind the MOOC approach, including use of digital tools facilitated by the web and, in particular, the collaborative piece.

“I do love the versatility and, I suppose, the accessibility, of MOOCs”

Following from this, there is also the question of matching this learning to either the learning outcomes or teaching for understanding philosophies. On the face of it, teaching topics like the workings of politics and democracy surely fit better with teaching for understanding, but is it an open and shut case?

Does the Path Make All the Difference?

Learning Outcomes Versus Teaching for Understanding

There has been some discussion about how the learning outcomes approach is, necessarily, more structured because of the very real practicalities of ensuring a measurably equal standard of teaching and learning across department courses, universities and even countries. Teaching for understanding's throughlines may seem less restrictive, but without the more formal or structured elements for teaching, learning and assessment, how can we ensure a standard across different courses and systems?

This leads to the question of assessment. The learning outcomes approach has it written on the tin - they are "clear statements of what the learner is expected to achieve ... and ... how to demonstrate that achievement". TfU's generative questions seek *transformative learning*; the understanding goals may have close relations in the learning outcomes approach but is the assessment piece more difficult with TfU - *how do*



Photo by Justin Luebke on Unsplash

Choosing between learning outcomes and teaching for understanding does not (by any means!) leave everything cut and dried

we know performances of understanding we set are the right assessment? Even if they are the right ones for my course, how can these be compared with others?

The grand hope I have for the course I have in mind is to help people become more "literate" in the functioning of the parliamentary democracy

in this country specifically. Taking a learning outcomes approach, I suppose I could specifically have some outcomes related to the function of the Houses of the Oireachtas, election of public representatives, the work of Dáil and Seanad Éireann, how legislation is passed, the working of Oireachtas committees etc.

DOES THE PATH MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE?

It seems to lend itself to the neat process but there's the nagging feeling that much of this would sit on the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy, relying heavily on comprehension and knowledge - after ten classes or so my students might be able to tell the difference between a bill and a motion but would they be any more "literate" in how democracy works in Ireland and what effect this understanding has in real life?

A TfU approach, with the aim of education offered by Perkins of "active use of knowledge and skill", seems to suit the topic better but the concerns I have about assessment persist. If understanding goals can again relate to the different functions of our parliament, the generative topics seem to be the crucial element in ensuring a student can move from simply comprehending to analysis, synthesis and, possibly most important, evaluation?

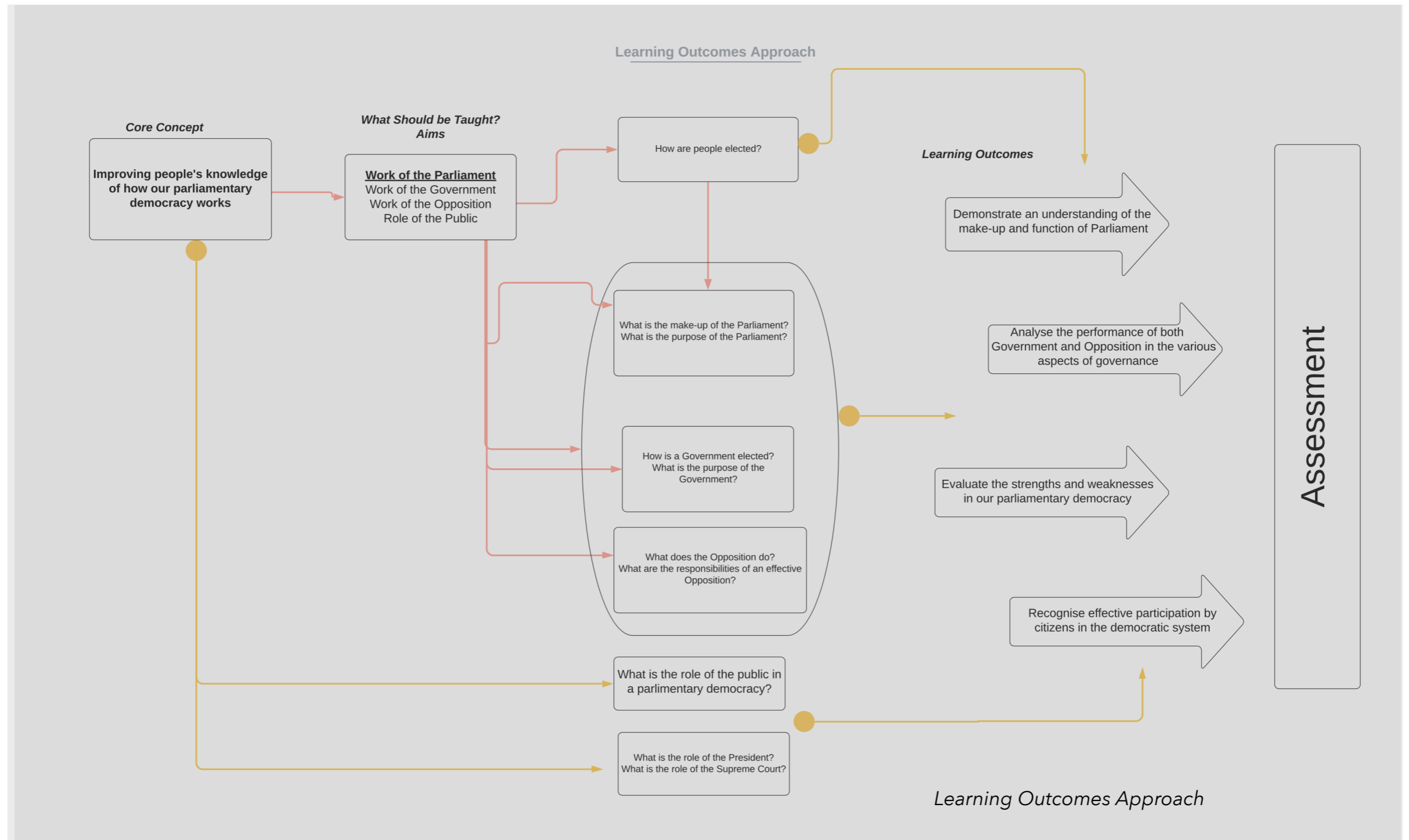
Making a Choice.

I was reasonably confident that what I wanted to teach would be better suited to the learning outcomes approach; it was certainly the case that topics could be neatly categorised for a syllabus and then distilled into learning outcomes with no fuss. But then there is the saying about a plan not surviving contact with the enemy, so although I could certainly put in a session on the d'Hondt method of allocating seats in a sectoral committee I cannot foresee any scenario in which a student's eyes would not glaze over and pray for better days.

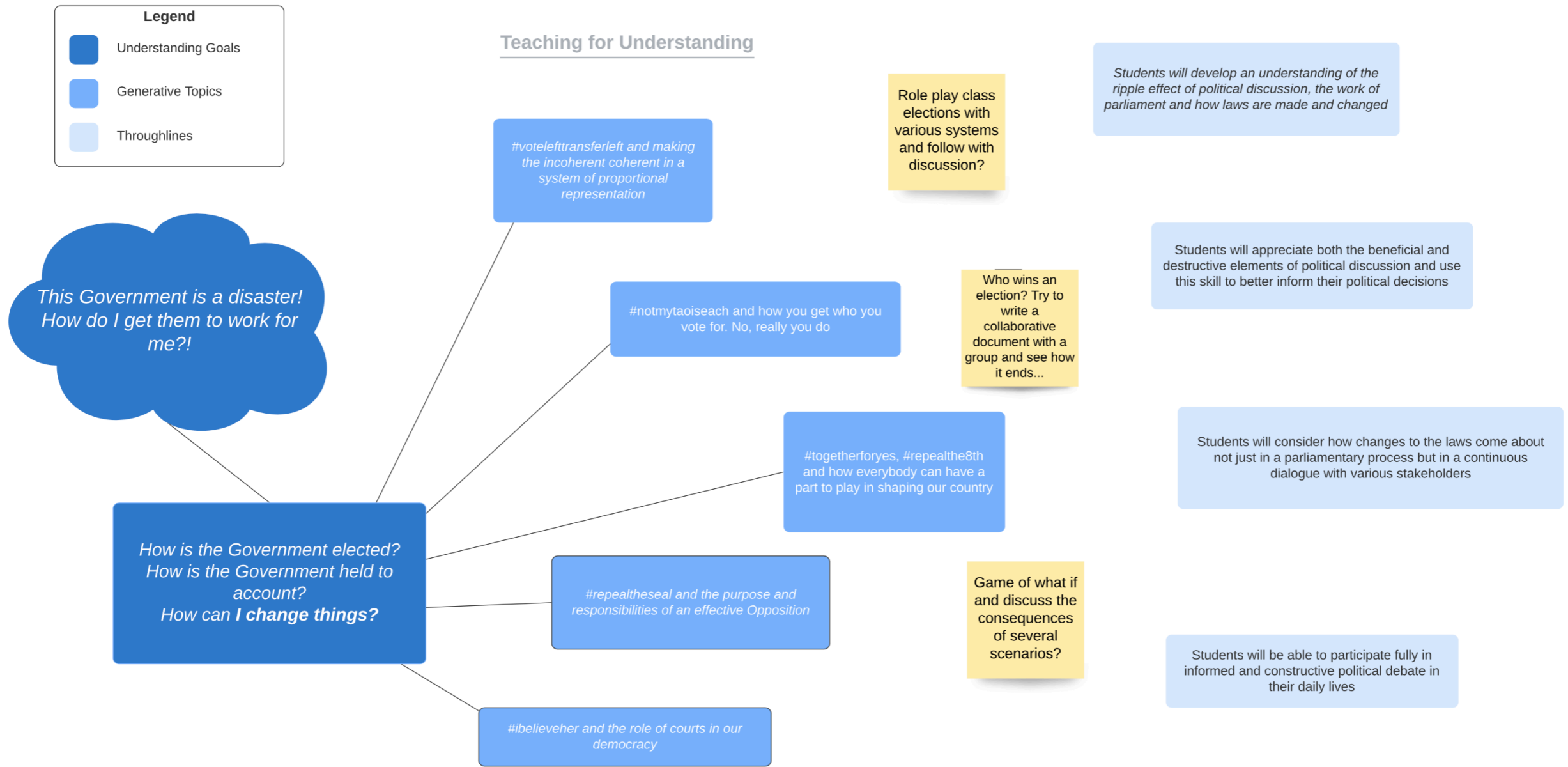
I guess a contrast and compare exercise is required before getting any deeper into the curriculum.

Getting Down to Business, Setting the Curriculum

The two diagrams are taking the same topic from different angles, with idea of a generative topic in the TfU example not being a particular element of a syllabus but rather a possible real-life example of it, with the hope of generating some discussion on merits, demerits etc.

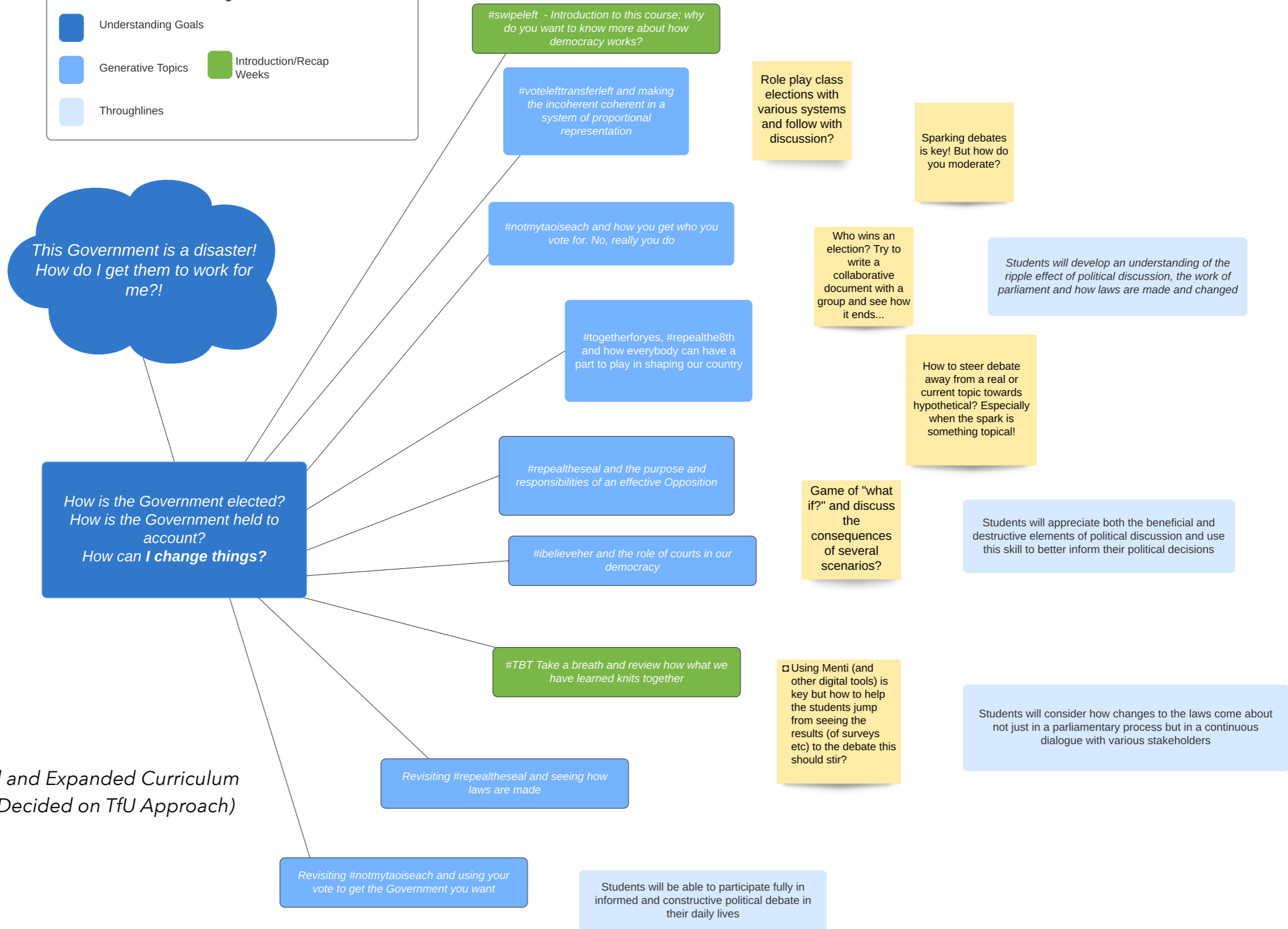
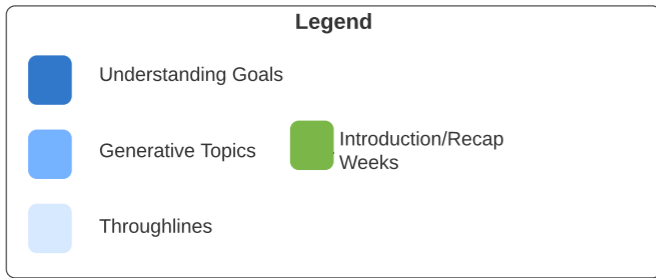


GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS, SETTING THE CURRICULUM



Teaching for Understanding

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS, SETTING THE CURRICULUM



Updated and Expanded Curriculum
(Having Decided on TfU Approach)

Building Blocks



Photo by Jez Timms on Unsplash

Getting the spark right

Leveraging Communities of Practice and E-tivities

The Gilly Salmon model works quite well with the TfU approach I've worked on here and it even fits sort of neatly into the storyboard idea.

Her concept of "scaffolding" is the nub, especially when it comes to access and motivation and the online socialisation elements. In my approach, I thought that using some relatively well-known hashtags would make the modules accessible (well, certainly more accessible than "This is how proportional representation works") and would, importantly, serve to motivate people because they should all be something on which it is easy to have an opinion, at least until later weeks, when I hope people can use the learning from initial weeks as "building blocks" to form more intricate learning opportunities.

Mentimeter is a brilliant tool for the likes of the online socialisation element when used correctly. I have used it before and there is definitely lots of potential there. First, it allows for a true sense of immediate interaction, even in remote working and teaching, and because it reflects the thoughts and opinions of a class in real time (or in as much as that is possible), it means the information exchange and knowledge construction stages should not have to be artificially constructed by moderator intervention. Going back to the access and motivation elements, short and topical polling like I've included should in theory add some gamification elements to this, and get people interested in how their opinion is viewed, as well as the opinion of others. The theory elements of the sessions, should, with any luck, fit neatly into the discussions that arise from the polls. If they don't, it should be relatively easy to weave in real world examples of the theory using the same hashtags that were used to motivate people at the beginning.

The following pages include a course outline and three sessions in some detail from the curriculum.

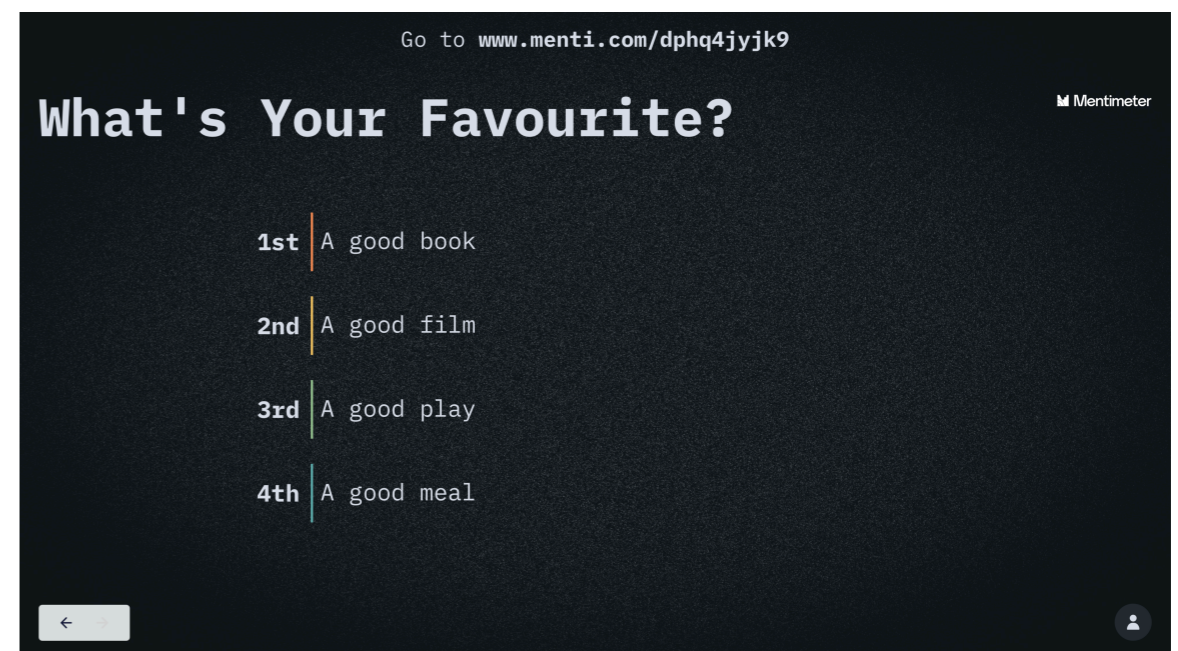
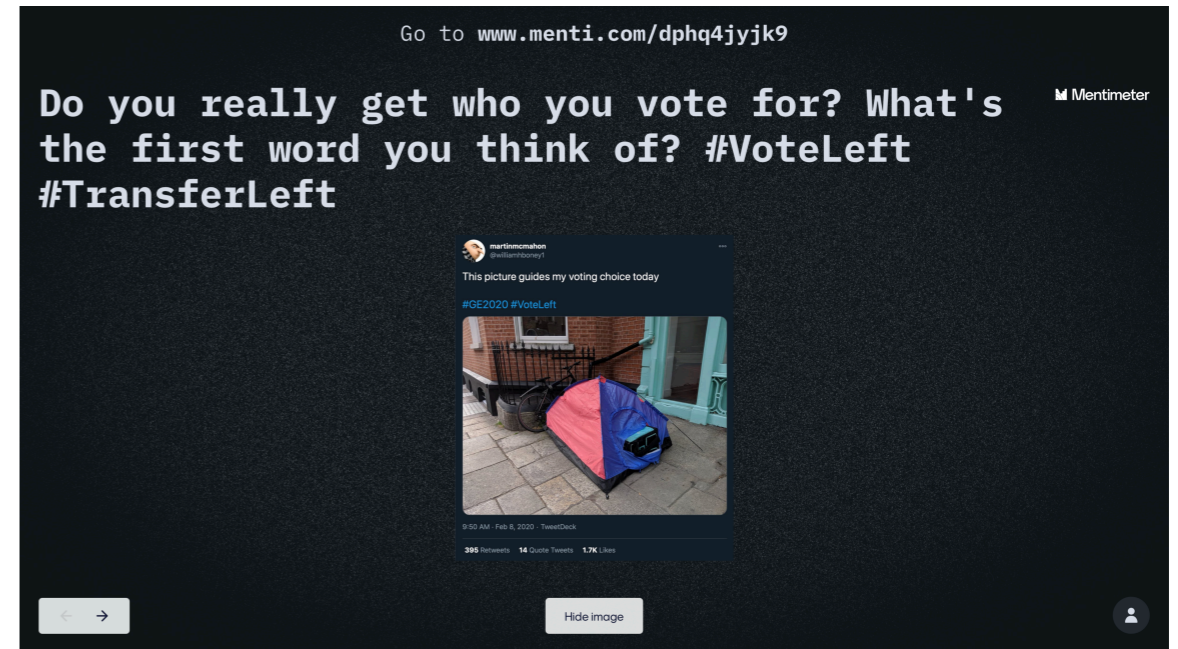
Proposed Course Outline

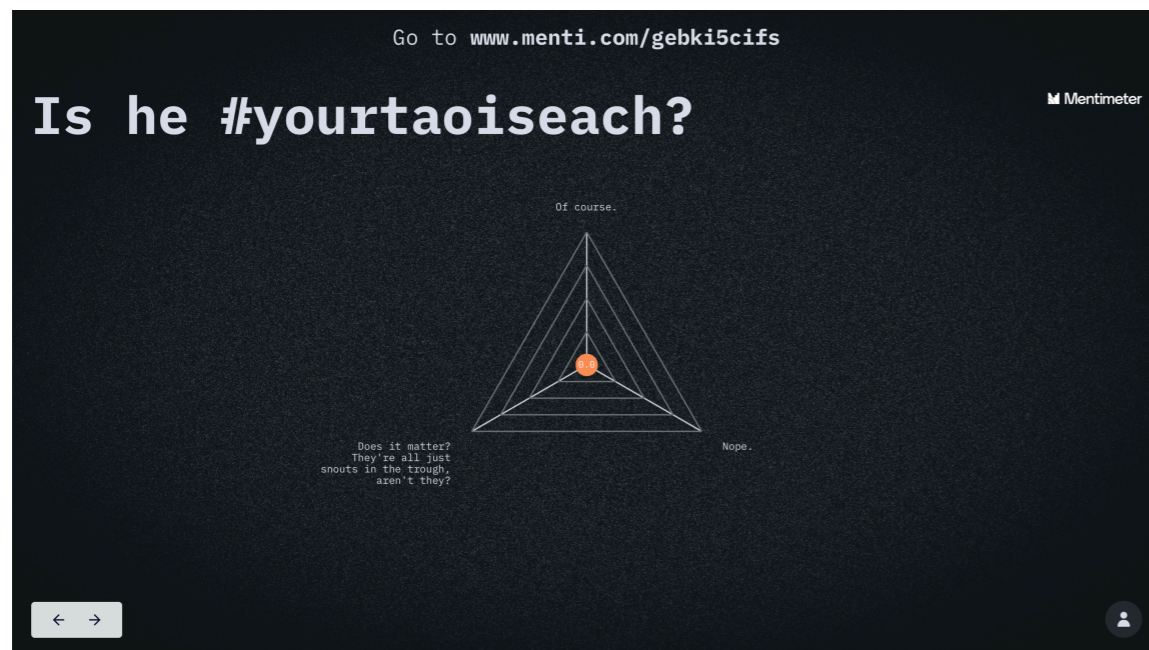
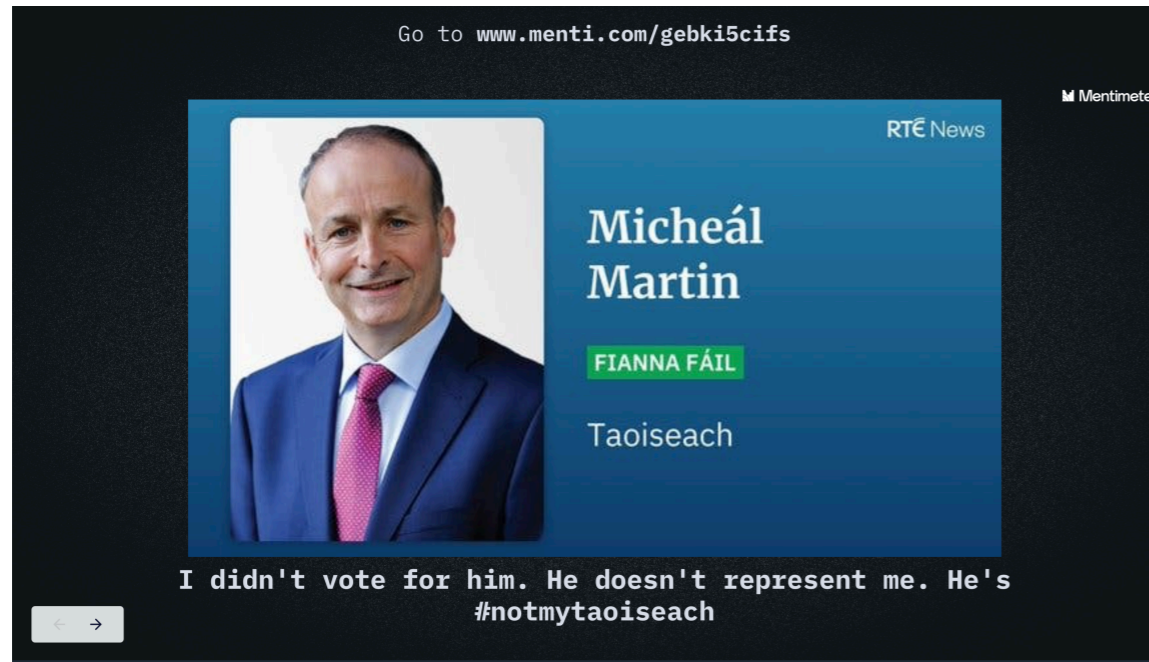
Week	Generative Topics	Key Learning	Readings/Activities/Notes
1	#swipeleft - Introduction to this course; why do you want to know more about how democracy works?	Introductions and setting of learning goals	Assess UDL requirements and adjust if necessary
2	#votelefttransferleft and making the incoherent coherent in a system of proportional representation	How (Irish) parliamentary democracy works using a system of proportional representation	See detailed plan
3	#notmytaoiseach and how you get who you vote for.	How a government is formed by public representatives elected in the system outlined in week 2	See detailed plan
4	#repealtheseal and the purpose and responsibilities of an effective Opposition	The role of an Opposition in the parliamentary system resulting from the elections as detailed in week 2 and after a government has been formed as detailed in week 3	See detailed plan
5	#togetherforyes, #repealthe8th and how everybody can have a part to play in shaping our country	The part played by the public in the parliamentary democracy system (taking into account dynamics of government and opposition as detailed in weeks 3 and 4)	Assess success of using Mentis (or other digital tools. Readings should be accessible and widely available - newspaper articles and reports. Educational section of the Oireachtas as a useful and accessible tool. Assess possibility of using curated social media threads as an example of how debate can be skewed.
6	#ibelieveher and the role of courts in our democracy	The role played by the courts (also taking into account the role played by the President and others outside Parliament)	Assess possibility of using curated social media threads as an example of how debate can be skewed.
7	#TBT Take a breath and review how what we have learned knits together	Review of what has been learned and bringing discussion to overall analysis of how parliamentary democracy works	Formative Assessment and assess whether tools have been successful. Seek feedback on what has worked.
8	Revisiting #repealtheseal and seeing how laws are made	The specific process of making laws and discussion of how legislative change is achieved versus how people may want it achieved.	Opportunity to try to achieve threshold learning.
9	Revisiting #notmytaoiseach and using your vote to get the Government you want	The daily work of parliament, including keeping government to account through parliamentary questions, Private Members' business, the raising of national and local issues. What changes (and does not change) after elections	Opportunity to try to achieve threshold learning.
10	#howitstarted and #howitsgoing - What have we learned and putting it into action	Review of course and questions and answers session	Assessment (reflective, discussion-based)

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Week 2 of Syllabus (After Introductory Session) - Two-page Menti and E-tivities description

Numbering and pacing & sequencing	1
Title	#VoteLeft and #TransferLeft and Making the Incoherent Coherent in a System of Proportional Representation
Purpose	Do you truly know the effect of your vote in an election? This exercise demonstrates the power and versatility of proportional representation
Brief summary of overall task	There are two parts to this activity. The first is an interactive brainstorming session to determine some of the reasons people vote the way they do. The second is an interactive example of the way proportional representation works, how it might differ from other systems and the reasons we use the system in Ireland.
Spark	Two interactive “polls” using mentimeter.com. The first will spontaneously generate a word cloud of ideas associated with reasons for voting. The second is an interactive worked example of “voting” for something with proportional representation.
1st Individual contribution	Respond to the two individual polls at https://www.menti.com/dphq4jyjk9
Interaction begins	Respond to the individual polls, preferably in a group setting (online discussion board) where discussion can take place on the results as they come in but this will also work if people work at their own pace.
E-Moderator Interventions	Begin discussion of what voting means to a person with display of the first slide and use word cloud to speak to some of the main reasons a person votes for a candidate. Expand theoretical discussion by asking if these reasons are reflected in the candidates that end up being elected. Weave the effect of hashtags in people’s behaviour in the 2020 election into practical examples of effects
Schedule & time	The first poll and discussion leads to the second and could be spread over three to four days, leaving a week or so for full discussion
Next	#notmytaoiseach and how you get who you vote for





Week 3 of Syllabus - Two-page Menti and E-tivities description

Numbering and pacing & sequencing 2

Title #notmytaoiseach and how you get who you vote for

Purpose The guy you voted for didn't get elected. What's the point of paying attention to the guy who did?

Brief summary of overall task The first part of the activity is an interactive poll as to whether people believe they have buy-in if the current government does not reflect their views. The second part of the activity is a practical interactive example of a class election and the effects of such elections on a micro scale.

Spark Again, two interactive "polls" using mentimeter.com. The first will spontaneously indicate whether people feel they have buy-in to the democratic process if the current government does not reflect their views (following on from the discussion in the first week). The second is an interactive worked example of "voting" for a class representative.

1st Individual contribution Respond to the two individual polls at <https://www.menti.com/gebki5cifs>

Interaction begins Respond to the individual polls, preferably in a group setting (online discussion board) where discussion can take place on the results as they come in but this will also work if people work at their own pace.

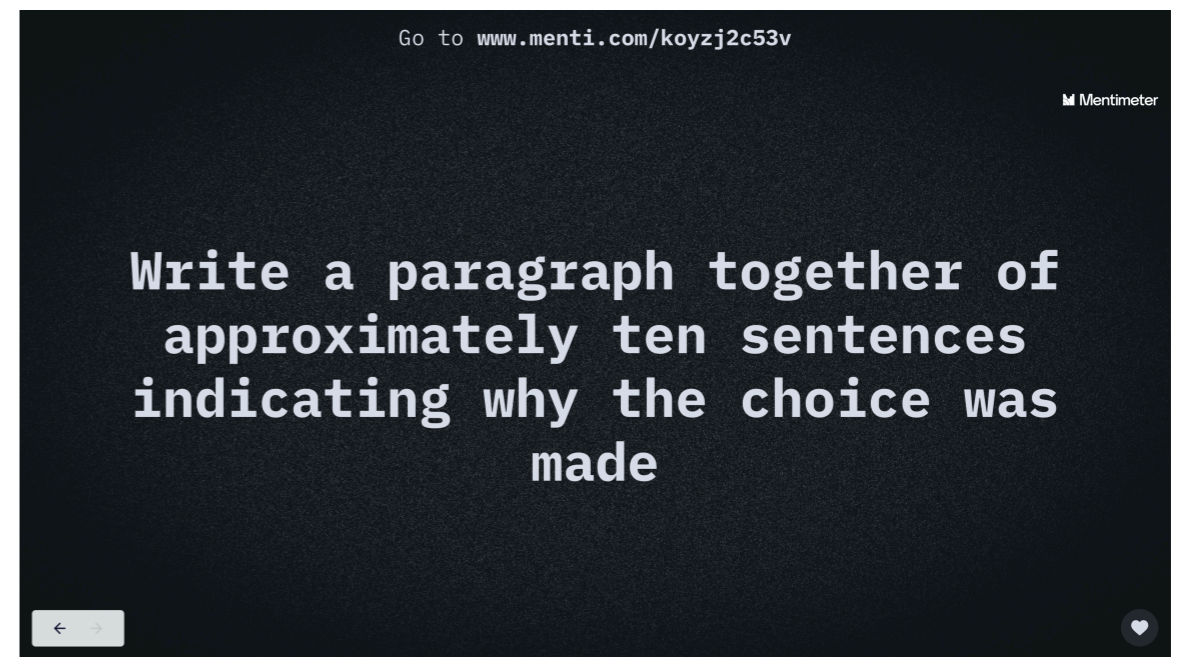
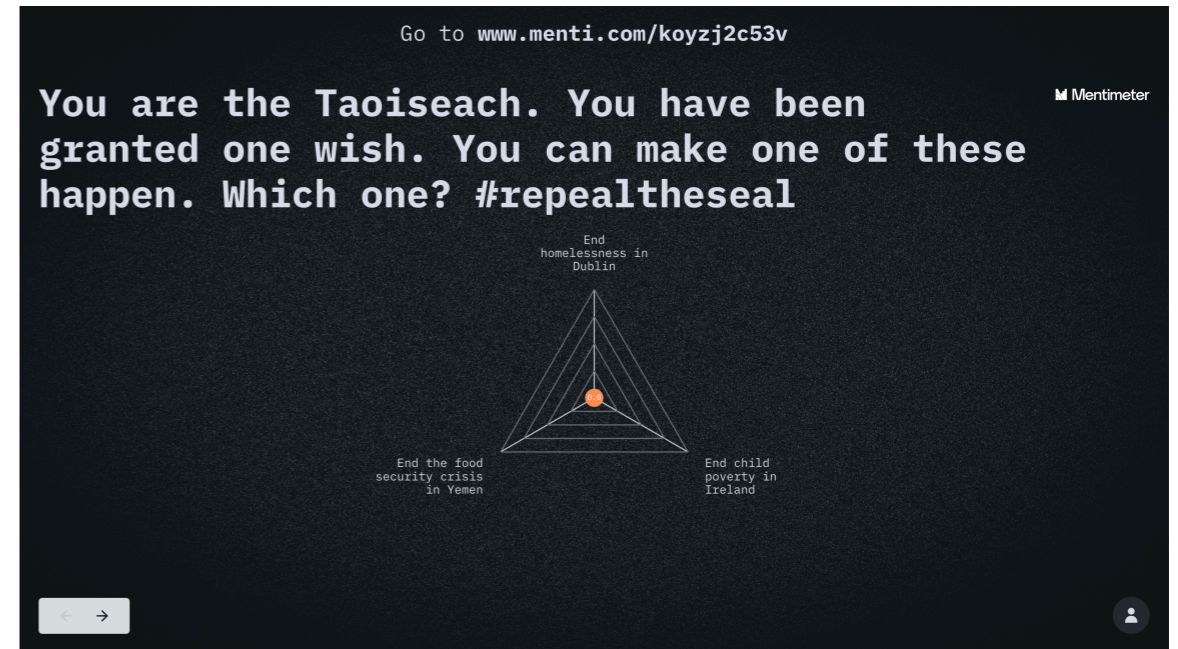
E-Moderator Interventions Begin discussion of whether a person can feel truly involved if those in power do not reflect their personal views. Ask participants to advocate from an opposing viewpoint. With the second activity, ask if the previous opinions persist after the results of this (micro) election in which there can only be one winner to speak for the class and tease out concerns. Weave in the hashtag #notmytaoiseach and introduce views on why the hashtag trends, and whether these are valid.

Schedule & time The first poll and discussion leads to the second and could be spread over three to four days, leaving a week or so for full discussion

Next #repealtheseal and the purpose of an effective Opposition

Week 4 of Syllabus - Two-page Menti and e-tivities description

Numbering and pacing & sequencing	3
Title	#repealtheseal and the purpose of an effective Opposition
Purpose	What does the Opposition in a parliamentary democracy do? Is it just about criticising the Government?
Brief summary of overall task	The first part of the activity is an interactive poll designed to illustrate how difficult it can be to come to a consensus. The second part of the activity is a short collaborative activity designed to illustrate the practical difficulties involved.
Spark	Again, two interactive “polls” using mentimeter.com. The first is a spontaneous poll with three choices. The second element seeks to build on presumed divisions in the first poll and try to evince people’s reasons for voting in the way they did.
1st Individual contribution	Respond to the two individual polls at https://www.menti.com/koyzj2c53v
Interaction begins	Respond to the individual polls, preferably in a group setting (online discussion board) where discussion can take place on the results as they come in but this will also work if people work at their own pace. The second element, a collaborative document, may require ongoing work.
E-Moderator Interventions	Begin discussion as to how a difficult decision can be made within a group and the consequences of “not” making a decision. Start the conversation on how a group collaboration can be achieved and discuss practical examples. Weave in the hashtag #repealtheseal as an example of a united political argument.
Schedule & time	The first poll and discussion leads to the second and could be spread over three to four days, leaving a week or so for full discussion
Next	#believeher and the role of courts in our democracy



Thresholds

Getting It

The concept of threshold seems to be about seeing your learning as more than the sum of its parts. Easier in some forums or learning environments than others?

Interestingly (at least for me!), for the sessions of the course I have fleshed out a bit, I have deliberately stayed away from the overly complicated or technical elements (anybody want to spend some time deconstructing the d'Hondt mechanism? Anybody? Just me?) with the idea of trying to help people see the wood for the trees. If the component "core" concepts are either too dense or even presented as such, what hope for a "transformative" concept? Again, probably easier in some forums than others. It is not as if you can skip over or dilute core concepts in rocket science; brain surgery, maybe, but not rocket science.

To that end, the Meyer/Land piece seems to dovetail nicely with a course that has somewhat general learning outcomes or throughlines such as systems of elections, the role of the Government etc. They can be as complicated as you like but if simpler works and helps get to the "transformative", "irreversible" and "integrative" qualities of a threshold concept, it is surely beneficial to keep the concepts relatively simple? After all, whatever about the importance of the transformative and irreversible qualities, the integrative piece - where in this case the various "bits" of a democratic parliamentary system could be seen as

interrelated and interdependent, each causing a butterfly effect in their own way, is actually one of the primary goals I would like to achieve.

So an example. Take the session on how people get elected; if the course teaches that people are not just elected according to how many first-preference votes they get, and that a vote may be distributed more than once as part of a surplus, for example, students may see that voting may not necessarily be about voting for a single person (or party) and that the PR system can affect vote dynamics throughout a ballot (this could tie into the #voteleft and #transferleft hashtags). This in turn could lead to an opportunity for developing threshold concepts on Government and Opposition (it is not just a matter of "voting out one crowd" and "voting out another", and the reasons for same).

It is a difficult idea to wrangle but there's definitely something there to make the learning greater than the sum of its parts. Glancing at Dilly Fung, the concept is that learning is not confined to the classroom, which could dovetail nicely with the topic, because, again, the idea is for the learning to not just "exist" but be put to use outside the classroom. Perhaps it does not have the same connection with research, at least in its academic sense, but the concept is a good one. For this reason I have dedicated some of the later classes in the syllabus to "revisiting" concepts in some ways, hoping this will help students "cross the threshold".

Assessments and Rubrics

Who (or What) Assesses the Assessors?

There is a difficulty in getting a sweet spot between assessment on the individual level versus a baseline group comprehension in my case, and this is probably just becoming clear when looking at assessments. This is not a problem *per se* but if this is more an educational type of course (or even a *life skill*) rather than specific training, there is not much point in throwing the baby out with the bath water. At the same time, some level of assessment would be at least beneficial moving from one session to the next - the class sessions would work best as building blocks, although they could work as individual educational or information sessions at worst.

Andrade and Valtcheva stress the importance of formative assessment in self-assessment; the assessments would work best applied in each

Possible CATS:

- Misconception/Preconception Check - useful for setting a baseline for participant knowledge?
- Invented dialogues (or maybe not so invented - see Mentis)
- Class Modelling
- Classroom opinion polls - these are already used in a couple of my Mentis
- Everyday ethical dilemma - hey ditto
- Focused autobiographical sketches - this could be useful with the appropriate corresponding rubrics
- Punctuated lectures might work but if the idea is to generate some guided discussion, would this disrupt a flow and lead to sidetracked discussions?

session (or perhaps even twice a session if the topic is unwieldy). No batches of 100 MCQs then. They also indicate that students' attitude towards self-assessment become more positive as they gain experience - start slowly I guess but perhaps a more formal formative assessment would be beneficial after covering the core concepts.

Central to this is "flipping" the classroom - taken from Carnegie Mellon, after first exposure through the Mentis "all or a significant portion of the time is used for practice, application exercises, discussion-based activities, team-based learning, or other active learning techniques. Some preliminary assessment, such as an online quiz or brief assignment, may be used to gauge student understanding and tailor instructional plans prior to class.

Again, the Carnegie Mellon rubric for assessing student participation would work here with some customisation. It is outlined on the following page.

Rubric for Assessing Student Participation

Leveraging Carnegie Mellon

	Exemplary (90%- 100%)	Proficient (80%-90%)	Developing (70%-80%)	Unacceptable (>70%)
Frequency of participation in class	Student initiates contributions more than once in each recitation.	Student initiates contribution once in each recitation.	Student initiates contribution at least in half of the recitations	Student does not initiate contribution & needs instructor to solicit input.
Quality of comments	Comments always insightful & constructive; uses appropriate terminology. Comments balanced between general impressions, opinions & specific, thoughtful criticisms or contributions.	Comments mostly insightful & constructive; mostly uses appropriate terminology. Occasionally comments are too general or not relevant to the discussion.	Comments are sometimes constructive, with occasional signs of insight. Student does not use appropriate terminology; comments not always relevant to the discussion.	Comments are uninformative, lacking in appropriate terminology. Heavy reliance on opinion & personal taste, e.g., "I love it", "I hate it", "It's bad" etc.
Listening Skills	Student listens attentively when others present materials, perspectives, as indicated by comments that build on others' remarks, i.e., student hears what others say & contributes to the dialogue.	Student is mostly attentive when others present ideas, materials, as indicated by comments that reflect & build on others' remarks. Occasionally needs encouragement or reminder from T.A of focus of comment.	Student is often inattentive and needs reminder of focus of class. Occasionally makes disruptive comments while others are speaking.	Does not listen to others; regularly talks while others speak or does not pay attention while others speak; detracts from discussion; sleeps, etc.

UDL and Divergent Thinking Considerations

Getting Creative?

This course is somewhat unusual in that it deals with matters that people can influence without any training or education. People can vote (or not) and the only thing they need to figure out is how to vote correctly for that vote to be counted.

So there's the potential problem asking people to think again about something they may already see as "learned". In a way, the course addresses how this could be seen as a problem - people may be tempted to see a government (regardless of its make-up) as being a problem and the only logical argument is to "vote them out". So it could really be a case of getting some students to "unlearn" what has already been "learned".

UDL Considerations:

- Using Menti should allow for UDL considerations to be met at least for the discussion prompts. Might need to have descriptions and to investigate appropriate slide design
- I had envisaged discussions happening mainly online but I may need to consider people's comfort levels with technology and also with interacting in a digital forum
- A digital platform used for this would need to be accessible for everybody - need to investigate which platform is most appropriate and will tick all UDL and other accessibility concerns

I think the Menti prompts do this quite well, as they look to turn what may well be a popular opinion or argument on its head and, more important, try to get people to apply critical reasoning to this (whether they might want to or not!).

This feeds nicely into inquiry-based feedback (and trying to dissuade its value-based counterpart). Politics is often personalised and reduced to "you versus them" so encouraging students to engage in inquiry-based learning is as valuable a step in the course as learning the different nuances of parliamentary democracy.

It is no coincidence that divergent learning seems to come easier to younger children - they are not set in their ways or their opinions and are more open to different ways of doing the same task. The discussion prompts in the Menti slides are, I hope, a useful tool in encouraging students to take on such thinking for their benefit.

Reassessing the Path for My Students (And Me)

Finding the Building Blocks. Getting past Roadblocks

The idea of the course is simple enough. Aimed at a broad spectrum of people rather than a specific cohort, and with the aspiration of being a MOOC, it is about relaying knowledge about the working of Ireland's parliamentary democracy, including how public representatives are elected, the function of the government and opposition, how laws are debated and passed and the responsibilities of courts, the president and the public in this dynamic process.

On the face of it, the course seems suited to an approach of teaching for understanding. The contents and lessons are not set in stone as a topic like this should probably be focused more on the throughlines. of which there are relatively few but which are critical to the success of the course. There is still a nagging feeling that setting learning outcomes would be easier for the "check the box" side of my mind and I have to keep reminding myself that this is *not about specific training* but improving a life skill in a way. Throughlines, by definition, are more suitable and this should also dovetail nicely with the two related elements of threshold and divergent learning; achievement of either or both would be a very big bonus in this course.

A Bad Workman...

I have set the curriculum but it is possible to be flexible with the contents; a sweet spot for the length would probably be the six to ten "lessons" in this course outline. A typical MOOC might run for two weeks or so, with between four and eight hours of work per week and this would fit very loosely into that metric, however..

"The course content has been designed to appeal to a large cross-section of people, which could also be an Achilles' heel."

The course content has been designed to appeal to a large cross-section of people, which could also be an Achilles' heel. The course will function best if a community is fostered; the learning should be collective rather than individualist in this respect. However, this means methods of fostering such community dynamics should be included and, on review, these are lacking, at least to a degree.

My showcase tool is digital and interactive - the whole point of Mentimeter is that it is not a stationary slide but something that is dynamic and which responds to input, hopefully from the students themselves. However, I need to remember that whereas Menti (or tools that operate with

a similar dynamic, including Padlet) can indeed prompt debate and provide a spark, it is not a given that a collective or collaborative spirit will magically

Reassessing the Path for My Students (And Me)

follow when they are used. Indeed, in considering the UDL elements that should be included, I should probably have considered whether all people would be comfortable in using these tools in the first place. Nonetheless, I am reasonably happy that with the three lesson examples, there is a reasonable learning curve built in - initially the student is asked to merely respond to a prompt with a rationale whereas the later lesson leans more to responding to the prompt with a rationale and performing a critical analysis of that response *through group interaction*.

The problem I foresee is this group interaction piece. Menti is a digital tool and I foresee that if the course is completely online (as a MOOC, by definition), digital tools will be used for the online collaboration and discussion piece as well. I had designed the course with the assumption that a community of practice would naturally evolve but, of course, this is not a given.

Discussion may take place either on a VLE (perhaps expensive and difficult to administer, and access through usernames and passwords defeats the "massive" element) or a specific MOOC platform (perhaps expensive) and this may help create "sandboxed" environments that could be overseen by an instructor or teacher, so it may at least be possible to help people or "nudge" them in a certain direction. If the expense of these platforms cannot be met, it may still be possible to use the likes of Slack to help create some form of "community" comprising students of the course.

But creating a collaborative community is not a given even in such circumstances (leaving aside budget constraints). With this in mind, it may be useful to consider building in another review week before week 7 (#TBT) or even build in another lesson week to focus on communities of practice. I had resisted this idea initially because it did not necessarily fit into the overall focus on parliamentary democracy in Ireland but, on reflection, it may well be a very natural fit in considering how work is achieved in parliament. To that end, it may be beneficial to either reorganise the course outline, either by extending with one or two lessons devoted to community of practice or by consolidating other lessons to fit in a communities of practice piece *relatively early* in the course, perhaps after week 4 in the outline.

On the course outline, I have labelled each lesson as taking place in Week 1 etc. and this presents a conundrum in itself. On the one hand the syllabus can contain relatively complex matters and, as I have outlined, the success of the course itself is somewhat dependent on a community of practice evolving among students as the quality of collaborative work and discussion will affect the quality of learning. My thinking was that if people have longer to take in teaching, the quality of learning would improve but, on reflection, I am not entirely convinced of this view. I have seen some MOOCs run over the course of two weeks with similar content load. In a perfect world, the students could take this course at their own pace but as I said, the group dynamic has an effect, so it is another factor that may have to be reconsidered carefully.

Reassessing the Path for My Students (And Me)

Understanding Student Understanding

I see the divergent and threshold learning concepts as being vital but this may well be a gamble. There is no guarantee students will respond well to prompts for divergent thinking and yet prompts (including the Mentis, for example) will have a strong foundation on such concepts. Would it be prudent to hedge my bets and have a fall-back method that might be less “radical”, or at least ask less of potential students?

The question not be an “either-or” scenario but my instinct is to start by challenging students and then perhaps regroup and rethink if necessary. The “formative assessment” process is indicated for week 7, which may be too late to be of use in this respect. It may be prudent to build in an even less formal assessment after between two and four lessons to gauge how pupils are responding to the course methodology.

UDL considerations also need to be expanded. At its core, UDL looks to provide an *appropriate* syllabus for each course participant but in a way this can only be achieved once student requirements are assessed, and this may only be possible once a course has begun. Therefore it would be prudent to build in UDL assessment

and even adjustment while a course is running. It may be a good idea to build in a “responsive” process of course management, at least for UDL purposes.

Failing. Failing Better

The subject matter for the course is sound and I’ve concluded that the teaching for understanding approach is the best fit. In some ways, the potential pitfalls for this course are the “unknown knowns and unknowns” in

that they mainly relate to the requirements of the students and how the students themselves will respond to teaching methods. The challenge for this course will be turning these “unknown” factors into “known” factors efficiently and without disruption to the course content itself.

The most important element in this, of course, is me as the course co-ordinator. In the introduction I spoke of having opinions on teaching without walking in a teacher’s shoes. I still need to have an opinion on teaching, even as a teacher, and to be able to self-evaluate both the methods, philosophies and teaching tools that I employ. I should remember to do this by reflecting on my students’

experiences and, yes, even their opinions. Only by rethinking and re-evaluating in such ways will I continue to learn how to teach.

“My instinct is to start by challenging students and then perhaps regroup and rethink if necessary.”