The Pedagogy of Power:
Learning for democracy
Titus Alexander

Abstract
This paper argues that the most powerful in society get a great deal of training and support for practical politics while those with least power have almost none. As a result large sections of society are unable to take part in politics, many problems remain unsolved and governments make costly mistakes. Participation in politics should be recognised as a public good and supported through education for practical politics (EPP), particularly for people with least power. It includes a brief description of nine aspects of power and outlines a curriculum for practical politics as a discipline. It argues that EPP should be taught at all levels of education, particularly adult and community education, and makes the case for universities to take a lead on the grounds of academic freedom, EPP’s contribution to the research excellence impact assessment (in the UK) and universities’ influence over the education system. The final section briefly outlines a strategy to establish EPP as a vocational discipline in order to strengthen democracy. This includes proposals for communities of practice to develop provision and a Commission on Learning for Democracy.

It includes learning activities, reference to materials and an outline curriculum for practical politics.

Hand symbol indicates a practical learning activity

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Publications include: Campaigning is OK! a guide to building capacity for campaigning (2009)
Learning Power (Campaign for Learning 2007) makes the case for learning practical politics, about which Bernard Crick wrote “This is a most important and timely publication”
Family Learning: foundation of effective education (Demos 1997),
Citizenship Schools: a practical guide to education for citizenship and personal development (2001)
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The Pedagogy of Power: Learning for democracy

Why we need education for practical politics

Politics today is like elite sports in which a few teams have the best facilities and the winner takes all, while public participation plummets through lack of support. The game on the pitch is decided by men with money who hire top managers, players and coaches from across the world. Spectators pay escalating prices while public facilities to play sport are run down or sold off. The game is dominated by sponsors, financiers and media companies who control its governance and manipulate loyal supporters to make money. But Britain’s fortunes in the 2012 Olympics were dramatically improved as a result of the decision by John Major’s government to increase spending on training and support for participation in sport twenty years earlier. Low participation in politics can also be reversed by increasing investment in education and support for practical politics.

The most powerful in society invest heavily in political skills and knowledge to stay powerful, while those with least power have almost no access to political education. Lack of political ability makes our political system exclusive, ineffective and often incompetent. Participation in politics, like sport, takes skill.

Democracy means “government of the people, by the people, for the people” in Abraham Lincoln’s famous phrase at the end of the American civil war in 1863. What this means in practice is more complicated, but at very least it means that all citizens are equal and have an equal say in how they are governed.

In this essay I argue that for democracy to work, practical politics needs to be taught as a basic skill like literacy, numeracy and IT, through a mixture of practice and study. Education for practical politics (EPP) should be universal, through schools, colleges, the media and local democracy hubs. EPP needs to be recognised as a vocational discipline like business, engineering, law, medicine or teaching. For democracy to flourish, the ability to learn political skills would be as accessible and universal as the ability to read and write.

What is politics?

The word ‘politics’ derives from the ancient Greek πολιτικός (politikos), meaning the "affairs of the cities" (from polis, city), from Aristotle’s treatise on governing and governments written in 350 BCE. Aristotle called politics the “master science” because it is how the polis decides priorities between all other subjects. Since then the term has been extended to a nation, state and society more widely. Bernard Crick defined politics as “the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated” (Crick, 2000: 21). In this essay a “unit of rule” includes any institution in which decisions are made, from the workplace to global governance. It also includes wider regimes which govern the interaction between institutions that influence society, even if there is no single ‘unit of rule’. The laws of the sea, international trade agreements, accounting standards and conduct of global financial markets are all governed by rules drawn up through a process of conciliation among different interests, sometimes through several different governing bodies. To exclude these from our understanding of politics is to leave out the politics of some of the most powerful agencies in the world.

Crick argues politics is about the state and not activities within groups such as the office, families or between states (30). This is to ignore reality. In many states the ‘unit of rule’ is still revolves round families, whether monarchies of Arabia, plutocratic families of the Americas or the dynastic dictatorship of North Korea. Europe’s constitutional monarchies (families) have a subtle but critical
role in the political system. Political families also shape national politics, as generations of Ghandi (India), Bhutto (Pakistan), Bush (USA), Benn or Churchill (UK) stride the political stage. Behind them are diverse family traditions which nurture young people into a conservative, democrat, liberal, republican, socialist or apolitical direction. More profoundly, the relationship between men and women, the power dynamics within families and sexual politics are political issues which affect many people’s life chances. In some countries the decision to send a daughter to school or marry her into an influential family are political decisions, and the ability to influence those decisions takes more courage and skill than campaigning in a more open society. Conflict of interest between men and women can be conciliated through political skill within families, or enter public politics through campaigns on abortion, against domestic violence, for women’s right to vote, equal pay or gay marriage. Not everything that happens in families is political, far from it, but some activities in families are profoundly political, and the politics of families can shake the state.

A great deal of political activity takes place within institutions which seek to influence governments, such as business associations, trade unions or the press. Political battles between officials within government departments, banks and businesses are office politics that can have more impact on affairs of state than public political debate, such a decisions about the money supply, funding formulae for local government or tax domicile. For many institutions the state is simply one of many factors in their office politics, particularly for those at the top of big businesses or media empires. For political parties the politics of the leader’s office or the local constituency office is often more significant than politics in parliament, town hall or the public square.

The politics of banks, corporations, foreign governments or international agencies can have more impact on a country than its citizens, as in Iran in 1953 (Gasiorowski & Byrne 2004), Chile in 1973 (Kornbluh; Goodman & Gonzalez, 2013), Structural Adjustment Programmes of the IMF (Konadu-Agyemang, 2001; Abouharb & Cingranelli 2007), or Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) procedures in international trade agreements today, to give only a few examples were domestic politics in a given ‘unit of rule’ is over-ridden by the global politics of a more powerful ‘unit of rule’, whether state or corporation.

Sometimes politics is about creating a ‘unit of rule’ such as the United Kingdom in 1707, the United States from 1776 to 1779, the Republic of Ireland in 1922, the United Nations after 1944, or the Bank of International Settlements, a private arrangement between central bankers to regulate the world’s money “completely removed from any governmental or political control.” (Lebor 2013: 42)

Politics may be hidden, dictatorial, open or democratic, but what happens in society is usually the result of a political process somewhere. Politics takes place among courtiers of an absolute monarch and the inner circles of dictators, among town hall officials and in the cabinets of elected governments, most of it out of sight. The politics of the palace and corporation are not public, and dictators exercise power through coercion not consent, but most politics in elected governments also takes place behind closed doors and they too resort to coercion at times. Many people in democracies experience the actions of the state as coercive and secretive, contributing to high levels of distrust of politicians and alienation from the political system. Nevertheless, politics in representative democracies are more accessible and safer than in closed political systems. In democracies redress is often easier than most people realise; people who dissent do not risk being ‘disappeared’, imprisoned or killed, and they can organise to replace their rulers through elections.

Crick’s definition of politics continued “by giving them [the people] a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community.” In my view this is over optimistic. Even in democracies where citizens are “given power” through the ballot and other rights, their actual share of power is unequal and bears little relationship to their importance or to
the survival of the community. Without knowing how the system works and understanding the nature of power, how it affects them and how to use it in their particular situation, people’s share is a token of powerlessness.

Nevertheless, Crick’s definition contains three critical aspects of politics: it is the activity by which differing interests are decided; it is about the exercise of power; and it concerns the welfare of the whole community. Power struggles between different interests mean that some win and others lose, and the welfare of the community may rise or fall as a result, but politics always affects the whole community or common good in some way. The differing interests which take part in politics may not be interested in the common good or have radically different ideas about what it is, but the outcome of politics has an impact on the common good, often in unpredicted ways.

Crick’s “welfare of the whole community”, or common good, is contentious but important and probably necessary. Every political system needs some common ground on which politics takes place, protected by the rule of law and shared institutions which constitute the *polis* or unit of rule. The common good may include a commitment to open competition in which there are winners and losers, as in sport, politics and markets, but they require rules to protect losers from being slaughtered or starved. In the politics of an institution, neighbourhood or family there is also a common good which is bigger than the sum of its parts. This may be diminished or enhanced through internal politics, but even if everyone involved in politics is only motivated by self-interest, the outcome always has consequences for the common good. Most people who are active in any form of politics have some idea of a greater good, of the country, party, city, firm or simply their family, even if their own motivation is largely self-interested. Even the belief that “greed is good” and unfettered markets should rule is based on the idea that self-interest and “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 1942) is ultimately good for society.

In my view the definition of practical politics in modern times should also include a second contentious notion, which is that it is the resolution of differences by peaceful means. Actual politics often involves coercion and sometimes violence, particularly in international affairs. In my view the use of violence is a failure of politics, equivalent to the use of corruption, fraud and extortion in commerce. The latter are illegal in most countries, but still an inescapable part of doing business. Many people still see violence as a legitimate part of politics, and the use of force by states as permitted in certain circumstances, but I believe practical politics is important because it can reduce and potentially eliminate the use of force to resolve differences. This is a value judgement which is discussed later (p. XX: 23).

This leads to my working definition of “politics as the activity by which differing interests in the exercise of power are resolved by peaceful means for a common good.” The words in bold aim to be descriptive, the rest is aspiration, for what politics could and should be – what Crick would call an ‘operative ideal’ (1962: 162)

When advocating education for practical politics, I am proposing a discipline that is about the peaceful pursuit of a common good, while recognising that politics is inevitably about conflict between people with different interests and visions of the common good.

Politics is the practical business of making things happen through decision-making, governance and the exercise of power at any level of society. Politics takes places within families, firms and every other institution. Many corporations are bigger than most states and their internal politics matter greatly for their performance and for wider society. Good corporate governance is critical for sustained business success and a productive economy. The internal politics of charities, community associations, schools, universities and other organisations matter as much for the everyday lives of people involved as the "affairs of the city". Many institutions are bigger and more powerful than
Athens in the time of Aristotle, which had a population of about 120,000. Institutions are the main *polis* for many people involved with them as staff or users. In *The New Machiavelli*, British businessman and Conservative political operator Alistair McAlpine wrote “there is a striking similarity between the city states of fifteenth-century Italy and the great corporations of the last half of the twentieth century” (McAlpine 2000: xiii).

What is politics and what is not?

Which of the following are political activities, and if so, what makes them politics?

**Slavery: business or politics?** For centuries people were booty in war or commodities. Slavery was recognised as legal in the Code of Hammurabi in 1750 BCE. From the 1700s entrepreneurs transported millions of people from Africa to the Americas, enriching European plantation owners, stockholders and their economies. The trade was politicised by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and Evangelicals like William Wilberforce. The campaign to end slavery was clearly political, as was the campaign to continue the trade. Britain made a political decision to use diplomacy and navy warships to stop other countries trading slaves. In American the issue triggered a Civil War (1861-65) between Northern (Union) and Southern (slave owning Confederate states), a political act. Although slavery was primarily commercial in origin, its legal status and human impact made it a political power relationship from its earliest beginnings, and its abolition a political struggle which continues to this day.

**Miscarriage of justice: policing or politics?** The arrest, trial and conviction of four Irish people of the Guildford bombing was an exercise in policing and legal process. But their 15 years in jail, and the fighting to prove their innocence, were clearly political. The laws under which they were convicted were created by parliamentary politics; their prosecution was almost certainly unjust, probably criminal; and their continuing detention was motivated by judicial politics, as was their final release, which came through political actions in parliament (Christenson 1991:168; Conlon 1991; May 1990).

**Firing your founder: management or politics?** Senior fund managers at one of the world’s biggest bond traders, with $2 trillion of assets, fired their $200m-a-year founder Bill Gross after investors withdrew from his $300bn Total Return Fund, following months of concern and a shift in the balance of power among the 240 portfolio managers. Gross promptly joined a ‘sleepy $13m fund’, promising to turn it into a multi-billion player (FT 3/10/14).

Politics is above all a practical activity, about making and carrying out decisions about collective affairs. Alongside decisions about priorities, tax and spending this includes judgements about what is the common good? How do we achieve it? What forms of governance serve us best? And how do people learn how to take part? This last question is the central concern of this essay.

The nature of politics varies dramatically according to the institutions and circumstances where decisions are made, but the existence of politics is inescapable. In a dictatorship most people are excluded from politics, but personal survival may depend utterly on political skill and connections. The ability to deal with a dictatorship requires different political skills from a country town or global institution, but getting rid of a bullying chief officer can be almost as difficult. In a democracy the ability to take part in politics is much less dangerous than in a dictatorship, but the failure of politics can lead democracy to become a dictatorships, as in Germany’s Weimar Republic in 1933 or Latin America in the 1950s and ‘60s. The failure of democratic systems to resolve differences can still lead to a military coup, as in Thailand or Egypt in 2014.
Why politics matters

Practical politics is the ability to take part in the deliberative process of governing, which today is much wider than the city state. It includes the art of influencing decisions and governance at any level, from the office or neighbourhood to world politics. The politics of the office, party, city and state are parts of a much larger, complex global political system in which everything is connected.

Low levels of participation in the formal political system may suit some powerful interests, but citizens who are ignored or excluded express disaffection in ways that affect the whole of society, or indeed the world. The politics of apartheid South Africa, Northern Ireland before the peace process or Israel and Palestine today reverberate globally. At a national level, race riots in the US, Britain’s poll tax riots of 1990 or the fuel protests of 2000 shook the political establishment. Most disaffection is expressed in subtle ways, such as anti-social behaviour, non-cooperation with authorities, non-payment of tax or even self-harm. Political systems are often slow to respond to disaffection, first ignoring it, then dismissing it and responding only when threatened on the streets or at the ballot box. Effective politics means getting disaffection onto the public political agenda and resolving differences faster as well as better.

All societies need effective political participation to solve collective problems. When people see their interests threatened, or an injustice done or harm caused, political action is often the best way to solve the problem. While many problems can be tackled by self-help, charity or private enterprise, collective problems require political solutions through changes in the law, regulation or public services. Slavery could be ameliorated by charity or benign slave owners, but only political action could end it; smallpox can be treated by people with access to markets in medicine, but only concerted political action could eradicate it; nature reserves have all been created by wealthy philanthropists, but only political action and the law can permanently protect land from commercial development.

Democratic politics needs to be recognised as a public good like the rule of law, public safety and public health. The lack of political skills, knowledge or opportunities prevents people from taking part, just as not knowing the rules of football or not having access to a pitch means you can’t play. Politics therefore requires sufficient public investment and support for everyone to take part. Just as equality before the law is a fundamental principle of a democratic society, so equality of influence in making the law is essential for a healthy democracy.

This essay aims to show that the ability to take part in politics is extremely unequal and that if we believe democracy is a fundamental principle for governing society, then society needs to provide practical political education and support for all sections of society to take part as equals.

Summary of the argument

Part One describes the political education of the powerful in government, business and the media, and the ways in which most people are effectively excluded from democratic politics, taking the UK as a case study. Part Two considers why so many people feel powerless, the result of a pervasive “education in powerlessness”. Part Three explores the nature of power as the means of doing politics. Part Four makes the case for politics as a public good. Part Five outlines a curriculum for education in practical politics and learning for democracy, and the potential for universities to take a leading role. Part Six summarises lessons from the growth of new disciplines in education (such as adult literacy, business studies and parenting education) to propose a strategy for making EPP a universal subject at all levels, as widely available as literacy, numeracy or business studies. The conclusion proposes a Commission on Learning for Democracy as a first step.
For democracy to be real the poorest and least powerful should be able to develop skills, knowledge and contacts equal to the most powerful. There are many kinds of education for practical politics at a community level throughout the world, on a small scale and mostly outside education institutions. To become widely accessible, EPP needs to be recognised and supported with the same kind of commitment as education for enterprise, information technology or sport. Like many new subjects, these were first pioneered by civil society and informal education before being taken up by the mainstream. But the ground breaking efforts of civil society often need the support of schools, universities and government to take off and become widely available.

Universities, as independent institutions dedicated to the non-partisan pursuit of knowledge, have a particular responsibility to promote learning for democracy as a universal public good. Providing education for democracy should be as much part of the university’s role as pushing the boundaries of science, scholarship and medicine. Indeed, in a democracy the study of any subject should include the political context and skills needed to apply it in society. For British universities, impact assessment under the Research Excellence Framework makes political skills even more relevant to all disciplines, because the way in which knowledge informs policy and practice is a political process, if only the politics of a profession, institution or discipline.¹

This paper aims to make the case for education in practical politics and learning for democracy in a way that is accessible to a wider audience, not just academics. The argument is grounded in evidence from experience as well as research from several disciplines, including business studies, pedagogy, psychology and sociology as well as political studies.

The ultimate test of education for practical politics is not in the discourse of political education, but in a better society, just as the ultimate test of medicine is in the health and wellbeing of patients, the test of an MBA is better businesses in a more prosperous, sustainable economy. Sound argument and evidence is important to inform effective action, but what matters is its application and the durability of the result.

This paper follows a seminar series on Education for Practical Politics at the Institute of Education in London in which many contributors provided examples of learning to empower people as democratic citizens. The intention of the series and paper is to encourage learners, teachers and others to establish education for practical politics (by whatever name) as a core subject across all phases of education, because we cannot have a functioning democracy until everyone is able to take part.

To paraphrase a Gaelic Proverb, “Some people make things happen, some watch things happen, while others wonder what just hit them.” In a flourishing democracy everyone would be able to make things happen and no one would be knocked out by forces beyond their control.

¹ “The assessment of impact will be based on expert review of case studies submitted by higher education institutions. Case studies may include any social, economic or cultural impact or benefit beyond academia that has taken place during the assessment period, and was underpinned by excellent research produced by the submitting institution within a given timeframe.” http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2011-01/#exec
1. Political education of the powerful

This section summarises some of the main ways in which powerful people develop political abilities to gain and use power. These forms of political education are not available to most people, thus widening the participation gap and increasing inequality in incomes, power and life chances.

The political education of politicians

All leading politicians employ professional coaches to help them win campaigns and influence people. President Obama and his Republican opponents employ teams of campaigners to win elections and political battles in Congress. India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 with advice from a high powered team including university professors and investment fund managers (Chakrabarti 2014). In the UK Prime Minister David Cameron employs Lynton Crosby as campaign coach and strategist, drawing on his successful track record with Australian Premier John Howard, London Mayor Boris Johnson and New Zealand’s Joy Key. Cameron also hired Obama’s campaign manager Jim Messina to advise on social media and political organisation. Another Obama adviser Anita Dunne coached Mr Cameron for the 2010 election TV debates (BBC News, 2/8/12). Former Premier Tony Blair employed Alistair Campbell, David Hill and a policy team to stay on top of his game. The Labour Party leader Ed Miliband hired David Axelrod, Larry Grisolano and Mike Donilon from Obama’s campaign team for the 2015 elections. Most leading politicians employ experienced aides to advise, coach and support them through relentless political battles in the media, Parliament and their own parties.

Modern campaign advisers are political educators, as much part of party politics as football coaches in the sport. They train champions to win. In the United States professional training for aspiring politicians is a well-developed discipline in many colleges and its alumni are in much demand. But in politics they are only available to elite players.

Every country has its premier league of politics inside the Beltway, Westminster Village or Brussels bubble. People who compete at the top hire the top coaches and are much happier if everyone else is untrained and ignorant of the rules, because it gives them an advantage. But for the governance of the country it is a recipe for mediocrity.

The politics of governing a country is many times more complicated than football. It is more like multi-dimensional chess on parallel boards, each with its own rules and teams playing against or with you. Team colours are deceptive. People change shirts during the game. New players or teams storm the pitch. Dozens of different games are playing simultaneously – within your party in Parliament and the constituencies; between parties, in the press and social media; across the civil service; between nations; through international institutions, and above all, with the free-booting bond markets who can crash your country’s credit rating on a rumour. And at any time a jail break, bombing, beheading or belligerent interest group can blow you off course.

To win elections and stay in power, parties need focus, discipline and the ability to perform effortlessly for different audiences across all media. They need to keep their core vote happy while contending with challengers like the Tea Party in the US, UKIP in England or SNP in Scotland. One unguarded remark or gesture can be blown up and thrown back at them through an unforgiving media. Politicians need to hire the best political advisers, speech writers and strategists to win and use power, but even then it is probably impossible to play multi-dimension political chess.

Most professional politicians get their basic training and a head start from home and school. In Britain a third (34%) of all MPs and half the cabinet went to fee-paying schools, compared with 7% of the population. Most had mentors and patrons within the system to give them a hand up. They served apprenticeships in student, trade union or pressure group politics. They developed
experience, skills and contacts as a special adviser, policy researcher or local councillor. And above all, they developed resilience on the campaign trail.

These routes into politics are open to everyone, like Lords cricket club: only a few tickets are available at the gate, entry is by ballot, membership fees are high, hospitality boxes are exclusive, and most people don’t think it is for them anyway. In other words, politics in practice is a closed shop, although in theory it is possible for anyone to take part. But with knowledge, skill and determination it is always possible for people to break through and make a difference.

All political parties want the public to support them as voters, donors, members and activists. But parties are run by people who have won gruelling contests and are constantly fighting. They want newcomers to help them win their next battle, not to bring their own balls onto the pitch. Yet parties do not have the pitch to themselves. They must contend with what US President Theodore Roosevelt called “an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people” (Roosevelt: 1926), namely big business.

The politics of business

Political parties are not the only organisations to employ professional campaigners. Businesses success often depends on government decisions about regulation, tax, trade and public spending. Small changes can have a big impact on companies, their employees, customers and shareholders. When the UK Chancellor announced in March 2014 that pension savers will no longer have to buy an annuity, shares in annuity providers fell by up to 55% (Guardian 19/3/14). The UK public sector spends about £187 billion on goods and services each year, from computers and healthcare to prisons (NAO 12/11/13), the biggest outsourcing market outside the United States (Holmes Report 2012). Planning permission can dramatically change the value of land overnight. The fortunes of any industry can rise and fall in response to government policies: think about the business of arms, energy, farming, housing, pharmaceuticals and tobacco. In fact no industry is untouched by politics.

More powerful even than the influence of government on business are the daily assessments of the interests of almost every business is affected by government decisions, so companies and industry associations employ lobbyists to get their message across to decision-makers as effectively as possible. Like political advisers, lobbyists are both players and coaches in this multi-dimensional contest. They act directly for their employer, but more often they are educators, providing strategies, tactics, skills, knowledge and contacts for executives to learn how influence decision-making over specific issues. Many ministers and senior officials move in business from government, transferring valuable skills, knowledge, contacts and kudos, reflected in its market price. The Clintons can command $200,000 - $750,000 for a single speech (Ghosh 2013, Yoon 2013). Former Prime Minister Tony Blair generates £10-20m a year from business (Office of Tony Blair 2013, This Is Money 2/7/12). Lord Tom McNally, former Labour MP, Head of Public Affairs at Shandwick Consultants, member of parliament in the unelected upper house and a Liberal Democrat Minister of Justice in the Coalition Government, described public affairs as “an operational necessity in the boardroom” (Harris & Fleisher 2005: xxvi).
The power broker business: lobbying, consulting and professional persuasion

Business has long used persuasion to promote goods, particularly since mass production made mass markets possible. The founder of public relations, Edward Bernays wrote in *Manipulating Public Opinion* "In the mass production of materials a broad technique has been developed and applied to their distribution. In this age, too, there must be a technique for the mass distribution of ideas." (1928, in Peters & Simonson 2004:57). He argued that the “conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ... In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons... It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind. (37)

Today Business leaders employ a wide range of specialists to deal with different kinds of political problem:

- Public relations (PR) professionals promote their point of view to the press, public, politicians or other target audiences;
- Public affairs aims to build relationships with politicians and decision-makers;
- Lobbyist are specialists within public affairs who aim to influence specific decisions by government or other bodies;
- Researchers in think tanks and universities are employed to create ‘thought leadership’ and policy options on critical issues;
- Management consultants are by far the biggest group, who mostly deal with internal office politics or battles between firms in mergers and acquisitions (see p. XX).

Each of these disciplines use political skills to influence different groups in society and maintain or increase the power and reputation of the business, organisation or individual which employ them. These professional political operators are far more numerous, and often better paid, than the staff of political parties.

One estimate suggests the global public relations agency industry is worth almost $12.5bn and employs more than 80,000 people (Holmes Report 2014), although the US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates there were more than 7,000 PR firms in 2012 in the US alone, with a turnover of $10.5bn, excluding internal or in-house communications. Including in-house PR its value may be in the region of $30bn, employing 200,000 people, based on the ratio of in-house to agency staff in the UK.

The lobbying and public relations industry in the UK employs about 62,000 people. Its turnover in 2013 was estimated at £9.62 billion (PR Week 18/12/13), of which about 73% was in house and the rest agency/freelancers. This includes the public and voluntary sector. The latter employs about 5,000 campaigners, less than 10% of the total.

Spending on lobbying and PR in the UK is about a hundred times more than spending by political parties. All three main political parties spent an average of £68m a year from 2001-11 according to one eminent source (Kelly 2011) or £110m a year from 2005-09 according to Democratic Audit (Wilks-Heeg & Crone, 2007: 7), when the combined turnover of the three main parties was £349 million. Large individual donations accounted for 25 to 60 per cent of the two larger parties’ income over the last decade, showing the importance of corporate and personal wealth in party politics.

Business also influences policy and ‘thought leadership’ on by funding research, think tanks, conferences, seminars and universities (Stone & Denham, 2004: 3, 42; see also Abelson, 2009).
The growth of lobbying, public affairs, public relations and intellectual sponsorship reflect the complexity and power of government decisions in more open, democratic societies. In closed, authoritarian societies business power brokers are more likely to rely on bribes, back door deals and sheer power politics (not that democracies are immune to these entirely).

Politicians adopted commercial marketing long after businesses adopted politicians to further their causes. Political marketing is a well-developed discipline, used by both business and premier league politicians to influence public opinion and decisions, particularly in elections.

The central issues for democracies are not commercial lobbying, which is inevitable and necessary, but the transparency of lobbying, the ethics which govern it, and support available for those with least power so that they can have greater equality of influence in the political process. In *Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics*, Margaret Scammell argues that political marketing can also enhance democratic politics (2014).

Over 90% of lobbyists work for business, mainly large corporations which can afford their services. Like parties and the media, businesses are also in competition with each other, so they are not a unified block. Industry associations and umbrella bodies like the Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors, Federation of Small Business or British Bankers Association all exist to advocate for business interests.

In this context individual citizens are completely out classed by corporate players. Charities, churches, pressure groups, trade unions and other associations of civil society give voice to sections of society. Some employ campaigners to get their ball – the issues they care about – on to the pitch, let alone get near the goal. In the UK they are also constrained by charity law (which largely has the balance right) and the 2014 Lobbying Act (which does not). But even pressures groups with professional staff are like village football teams pitched against premier league clubs. The consequences in sport may not matter much, but for democracy it is a disaster.

In *Power Inc.*, David Rothkopf (2012) trances the rise of private power since 1288, showing the ceaseless struggle and intimate relationships between business and government throughout the world. Few countries are immune to business influence. A third of China’s private entrepreneurs have joined the Communist party since 2001, when membership was opened by General Secretary Jian Zemin (Lardy 2014). In most democratic states elections are unthinkable without funding for political parties from business or wealthy individuals promoting their business interests.

In *The Political Power of the Business Corporation*, Stephen Wilks (2013) shows how international corporations have become institutions of global governance that constrain national governments. The UK in particular “has moved to a significant level of ‘government by corporation’, most obviously in the swathe of services now delivered by privatised corporations” (Wilks 2013:257) so that “their political power is exerted on an everyday basis as part of our political system” (41) through a managerial elite that “works in conjunction with political elites to create corporate strategies which favour their own and wider elite interests.” (35)

Wilks observes that “Democratic legitimacy ... appears to be emerging from ‘brand legitimacy’” (Wilks 2013:258), something that makes business extremely sensitive to attacks on their reputation. ‘Brand legitimacy’ is more than a marketing tool. It projects a company’s power in society and gives its leaders access to power and voice not available to ordinary citizens.

Long before President Roosevelt’s “invisible government” speech in 1906, businessmen such as Robert Owen (1771-1858), Titus Salt (1803-76), Cadbury and Rowntree in the UK showed “responsibility to the people”. Since the 1960s corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown
significantly, encouraged by organisations like the World Economic Forum (founded 1971), Business in the Community (1982), Corporate Responsibility Group (1987) and others advocating a progressive role for business (DeGeorge 2010). Responsible business is an important political movement, as significant as any major political party or social movement in terms of influence. Like all politics, it has its factions, opportunists, pragmatists and true believers, as well as opponents. On the other side of the argument, some argue that the only responsibility of business is to maximise value for shareholders and CSR is a distraction (Henderson 2001).

**Trust in business and politics**

Business (other than bankers and estate agents) is largely trusted more than governments, by 59 to 50% globally and 56% to 47% (Edelman 2013). However, there has been a steep decline in people saying that British business generally behaves ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ ethically, from 58% in 2011 to 48% in 2012 (Ipsos Mori 2012). However, in a 2014 survey for the BBC, nearly half (49%) of people surveyed said that big business is a greater threat to the public than trade unions with just 13% dissenting (Populous 2014). Polling by Ipsos MORI showed that just one in five (18%) Britons trust politicians to tell the truth compared to 21% trusting journalists and bankers and 24% who trust estate agents (Ipsos MORI: 2013).

The Edelman Trust Barometer shows a wide variation of trust in business between countries, at above 75% in the UK, Canada, Sweden (79%) and Germany (80%), compared with Italy (55%), Brazil (42%), India (35%) or Mexico (34%). The same survey shows a global gap of 14% between trust in business and government in 2014, compared with a 4% gap in 2011 and 7% in 2009. Although business leaders score more highly (58%) than government leaders (44%), there was little trust that in either on key metrics (see Fig. 1)

**Fig 1: Edelman Trust Barometer (2014)**
The relative good standing of business compared with governments reflects fundamental differences between them. To survive in competitive markets companies sustain a relentless focus on customer service and innovation. They only serve people who can pay and concentrate on a narrower range of products and services than governments. Companies have become very adept at dealing with risk, customer complaints and scandals. Companies also invest in brand and reputation management as part of their soft power armoury. Democratic governments, on the other hand, have to serve everyone and meet a wider range of interests and needs than any company, regardless of ability to pay. While companies only promote the positive features of their own products and rarely criticise competitors, politicians constantly attack each other. Day after day political leaders are pilloried in cartoons, comedy and commentary, while most business leaders are invisible and their services seem more successful than those of the state. When they fail, businesses are closed quickly, leaving the public sector to pick up the pieces, while failing public services can limp along for decades.

These structural differences lead people to mistrust politicians and the political system by giving the appearance that business is above politics. Yet political battles in business can be more brutal than party politics, as briefly glimpsed in hostile take-overs, boardroom shakeouts or the conquest of new markets. Culpepper describes the ‘quiet politics’ of business takeovers, “in which highly organized interest groups dominate the policy process in arenas shielded from public view.” (Culpepper 2011: xv) Alistair McAlpine’s The New Machiavelli provides a more raucous guide to politics in business by an insider (2000).

Businesses are not just in the Premier League of politics, but they sponsor parties, pitches, players and prizes to promote their interests. Their logos may not appear on ballot papers or election leaflets, but they are prominent at party conferences, think tank reports and the logistical support on which cash-strapped parties depend.

But as well as lobbying, policy research, trade agreements and financial markets, business interests influence public political opinion through advertising and ownership of the media.

Political education by the media

The public’s main source of political information and education about how our system works is the media – television, press, books and increasingly the internet. The media are also main way in which politicians communicate with the public. Ownership, control and use of the media are therefore critical battlegrounds in Premier League politics. In the UK this was vividly shown in the Leveson Inquiry (Leveson, 2012), the purchase of the Times (1981) and BSkyB (1990) by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, or of Express newspapers by Richard Desmond in 2000.

One-party states like China exercise direct control over the media, authoritarian states like Russia use intimidation, but in Western democracies the press is free but money decides who can publish what for whom and when.

Political parties devote a great deal of effort to securing favourable coverage of their leaders and policies while undermining those of their rivals. Major parties use focus groups, opinion polls and careful kite flying to test messages with votes; they plan a long campaign to set the media agenda in the run up to an election, and plot daily topics on their communications grid. This process has been extensively described by its practitioners, including Philip Gould, one of New Labour’s campaign advisers, in The Unfinished Revolution (1998); Damian McBride, political aide to Gordon Brown from 1999 to 2009, in A Decade of Policy, Plots and Spin (2013); and most fully in Alastair Campbell’s diaries (2007, 2010, 2011, 2012). See also Steven Foster (2010: 34). Piers Morgan tells his side of the stories as editor of The News of the World and Daily Mirror in The Insider: The Private Diaries of a Scandalous Decade (2005).
Campaigning charities and pressure groups are also skilled at using the media to catch public attention and build support for their causes. Stunts, petitions and demonstrations are used to amplify a message through the media.

Every newspaper, broadcaster and news website is itself a political arena, fraught with battles about personalities, resources, lines to take and priorities between different subjects, often overshadowed by the proprietor’s preferences. Editorial meetings are influential political forums. Decisions about what stories to investigate, what to put on the front page, leader columns and who to commission as columnists are all part of a nation’s political process. Coverage of politics competes with advertising, business, celebrities, human interest, sport and other topics – decisions that exemplify Aristotle’s case for the primacy of politics. The decision to downgrade coverage of politics is itself political. Not necessarily party political: it may simply be that’s what readers want, which the editor and owner accept on commercial grounds. The choice to give commerce the final say is nevertheless political.

Trust in media and politicians

Viewers, readers and listeners tend to trust the media more than politicians (Edelman 2013) and may be more loyal to their paper than a party, although this varies widely depending on which media (see figure 2) and which politician. Nevertheless, papers have to win readers’ support every day, parties only every few years. In the UK half of all adults (53%) read a national newspaper and 61% (31 million people) read a regional paper, 23% of whom do not read a national (Newspaper Society 2012). Total readership in the UK is 61m (Press Gazette 2013), with many reading more than one paper. This is more than support all political parties put together. Readers interact more with their paper or its website than with any political party or elected representative, and may feel it represents their views better than any politician.

Figure 2: Who do we trust? A tale of two medias.

Source: Edelman from The Guardian 24/1/2012

Media owners are proud of their paper’s robust role in politics. As the Sun boasted after John Major’s 1992 election victory, IT’S THE SUN WOT WON IT, although its chairman Rupert Murdoch later said the headline was "tasteless and wrong" (Wells, 2011). Readers like their paper to stand – like the Daily Mail’s campaigns over Stephen Lawrence’s murderers, Gary McKinnon’s extradition to the US or NHS treatment of the elderly.
As a public service, the BBC is obliged to be politically neutral with a duty to educate and inform. As a result the BBC is the most trusted of news outlets. But it also has its internal politics and a public agenda which is occasionally challenged from left and right in politics (Higgins 2014).

The internet is disrupting traditional media, pushing newspapers out of print, particularly in the US; giving some papers additional revenue streams; and making it easier for the public to take their issues onto the pitch through Twitter, blogs and comment pages. Campaign websites like Avaaz, Change.org, MoveOn and 38 Degrees have millions of subscribers – many more than parties - who have won numerous campaign victories (38 Degrees 2014). Essex MP Douglas Carswell predicts that digital media means The End of Politics and the Birth of Democracy (2012) by cutting out “meddlesome middlemen” in the media and Big Government to give people direct control over the goods and services they want.

Like political advisers and lobbyists, the media are both participants in the political process and partisan educators. They have their own internal politics as well as an active role in public politics. Like political parties, they employ people for their political abilities and convictions as well as technical skills. The media of all kinds are a major influence in politics and all players devote considerable effort to making the media work for them.

Citizens need to learn media literacy to understand how it works and how to use the media to have their say about issues of the day. The press and television, particularly the BBC, could also play a bigger role in giving citizens information on how the system works, the issues in contention and how to have an effective voice in politics. This point is developed in section XX, pYY.

All politics is office politics

People in positions of power need political ability to scale and stay at the top of their institution, whether it is a political party, government department, church, charity, pressure group or business. The politics of any organisation is about influence over decisions about strategy, priorities, budgets, structure, personnel, rewards, sanctions and ground rules. Survival at or near the top of any organisation depends on strategic alliances and effective control over various sources of power within the organisation as well as the ability to deal with its external environment and bring in revenue.

Leaders of large organisations employ consultants to strategize and coach them through internal politics. Change management, business re-engineering and corporate strategy are all about the practical politics of running large complex organisations in a competitive environment. Business schools and consultancies like McKinsey provide training and support for office politics at the pinnacle of corporate governance. The politics is largely top-down, more Machiavelli than Mill, but it is often more sophisticated than the overt politics of parties and pressure groups.

Political ability matters at every level in any organisation. Many chiefs fight their way to the top only to feel trapped by their position, unable to use their power effectively, while others dominate their organisations internally only to lead them to failure, as at Enron, RBS, Lehman Brothers, GEC and countless once powerful companies. The founder of Apple computers, Steve Jobs, was deposed as chairman in 1985, returning as CEO in 1997, while his successor Tim Cook ousted his vice president and retail chief “as internal politics and dissent reached a key pitch” (Arthur 2012). Rowan Williams lead the Anglican Church but lacked the political ability to resolve conflicts over homosexuality and women bishops. Party leaders constantly watch their back as rivals manoeuvre to force their hand or take their place. In almost every organisation political skill is more important for success or failure than the power of being at the top.
Influencing organisations from below or outside takes even greater political skill than exercising power from the top, because it depends on persuasion or pressure. However, outsiders are not tied down by responsibility for running the organisation and can wage a ‘war of the flea’ to pursue their aims. Much of politics of any kind is actually about influencing the office politics of another organisation or your own. To paraphrase Tip O’Neill, late speaker of the US House of Representatives, “all politics is office politics”. (O’Neill: 1995)

The types of political ability needed vary greatly between types of organisations, in different parts of the same organisation or at different times in the life of an organisation. The nature and use of power also varies according to position: the higher you are, the more politics you do. People lower down the organisation have to do what they’re told but ignore office politics at their peril. Politics is very different in the middle, bottom or outside an organisation, requiring different political skills.

The experience of politics and power for people at the bottom of any hierarchy or far from the political centre is very different from that at the top or middle.

**Part 2: Lessons in powerlessness**

Intense competition between elite players in business, politics, the media and other interests makes it hard for ordinary citizens to be heard. For most people the political Premier League might as well be on another planet, or at least Lord’s cricket ground.

Learning politics starts young. Like language, music and sport, learning about power begins at the home. Family background is the biggest influence on political participation, and is closely linked to education, the second major influence (Verba et. al, 2003, 2005).

It is no accident that many leading politicians come from political families. Family influence also teaches most people to believe they are powerless and can’t do anything to change things. While elite schools assume pupils are destined for leadership roles and provide numerous opportunities to develop character, confidence and skills of debating, leading and taking initiative, most schools teach people to do what they are told, follow the prescribed curriculum and wait for instruction. For most people these profound lessons in power and powerlessness continue under one boss after another and everyday experiences throughout life. This sense of powerlessness can be changed by teachers and schools with a passion for democracy, as well as by life experience, workplace learning, trade union education or community organising, about which more later.

People’s sense of powerlessness is compounded by the fact that the political system seems to have little influence on events. In representative democracies voters choose between parties every few years on manifestos which bear little relationship with what parties do in power.

There are many reasons for this, such as -

- Elections are marketing campaigns pitched at what voters want to hear rather than what parties can actually do. Manifestos are about winning power. Their language and policies should be carefully crafted to appeal to floating voters in marginal constituencies as well as core supporters, with a smattering of policies to appeal to key groups (like New Labour’s promise to abolish fox hunting in 1997), while playing down policies which could be attacked by influential sections of the press, business or trade unions (unless the party calculates that being attacked by one group will make it more attractive to others);

- The world is complex and events overtake even the best prepared parties.

- Many of powers of central government are delegated to quasi-autonomous agencies (quangos) or companies like Atos, Capita, Serco and G4S.
Perhaps the biggest reason is that governments are constrained by other powerful players. Decisions by the bond markets, European Union, NATO, WTO, US Federal Reserve or other bodies in the multi-dimensional chess board of politics can have more impact on Britain than Westminster.

This creates an expectation gap and disillusionment with politics. Colin Hay describes the process as the depoliticisation of decision-making in *Why we hate politics*, Polity, (2007: 78 – 152) to show how this contributes to political disenchantment.

Electoral systems also play a part. The UK’s First Past the Post’ system is intended to create strong, stable governments. Parliamentary politics is monopolised by a few parties which offer a relatively narrow range of choices. These are largely decided by a few people at the centre of each party who maintain the discipline needed to survive 24-hour media and get support from the relatively small number of swing voters who decide elections. Since 1950, fewer than one-in-ten seats changed hands from one party to another in 12 out of the 17 general elections¹. In 2015 the election will be decided in just 194 marginal constituencies, just 30% of seats in Parliament. Twenty-four hour media means that any gaffe or unguarded remark can derail the best prepared electoral strategy. This is an impossible circle to square, so tight control over the party’s message is vital.

The result is that professional politics consists of battle-hardened ministers who have fought their way to the top of their party and the country in the face of ambitious rivals, unforgiving media and an indifferent public. To be credible, parties must present themselves as having the best solutions to the country’s problems, and their opposition as wrong. Political leaders are praised for their resolve and rewarded for ability to unite their party, demolish their opponents and win elections. Politicians tear into each other with character assassination, scorn and sound bites to attract attention and poll ratings between elections. Inevitably, all parties are tarnished in the process. Each does down the other and all are diminished. This is compounded by a partisan media and commentators whose job is to pick holes in the contenders’ case. Add the expenses scandal, allegations of cash for influence and lack of straight talking, this creates a perception that politics is intrinsically disreputable and only for people with a thick skin, masochistic streak and lust for power. As the African proverb goes, when elephants fight, the grass is crushed. The net result is a powerful lesson for people at the grassroots that they have no place in politics.

The consequences of this sense of powerlessness are profound, affecting the whole of society. Psychologist David Smail describes the power relationship between distant powers and relatively powerless individuals in *Power, Interest and Psychology* (2005:27) through the following diagram (Fig 3). Distant powers are mediated by institutions of work, school, markets and local utilities, in which most people have little influence. These pressures are transmitted into personal relationships, where they appear as stress and distress, documented in Smail (2001), leading to addiction, depression and mental illness for many people who lack power in their lives.
Fig. 3: The Impress of Power (Smaill 2001)

The impact which a person’s sense of power has on their life chances and ability to act is supported by a wide range of studies, including the work of Albert Bandura (1986, 1997), Amartya Sen (1999) and the Whitehall cohort studies of British civil servants. These long-running studies since 1967 found a strong association between employment grade and mortality rates, with men in the lowest grade (messengers, doorkeepers, etc.) having a mortality rate three times higher than men in the highest grade (Ferrie, ed, 2004; Marmot et al, 1991; Whitehall II).

The decline of democratic politics

Formal representative democracy has almost ceased to be a meaningful political vehicle for most people. Less than a fifth (19%) of British people agree that Parliament is ‘working for them’ (Kalitowski 2008) and only a third are satisfied with how Parliament works (Hansard Society 2007:7). Half (52%) believe MPs put their own interests first and three in ten (31%) think MPs put their party’s interest first. Just one in twelve (8%) believe MPs put the interests of their own constituents first and 6% say their country comes first (Ipsos Mori 13/6/13). An overwhelming majority feel that Parliament is unrepresentative of British society. For most of the past decade (since 2002) more than half the population have been dissatisfied with the Government (Ipsos Mori 15/9/14). This sense of dissatisfaction and lack of power leads to low participation in the political system. Voter turnout was below 65% in all general elections this century and below 40% among 18-24 year olds. Less than 1% of adults belong to any political party, about a tenth the membership of the National Trust.

There is a great deal of evidence that most people have very little power to influence events. The Demos ‘power index’ (Leighton 2009) seeks to measure three elements of power or “core power capabilities” - the power to shape one’s own life; the power to be resilient in the face of shocks and the arbitrary power of others; and the power to shape the social world. The index scores every constituency in Britain to show where the most and least powerful citizens live. This shows a “very
steep differential, or power gap, at the bottom and top” of society, highlighting the greater difficulty for people with least power. The distribution of power scores is shown in their Figure 3: “constituencies with wealthier residents are likely to score higher: the link between wealth and power is not a novel finding. Yet the geographical skew is clear with the majority of constituencies in the top two bands being in the South East, the home counties scoring especially highly. In turn the Midlands and the North East overwhelmingly populate the lowest two bands.” The number of constituencies is each band is shown in Figure 4. (Leighton 2009: 41)

![Figure 3: Overall distribution of power scores](image)

![Figure 4: Number of constituencies per power band](image)

All constituencies in the Low and Very Low band, as well as most with Medium power, are represented in Parliament by Labour MPs, while most of the High and Very High constituencies are represented by Conservative MPs.

The power index is only one starting point, but it provides evidence of the democratic deficit and the widespread sense many people have about the distribution of power. The index could be used as a guide to geographical areas for projects in political education and participation in politics.

3: Understanding power

The two previous sections looked at political education from the perspectives of the powerful and the relatively powerless in society. They provide some evidence for how and why people have very unequal power in the political system. This section looks in more detail at the nature of power and the abilities needed to use it. This does not address the bigger question about what kind of political systems enable people to have more equal power.
Politics is above all about the use of power to make things happen, in an organisation, community or society. In order to take part in politics, people need to understand the nature of power, how it affects them and how to use it in their particular situation. Bernard Crick's working definition of power is "the ability to achieve a premeditated intention" and "influence over others" (2000: 82, 187), similar to Bertrand Russell's "power is the ability to produce intended effects" (Russell, 1938). The sociologist Max Weber defined power as "the probability that one act or within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will even despite resistance" (1922:53).

These definitions suggest that power is best understood in terms of relationships between people rather than something people have (Crozier, Friedberg, 1980: 30). Relationships depend on social situation and position in society. Organisations regulate power relations between people (36-44) and create collective power which amplifies or stifles the power of individuals or groups. Political parties, state agencies, firms and other forms of association are all organisations of collective power which aim to make things happen.

The nature of power varies enormously within different organisations and political systems. The exercise of political power in Berlin is utterly unlike that of Beijing, and different even from Bavaria, even if the same party is in power. Power also changes over time as well as place, so that the exercise of power in the Conservative Party of 1989 is unlike that of 2015, while the power dynamics of Conservatives in Chichester are unlike those of Clacton. But among these differences there are common themes about the nature of power which are at the heart of practical politics. Without some understanding of power or the ability to use it, it is not possible to do practical politics.

When I teach citizenship, I often start by asking people to list occasions when they've experienced a sense of power, occasions when they experienced powerlessness, and then analyse the forms of power they experience. (Alexander, 2001) This exercise can be extended to analyse power in many different situations, including historical events, contemporary politics, fiction, film and organisations in which participants are involved.

This section will briefly look at key questions which explore nine aspects of power, in order to provide a context for political skills and knowledge discussed in section four. These question are like diagnostic tools, which suggest things to look out for about power relations in a particular situation in order to inform action:

1. Purpose: what is it for and why do people want it?
2. Sources: where does it come from?
3. Instruments: how do people exercise power?
4. Gradients: what are the differences in power between people?
5. Sector or sphere: in what social sector or sphere is it ("power petals")?
6. Spaces: where is power exercised? To what extent are decisions taken in the open, behind closed doors or elsewhere altogether?
7. Who takes part? What are visible, hidden and invisible forms of power?
8. Levels: is power exercised at a local, organisational, national, continental or global level?
9. Degrees of freedom: how much scope do people have to exercise power?

These questions inform the ‘why, how, and what’ of education for practical politics. The answers will vary according to the political systems, institution or even situations within the same system and institution. But taken together they can be used to create a ‘power map’ of influences on any particular issue, outlined in the final part of this section.

3.1 What is the purpose of power?
To influence an individual, party, state or organisation you need to understand why they want power: what do they want to achieve, for themselves and others? This is often different from their stated purpose. Individuals or groups within an organisation may have competing or even conflicting goals, even if they say they want the same thing.

The easiest way of finding out the purpose of power is to ask, Who benefits? (expressed by the Latin adage, *Cui Bono?*) Looking at who gains what from particular arrangements or transactions can shine a light on the interests and purposes of those who wield power.

In *Who Really Matters: The Core Group Theory of Power, Privilege and Success*, Art Kleiner (2003) looks at the actual behaviour and accomplishments of organisations, including companies, unions, government agencies and schools, to argue that “every organization is continually acting to fulfil the perceived needs and priorities of its Core Group.” (p4) Kleiner argues that an organisation’s stated mission is secondary to the priorities of the Core Group. This helps to explain why, for example, churches founded on the principle that God is love or mercy can kill and torture in God’s name; why the many charities that aim to end poverty have made so little difference despite enormous effort and resources; why some hospitals and care homes can tolerate the abuse of patients; and why political parties in government usually fail to achieve their stated aims. Only when the Core Group’s priorities are aligned to the organisation’s mission does it stand a chance of achieving them. This is a profound insight for anyone seeking to influence organisations from inside or outside.

People seek power for many reasons — status, wealth, a sense of achievement, duty, insecurity, revenge, cruelty or a mission to do good — and often a mixture of several. Bertrand Russell thought that “of the infinite desires of man, the chief are the desires for power and glory” (1938: 11), although some people clearly prefer a quiet life and are content to blame others for everything that happens.

Political systems can end when their leaders lose faith in their purpose, as in East Germany, the Soviet Union or apartheid South Africa, while institutions with a strong sense of purpose continue for centuries, like churches. Although their actual purpose may change radically over time, they will keep going so long people vest in them sufficiently strong reasons to keep going. Skilled political operators know how to change the purpose of an organisation to meet changing aspirations or circumstances, or how to harness the ambitions of a core group to meet their particular purpose.

### 3.2 Where does power come from?

To have influence or stop someone from doing something you need to know where power comes from. Power is always a social dynamic, between an individual or agency that wields power and those that follow or submit. Power dynamics are not simply about a stronger force overwhelming the weaker one. Some groups have gained power through submission, like religious martyrdom or non-violent resistance, Ghandi’s *Satyagraha* strategy against British rule in India (Ghandi, 1951).

JK Galbraith described sources of power as “the attributes or institutions that differentiate those who wield power from those who submit to it” and prosed three — personality, property (including income) and organisation, which he regarded as “the most important source of power in modern societies” (1983: 6). It is more useful to see these in terms of relationships rather than attributes of an individual, and then unpack them into the following seven strands. The first three are aspects of personality, the last three are forms of organisation, and resources are central to them all:

- **confidence** and self-belief are enormous assets for gaining and holding power, which is why the education of elites puts so much emphasis on character and leadership. These traits are evident among powerful leaders such as Churchill, Roosevelt, Deng Zhou Ping or Putin, as well as people who challenge power, such as Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Martin Luther King,
Lech Walesa or Malala Yousafzai. Confidence is also a product of circumstances, of family, school and wider social circle which builds up or pulls down people.

Expertise creates its own power. Bacon’s dictum that ‘Knowledge is power’ has proved itself in the scientific and technological innovations that continue to revolutionise society and challenge politics to catch up.

Celebrity is a projection of personality now associated with stars of sport and screen, but has much in common with the stories of saints, martyrs, heroes and villains of the pre-television age, and plays a political role in telling stories about what kind of society we are and what’s important.

Resources – money, tools and other assets are the foundation and objective of power, providing incentive for people to do things. But the possession of wealth alone may not be sufficient to exercise power. Many wealthy individuals, companies and even countries decline because they lack the ability to use their wealth well, or because others out smart them. To use resources well takes personality, position and other sources of power.

Position gives control over decisions, money, staff and other resources, but also responsibilities and pressures to serve the institution or system. People need skill and expertise as well as contacts and confidence to use any position successfully.

Collective action is the power of people acting together with a shared goal, and throughout history people with big ambitions to change society have formed a group, organisation or movement to make things happen.

A network of contacts enables people to exert influence beyond their formal power or expertise: who you know can be the fastest route to making things happen.

The source of all power is in the relationships between people and the ways in which calls for action are carried out. Large hierarchical structures seek to command people from the centre, but messages can get mangled and subordinates learn how to give their superiors the illusion of control while doing their own thing. The ability to communicate and create appropriate incentives are therefore critical to the exercise of power and practical politics in any context.

3.3 How do people exercise power?

JK Galbraith describes three instruments of power (1983: 4-6)

- Coercion, which he calls ‘condign power’, which wins submission by inflicting or threatening adverse consequences;
- Compensatory power, “which wins submission by the offer of affirmative reward” including praise, payment or some kind of privilege;
- Conditioned power, which is exercised by changing belief, through “persuasion, education, or the social commitment to what seems natural, proper or right”, what Noam Chomsky calls “manufactured consent” (Herman, Chomsky: 2002)

Force is often seen as the ultimate power, as in the much quoted “War is merely the continuation of politics by other means” (Clausewitz: 1832) or Chairman Mao’s slogan "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" (1938: 224-225). But force can often backfire and end up weakening those who use it. Good politics is ultimately about making things happen without force or even coercion, so that the losers in a political conflict accept the outcome as a new settlement.
Force is always a failure of politics. Although coercion, conflict, war and violence can often be understood in political terms, they are like bribery and corruption in business. Yes, corruption oils the wheels of commerce, and in some countries may be the only way to do business, but it is bad practice. Likewise force may be realpolitik, but it should not be an accepted part of democratic politics. Force is still one of the most widespread instruments of political power in the world, from the balance of power between nations and nuclear missile arsenals to the prison guards of North Korea and Jihadi beheadings in Syria. Many political traditions see violence as the only way to overthrow repressive regimes. But winning power through violence tends to perpetuate violence. Political regimes “differ in the level and types of violence they generate” (Tilly 2003: 9) and collective violence can be seen as a rational response in many circumstances. This does not make it the best response.

In my view democratic politics is about the peaceful resolution of differences and reducing the use of physical force and coercion at all levels, from neighbourhood gangs and office bullying to threats, terror and war in world politics. This is, of course, a contested political view and many would argue that it is not possible to protect society or to change it without force. To which my response is that if societies invest more in developing opportunities and skills for peaceful politics then people would feel less need to resort to violence and states would need less force to protect themselves or their citizens. The peace process in Northern Ireland is a good example of the benefits of reducing violence in politics by creating new political structures for political differences to be addressed (White, ed: 2013). The end of dictatorships in Latin America, apartheid in South Africa and Indonesian rule over East Timor (Timor-Leste) are other examples.

### 3.4 Power gradients

Most organisations have steep power gradients from top to bottom, in which those at the very top exercise much greater power than those immediately below them, while those at the very bottom often feel powerless beyond a very narrow sphere (see Fig 6).

Figure 6: Power within many organisations is concentrated at the centre

![Power Gradient Diagram]

Daunting as they are, all hierarchies are vulnerable. Powerful regimes have been toppled by citizens’ action, including dictatorships in Greece (1974), Portugal (1974), Spain (1975-82), Philippines (1986), Latin America, Eastern Europe (1979), apartheid South Africa (1994), Tunisia (2011) and many others. Effective campaigning has persuaded mighty corporations to adopt fair trade, sustainable development, the living wage and other progressive policies. Powerful institutions like the World Bank, G8 and even NATO have all been influenced by citizens taking political action.
Each case is different, but timing, skill, persistence and courage can succeed against incredible odds. Understanding how each organisation works and the degrees of freedom of people at different levels is decisive for bringing about change.

### 3.5 Spheres of power

All social spheres have gradients from those with less power to those at the centre, but access to power and how it is used varies greatly from one sphere to another. In many faith communities, for example, the faithful can talk with their leader more easily than a shop floor worker can reach with their chief executive. In open societies people move at different power levels in different spheres, so that a powerful CEO or politicians may be an ordinary member of a faith community, social club or sports centre while a shop floor worker can become a sports champion or leading lay member of their church. These differences in the accessibility can offer fast tracks to access from one social sphere to another.

People at the top of almost any large institution are often closer to people at the top of other institutions than to people at the bottom of their own institution or social sphere. Charles Arnold-Baker (1967: 34) showed as ‘power petals’. Each petal represents a different social sphere or institution and many of the peaks overlap (see fig. 7).

![Power Petals](image)

**Fig 7: “Power Petals” from Charles Arnold-Baker, *The 5000 and the Power Tangle*, 1967**

The ‘petals’ today are different, and the number of people at the centre may even be smaller, but as a rough guide it offers insights for practical politics. In a globalised world each state, nation and transnational structure has overlapping ‘power petals’ competing for light, with relatively few belonging to the global elite. In *Superclass* David Rothkopf (2008) identifies just 6,000 people who qualify. At this level most prime ministers are mere petitioners at the edges of power, straining to influence the mightiest on the planet. For example British Prime Minister John Major and the Bank of England were no match for hedge fund manager George Soros on 16 September 1992, who made over a billion pounds in profit by short selling sterling (Mallaby 2010). When Tony Blair, Gordon Brown or David Cameron aspired to become Prime Ministers, they wooed Rupert Murdoch as assiduously as the electorate (Blair, 2010; Watson & Hickman, 2012; Tiffer, 2014)

### 3.6 Political spaces: what access to power do people have?
John Gaventa et al (2011) use the image of a cube to describe different dimensions of power (see Fig. 8), distinguishing between closed, invited and claimed spaces. Closed space refers to decisions taken behind doors, with little or no public consultation or involvement. Invited spaces are institutionalised forms of participation, organised by those with greater power on their terms. “Claimed spaces” are “those which relatively powerless or excluded groups create for themselves.” (16) The authors see these in terms of social movements through which marginalised groups create political space for themselves, but it is possible to see the history of democratic politics as a process in which people have opened decision making space to a wider public by moving the boundary into formerly “closed” space to create more visible, transparent and accountable decision-making processes.

Fig 8

The Power Cube can be used to explore power dynamics through a variety of activities described at www.powercube.net

Many powerful people began by building a political or economic base to challenge or enter closed establishments and then move into or create closed spaces for themselves, such as Lech Walesa, leader of Solidarity and then President of Poland; Rupert Murdoch, chairman of News Corporation; the ANC leadership in South Africa; Luiz Lula, former leader of the Workers’ Party and President of Brazil (2003-11); or even Barak Obama, President of the US. The fluid realities of power do not correspond to neat squares, as the authors recognise, and their case studies identify more categories on each side of the cube, but it offers a rough guide to explore different dimensions of power, described in the following three sub-sections.

3.7 Who takes part?

Another face of the Power Cube draws on the work of Steven Lukes in Power: A Radical View (1974, 2004), which argued that power must be understood not only in terms of who participates, but also in terms of who does not. In this view power has three faces – the public face which we all see as the theatre of politics; a hidden face, which keeps issues off of the agenda of decision making arenas, and an deceptive third face, through which the relatively powerless accept their own condition and do not recognise or act on their own interests. This ‘false consciousness’ is described as a form of self-preservation, through which people with little power protect themselves from forces much greater than themselves. Lukes’s analysis of what he called the three dimensions of power has informed many studies about how power affects those not who do not take part in decision making processes.
For educators, the key question is how people excluded from power can understand their situation and strengthen their voice as politically equal citizens in unequal societies. Under the Brazilian dictatorship in the 1960s, Paulo Freire did this through ‘conscientization’ in adult literacy (1970, 1993) while Augusto Boal used participatory theatre (1979, 1998). In the US Saul Alinsky trained the “have-nots” to take power through community organising (1971). In apartheid South Africa Steve Biko used Black Consciousness for psychological liberation (1986). Training for Transformation is an approach to community organising which enables people to ‘read their reality and write their own history’ inspired by Freire and developed in Africa since 1975 by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel (1984, 1999, 2014), still used in Ireland, Africa and elsewhere.

3.8 Levels of power: local, institutional, national, continental or global

Our increasingly integrated globalised world means that power is exercised at many levels through international treaties and institutions, multi-national polities like the European Union and NATO, and transnational corporations (TNCs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and faith communities. The Catholic Church is perhaps the oldest global agency which has influenced local politics around the world for centuries, while the East India Company and other TNCs largely shaped the modern world (Rothkopft 2012). Global governance is conducted through thousands of institutions which regulate many aspects of our lives, largely by officials from governments and business (Hurd 2010, Rittberger et al., 2012). However, communications technology, travel and trade mean that global decision-making is increasingly accessible to citizens’ organisations.

In many countries populist political parties and social movements have emerged to challenge global decision-making, such as Front National (France), UKIP (UK), and Alternative für Deutschland (Germany) to the Occupy movement, Tea Party (US) and World Social Forum. They, like national political parties and trade unions, also have international networks and alliances, capable of spreading ideas and successful slogans or campaigns. Political Islam (Islamists) such as the Muslim Brotherhood (founded 1928), Hizb ut-Tahrir (1953), al-Qaeda (1988) and others are also a powerful force in world politics, deliberately targeting Western-led global governance. Although antidemocratic and anti-politics, these movements also need to be understood and addressed through politics.

Power today is exercised through a web of interlocking bodies, through politics within organisations (“office politics”), between organisations and in forums at a local, national, continental or regional and global level. Understanding the interaction between these levels is no longer an optional extra but an integral part of national and even local politics.

Many people understand the intricacies of international football and other sports. They can see the impact of international finance, trade, climate change and conflict. Understanding the connections between local and global politics should be no harder than understanding the World Cup, but people don’t see the connections or the relevance to their lives. Perhaps the is because the popular media provide detailed coverage of football in dramatic, vivid language, while the little coverage of world politics bears little relationship with reality.

The development of effective, accountable and responsive agencies of global governance which citizens can recognise and influence as part of the political process is one of the greatest challenges in politics today.

3.9 Degrees of freedom
Different circumstances allow people varying degrees of freedom. Open societies and institutions allow people more freedom than closed ones. The ability of individuals, groups and communities to have freedom of action. Bernard Crick writes that “the classical idea of ‘freedom’ was tied to the concept of citizenship, indeed to political activity itself; a free man was someone who takes part in public life in an uncoerced way.” (2000: 89) For Crick, freedom is “endangered if most or many do not choose to participate in public life.” Or, for that matter, are unable to do so because they do not know how to take part.

Peoples’ ability to exercise freedom depends on the resources available to them, their external environment and the rules or constitution that governs them. Commercial organisations earn their freedom in the market, so that financial success means that firms like 3M, John Lewis or Google can afford to experiment. Private schools have more freedom about what and how they teach than state schools, and the freedoms of teachers and pupils within them also varies. The freedom of each public service depends on political support and public esteem. University lecturers can earn freedom by winning research contracts and attracting students, further education teachers are more constrained by national targets, assessment and accreditation. Understanding the constraints, power gradients and degrees of freedom at different levels within organisations as well as in a community or nation is fundamental for practical politics. Learning how an organisation works gives people much greater ability to influence it, however little formal power they may have. Within education, the classroom, extra-curricular activities and participation in governance all offer scope to learn about the exercise of power.

Academic freedom and the shift of the cost of studying from the state to students gives universities more freedom than most other education institutions to experiment with education for practical politics, as an addition to any other subject and as a discipline in its own right (see p XX).

Public broadcasters like the BBC are highly constrained in what they can do, but like all media they are already engaged in political education through current affairs and political news coverage. A conscientious broadcaster would recognise that they have the freedom to provide non-partisan education for practical politics. It should be a relatively small step from analysing the news to showing people how they can influence it as citizens.

**Landscapes of power**

Power in society is a constant moving landscape as individuals, groups, organisations and nations rise and fall, as technologies come and go, or people take action to address problems. To take part in politics it helps to have a good map of the agencies and actors who influence things that concern you. The analysis and images above can help to understand the patterns of power which affect any issue or problem.

Any political project needs to map the powers which influence the desired outcome. Political strategists, lobbyists, the military, investors, development agencies and community organisers use a variety of activities and tools to map power and influence. Power mapping is also used in some therapeutic traditions “where the impact of social adversity and inequalities can outweigh benefits of individualised psychotherapy” (Brown, 2010; Smail, 2005).

For practical politics a fresh map needs to be drawn for each situation, as in engineering or business. Relying on maps drawn by others, whether the CIA, Marx or the Economist is to risk getting lost.

To illustrate what I mean, here are two approaches to political map making:

- The first is called the Influence Onion, because it builds up in layers like an onion:
1. Start with the inner circle, people directly involved (primary actors)
2. are the direct influences on them: people, policy, institutions, funding, legislation, regulation, stakeholders,
3. people and institutions which decide these
4. are the larger systems which influence these,
5. are the system conditions
6. are governing ideas which may run through all these

For some issues the first two may be particularly important, particularly for problems requiring behaviour change. For more complex systemic issues the last three may be more important. The challenge is to know which you are dealing with. For example, obesity may appear to be a behaviour change issue to stop people eating too much, but the problem may in the food industry, subsidies for corn sugar and political priorities.

The second approach is to draw a ‘rich picture’ to capture as many of the relationships and factors involved in the issue, like the one by Elizabeth McVay Greene (2010):

This has many ‘power points’ where people could have influence, so the next step is to create a more schematic map, to find a focus, which suggests three leverage points -
This is only one of several approaches to power mapping and the following tools can help create power maps for different types of situation:

1. **Stakeholder Analysis** (see for example MMU Stakeholder Analysis Toolkit), particularly relevant for organisations planning any kind of change;

2. **Power, institutional and impact analyses** used by development agencies such as the World Bank, SIDA, DFID and others (Gelb, Ngo, & Ye, 2004; Haider & Rao 2010; Hyden 2006; OCI 2009),

3. **Participatory rural appraisal** (Chambers 1983, 1997), power analysis (Gaventa 2006; Powercube 2011); and net-maps (Schiffer & Waale 2008) for work with local communities;

4. **Power structure research** (Mills 1956; Domhoff 1967, 2005, 2006; Rothkopf 2008; Sampson, 2004) to understand the wider political and social context at a local, national or global level;

5. **Value chain analysis** to analyse the processes which a product or service undergo, particularly useful when looking at a company or even an economy (McCormick & Schmitz 2002; Neilson & Pritchard 2009);

6. **Community and social psychology** (Brown, 2010; Smail, 2005) for work with individuals and therapeutic contexts.

Each of these offers insights into specific situations from different angles. No map will ever be complete or remain current for long, since any action can change the dynamics, sometimes very fast. In practical politics, taking action can also help to understand as well as change power dynamics. For example, if you identify a particular person as a key influencer in a situation and are able to engage them, you learn about the issue and subtly change the situation. You may even move them from indifference or hostility to your cause to being supportive or at least neutral. Alternatively, if you publicly attack or humiliate them, you could move them from potential support to active opposition. Either way, changing their position influences others. Small interventions can reveal who is willing to act or react in a given situation, shifting the power dynamics. For example, when one manufacture is publically attacked or praised for their working conditions, others in the same sector will look at their own behaviour.
4. Politics as a public good

Humanity today faces immense problems of poverty, disease, conflict, crime, corruption and environmental degradation. These problems are likely to grow worse as world adds fifty percent more people – three more India’s – to its population over the next fifty years.

We have a great deal of technical knowledge about the problems and how to solve them, but the greatest difficulties are political. Conflicting interests, beliefs and values make it difficult to bring about change, even when evidence for specific solutions is overwhelming. What is lacking is not knowledge or resources but the political skills to use knowledge to solve complex problems by peaceful means.

Like upstart companies in a market economy, political action by citizens makes life difficult for established powers. But challenge and innovation are as important for public policy as the economy. Political action improves public decision-making because it

- provides early warnings about problems,
- generates a wider range of solutions,
- and can stop blunders by challenging authorities to justify decisions.

People with power naturally want to decide things in their own interests, but democracy means that everyone has a right to an equal say about the nature of society and who has the power to decide. The UK does not have a democracy but an “elected dictatorship” which gives the leadership of political parties a huge amount of power to make decisions over national affairs for five years, so long as they keep majority support in parliament (Hailsham, 1976).

But the public can only choose between parties every four or five years – barely 15 votes in a lifetime. For the rest of the time we are spectators, with little say over what happens, while corporate lobbyists and others who know how the system works influence decisions between elections.

Why we need education for practical politics

Governance is like a powerful computer operating system which enables families, farms, firms, public services, voluntary associations, organised crime and many other ‘applications’ to function (or not, as the case may be). Different forms of governance create big differences in outcomes. North and South Korea are an extreme example of the difference governance makes, but large differences in child mortality, murder rates, employment or traffic accidents, between wealthy western economies reflect different political decisions. Our operating system is the collective product of politicians, officials and the public interacting to solve problems. It is not quite open source, but nor is it a proprietary regime.

People need to be able to take part in the system to make it work and create new or modified applications to solve problems. But if people don’t know how to take part and don’t think they can have any influence, then they won’t even try.

Politics can be tough, but so is business and sport, where competition is recognised as a public good. A great deal of effort goes into encouraging people to take part in sport, including funding for training and support to help people compete more effectively. So why not for politics?

Britain’s fortunes in the Olympics increased dramatically after the government increased investment in sport and encouraged schools and voluntary organisations to develop provision. Likewise, part of the solution to lack of participation in politics is to increase people’s ability to take part through political education and support, addressed in the following section.
5. A curriculum for learning democracy

The first part of this essay aimed to show how the most powerful in society are constantly learning to improve their skills in holding and using power within their own organisations and the political system, while those with least power are largely powerless spectators, with few opportunities to learn how to take part. The next part outlines a strategy to make learning for democracy and education for practical politics (EPP) the central mission of education at all levels.

This section outlines the main elements for a “pedagogy of power” to enable citizens to take part in democratic politics as equals. It is addressed primarily at further and higher education, which have the freedom to develop a curriculum for democracy across all subjects, but these principles apply equally to education at all levels. My book Citizenship Schools (Alexander, 2001) presents a whole-school approach to learning democracy. Learning Power (2006) makes the case for practical political education as part of the national skills strategy.

Provision for education for practical politics

Practical politics has long been part of education for elites. Rhetoric and politics was taught in ancient Greek academies, Aristotle taught the young Alexander the Great, and the sons of kings and noble men learnt state craft from an early age throughout history. In France the Grandes Ecoles still select and train the technical and managerial elite, producing most high-ranking civil servants, politicians and executives. In Britain Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) teaches aspiring politicians the meta-skills of reasoning, argument and analysis for fast-track careers in the civil service and politics (for a list of influential graduates see Wikipedia 2012). Practical courses in public administration, public affairs, policy and government have also grown recently. Business studies provide training for corporate politics. But most education for practical politics is in the private sector, provided by consultants and lobbyists working directly for companies and large organisations.

What is missing today is education for practical politics for all citizens to develop the equality of influence necessary for democracy to flourish.

Practical politics as described in this paper includes a wide range of activities, summarised in Figure XX. Most discussions of political skills tend to focus on a few areas, such as campaigning, protest, public affairs or electioneering. This bigger picture helps to see the ‘master science’ of politics as a mosaic of activities and contexts everywhere people jostle for influence, power and change.

Party politics is shown as a vertical axis, touching almost every type of activity. The horizontal axis shows social movements on the left and the ‘office politics’ of institutions, states and corporations on the right. Diplomacy, lobbying, public affairs and institutional change management are types of insider politics while protest, awareness raising and behaviour change tend to be outside institutions although sometimes organised by them. Community organising is about building autonomous power bases in the community, although once set up they too become institutions driven by their own ‘office politics’. “Campaigning” covers the whole range of organised efforts to influence decisions, from protest and community organising to “nobbling” by people with power behind the scenes. Advocacy and lobbying are also known as “public affairs”. In a pluralistic democracy community action, voice, active citizenship and empowerment are an essential counter-balance to nobbling and lobbying by those with most power and resources.
Provision for ordinary citizens is scarce, but there are many strands of education for democracy across the world from which we can learn. The Scandinavia Folk High School and study circle movements are closely linked with the development of social democracy (infed.org, 2014; Borish 1991). The first Folk High School was created in Denmark by NFS Grundtvig in 1844 as a residential place of learning “where the peasant and the citizen can obtain knowledge and guidance for use and pleasure not so much in regard to his livelihood but in regard to his situation as ... a citizen” (quoted in Moller and Watson 1944: 27). This inspired a world-wide network of self-governing residential institutions, many of which still exist. In the US these include Poconos People's College, Pennsylvania, Waddington People’s College in West Virginia and the Highlander (founded in 1932), which provided active educational support to successive social movements, for labour rights, civil rights, the women’s movement and environmentalists. In Britain the folk high school model informed the educational settlements and residential college in the late nineteen century (Drews & Fieldhouse 1996), including Cambridge House, Fircroft, Northern College, Toynbee Hall, Selly Oak and Woodbrooke which continue as centres for education and social action.

Since the Second World War Germany has had substantial programmes of education for democracy. The Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb), Political Education portal and other agencies encourage citizens to be “informed, critical and active ... when they get involved in their social environment”.

In the United States President Harry S. Truman set up a Commission on Higher Education for American Democracy. It published a six-volume report in 1948 and led to the establishment of a network of public community colleges. These continue to provide some political education, but much less than education for enterprise. Campus Compact was founded in 1985 to promote the civic purposes of higher education and “renew our role as agents of our democracy.” This declaration has been signed by hundreds of presidents from campuses across the country. It has a membership of 1,200 college and university presidents, as well as 34 state Campus Compact affiliates which link academic courses to community service learning. The American Democracy Project (ADP) started in 2002 by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) in collaboration with The New York Times. It includes some 250 public colleges and universities, reaching more than one and a half million students, and runs a Political Engagement Project to develop political efficacy and “prepare students to become informed, engaged, and active citizens of our democracy.” The US also has highly sophisticated political consulting firms providing contacts, knowledge and training for anyone willing to pay (see Campaigns & Elections and the Political Pages Directory).
Public provision for practical politics in Britain is fragmented, sporadic and small scale. Most provision is by lobbying and public relations companies for the private sector, through high-cost conferences, courses or bespoke consultancy from companies such as DeHavilland, Dods and Freshwater. Campaigning charities, trade unions, youth and community work, social movements and pressure groups provide some training in skills and knowledge for specific groups and purposes. Publicly funded political education has been short term and limited, such as ALAC (Active Learning for Active Citizenship), Take Part and the community organiser programme, which provide a legacy of experienced educators and materials. Parliament now runs non-partisan workshops and courses to help people understand and influence politics, with a team of regional outreach staff.

Could Universities lead education for practical politics?

Much of my work has been with people in marginalised communities bringing about change round local issues such as childcare, disabled access, community facilities, parenting education, jobs, as part of a movement for community empowerment which has ebbed and flowed over the centuries. While there have been many successful projects, powerful forces outside their control have had most impact on people’s lives. Some well-intentioned government initiatives to support community action have even dis-empowered communities, because they encouraged people to give their time to create a local project, then after a few years the support is removed leaving little or nothing to show for their efforts. People have become wary of new initiatives, reluctant to commit time or to trust their ability to organise themselves, and often lacking basic resources to get started. Initiatives which made the most lasting difference have had assets, such as a building or endowment to provide an income, and an independent community organisation to run it, sometimes linked to a faith community, university settlement or development trust. Significantly, the settlement movement was started in the 1880s by people connected with universities in England and the US so that students could live and work (settle) among poor people to improve social conditions and alleviate poverty (Brewis 2014).

A great deal of community action is about the micro-politics of the neighbourhood – getting people together, raising funds, running projects, trying to get the ear of officials, attending meetings – but decisions that have most influence on the area involve macro-politics of the city, state, major employers or the financial markets. Valuable as neighbourhood projects are, they often depend on political influence at a higher level to provide premises and sustainable revenue. Unless local people are also able to learn how to influence these wider decisions, they will always be marginalised.

To be effective, this kind of practical political education needs to be provided through autonomous organisations that are not dependent on short-term funding, political patronage or vested interests. For these reasons, universities may be in the best position to support comprehensive, accessible education for democracy for local communities. As autonomous, self-governing public institutions with considerable freedom they can run courses in response to need as well as demand. Universities have a long tradition of innovative partnerships, increasing provision of practical, vocational subjects, offering placements, projects and service learning with businesses and community organisations. Student fees, paradoxically, increase their independence to teach what students want and need to learn. Many universities also run public lecture programmes, offer extra-mural courses and provide pro-bono research and other support to community organisations.

The President of Universities UK, Christopher Snowden, said in 2013 that “the true and unchanging purpose of universities is to make you think, to learn. It is less about the subject, but how to study something in depth.” (Snowden 2013) In democracies that depth must include the political and social context of that subject. He said “Higher education impacts on wider policy objectives including those related to health, citizenship, community cohesion, national security, social mobility, and wider society.”
There are a growing number of university courses in advocacy, campaigning, human rights and public policy, but they tend to emphasise theory and knowledge more than practical politics. The time is ripe to develop a curriculum for effective citizenship and democracy.

Creating a curriculum in practical politics

Like sport, politics take practice and persistence to learn. Some people have a gift for it, but everyone can learn the core principles and practices. Like business, music and other vocational subjects, practical politics cannot be learnt in the abstract. The most similar discipline is business studies, where the best MBA courses include case studies, placements and project learning. The following curriculum outline aims to create experiences necessary for effective political action, as well as knowledge, skills and contacts.

🌟 Ten elements of a curriculum for action

The following ten elements of a curriculum for action are informed by my experience of practical politics at many different levels, of running courses in campaigning as well as many different courses in practical politics, campaigning and democratic citizenship. They are grouped under three headings of experiential learning, knowledge and skill.

A: experiential learning

1. **Create a democratic learning community**: people learn about power through relationships with others and the ‘hidden curriculum’ of institutions. This can have more influence on what people learn than the content of courses. It is therefore essential to create a learning community in which people develop skills of democratic participation from the start. This can be done by:
   - Warm-up activities: use timelines to share and connect personal, community, organisational and national experiences and narratives;
   - Involve participants in drawing up ground-rules and sanctions for breaking them;
   - Negotiate the curriculum: at the start ask potential participants what questions they want the course to answer, why they want to do it and what outcomes they want, then agree the content with them;
   - Make time for learner-led discussion;
   - Create opportunities for participants to facilitate or co-facilitate activities;
   - Pair participants into mutual support partners (“buddies”) and make time for active listening in pairs;
   - Invite participants to choose two ‘class representatives’, male and female;
   - Encourage participants to form self-managed study groups or project teams;
   - Get feedback from participants after each session and module to provide real-time evaluation;
   - Involve past participants on courses as assistants or trainee facilitators;
   - Encourage participants to take part in the decision-making processes of the institution.

Many of these are standard facilitation methods that can empower participants

2. **Draw on personal experience**: start the course with exercises to share experiences that can be used as resources throughout the course. I often invite people to talk in pairs about times they have felt powerlessness, and then of times they have felt powerful, then draw out common points from the whole group; or ask pairs or small groups to describe campaigns or political activities they have been involved in – What ways it about? Why did you get involved? What did you do? Who did what? What happened? What was the outcome? What influence the results and how? In the 1970’s the women’s movement created “consciousness raising groups” to explore personal experience of patriarchy. In *The Pedagogy of Freedom*, Paulo Freire talks about...
the importance of talking with students about the concrete reality of their lives to awaken critical consciousness (Freire, 1998: 36).

3. **Use case studies:** get students to analyse successful and unsuccessful campaigns;

4. **Develop investigations, projects, placements, service learning and opportunities for participation in politics:** the main test of practical politics is whether it brings about the desired result. It easier to win battles of ideas in essays and seminars than reality, so reflection on action is central to learning practical politics. Working alongside an experienced activist is a bonus, but any placement can be useful when accompanied by coaching. Setbacks and failure sometimes provide more valuable lessons than success. Universities could have a catalytic role in local communities by supporting local Democracy Champions, hubs and community campaigns through service learning projects.

**B. Knowledge**

5. **Develop values and principles:** values are fundamental to politics; they address the question why you want to do something, so in learning practical politics you must constantly examine assumptions and values. Exercises I use to help people clarify their own values are:

   1) invite participants to probe a time they made a stand or took action (or an action by someone they admire) and ask why it matters to them, then repeatedly ask why until they identify a core value that can’t be reduced further;
   2) create an activity to get people to show what values they are willing to risk their jobs, freedom or lives for;
   3) get people to describe what certain core values mean for them in terms of specific actions;
   4) create situations which involve choice between values, such as freedom and security, to get people to prioritise their values.

As a discipline, education for practical politics also has to be informed by values. These should include the Nolan principles of public life, drawn up after the cash for questions scandal in 1994 - accountability, honesty, integrity, leadership, objectivity, openness and selflessness as well as the following principles from *Learning Power* (Alexander 2006: 37):

   1) **pragmatic:** start from where people are and help them achieve what they want;
   2) **pluralistic** in funding, forms of provision, content and values
   3) **participative** to develop confidence, communication skills and critical thinking
   4) **practical**, to include techniques, knowledge and analysis relevant to active politics
   5) **peaceful**: violence is a failure of politics
   6) **pro-poor**: prioritise provision for people on low incomes with least access to politics.

These principles recognise that politics is about participation in creating practical solutions by peaceful means in a pluralistic society, and that society benefits when all citizens take part, including the poor, disadvantaged and disenfranchised whose voices are underrepresented when decisions are made.

6. **Understand theories of change:** every institution, party or campaign has assumptions about how change happens, so it is essential to explore different change models. A theory is a hypothesis to be tested: applying the same theory to all circumstances is like prescribing one cure for all ills, whether it is direct action, lobbying, unfettered markets or workers revolution.
One useful summary of different theories is *Pathways for Change: 10 Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts* (Stachawiak: 2013). Other theories worth studying are Albert Bandura’s social learning theory (Bandura: 1977), particularly in the applications described in *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change* (Grenny et al: 2013); *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell: 2000), an application of Rogers theory of diffusion of innovations (Rogers: 1962) and *Switch: How to change things when change is hard* by Chip and Dan Heath (2011). Applying theories of change to different circumstances enables learners to become flexible and effective change agents. As well as overt theories of change, it is also important to understand how people see issues, the unconscious mental frames which shape perceptions, as developed by the FrameWorks Institute and George Lakoff in *Don’t Think of an Elephant* (2004), *The Political Mind* (2009) and other works.

7. **Analyse the problem (domain knowledge):** expertise gives campaigners credibility and detailed technical knowledge can be decisive at critical moments. But knowing too much can also make it difficult to focus on the few simple messages needed when campaigning. In *How to Win Campaigns*, Chris Rose (Rose 2010: 23) argues that education and campaigning are opposites. Learning about an issue leads to greater complexity and indecision, while campaigning needs to narrow the focus. When a business launches a campaign to promote a new product, it does not hold seminars on all the alternatives, but relentlessly focuses on its benefits.

However, political activists also need to respect the evidence and work closely with experts who understand the field. The art of politics is about asking the right questions, identifying who has the power, developing effective messages and influencing people to achieve the outcome you want. Seeing the issue from the outside can be a great advantage, but getting your facts wrong can destroy a campaign or fail to produce the results you want if it succeeds. Key skills for practical politics therefore include rapid research, using experts effectively and asking questions. Asking questions can also get powerful individuals or agencies to address a problem or start the change process. Activities I’ve used to analyse an issue include:

- Creating an ‘issues map’ with experts and representatives of all stakeholders involved in the issue;
- “Devil’s advocate” probing of an issue, in which people take turns to role-play their opponents;
- Jeremy Paxman/John Humphrey’s interrogation, as if on TV or radio.

8. **Understand the power structures and processes:** this is usually more important than knowledge of the issue itself – who are the key decision-makers, what keeps them awake at night, their underlying beliefs, advisors and the external influences on their decisions such as consumers, competitors, financial markets, regulators, voters, technological change or the media: all these need to be identified for their potential to influence decisions.

C. Skills

9. **Influencing skills** include communication, asking questions, decision-maker dialogue, organising, coalition building, using social and other media, lobbying, stunts and non-violent direct action are just some of the methods students of EPP could practice;

10. **Campaign strategy and tactics** means putting these ten elements together to achieve the outcome you want. A campaign strategy is the equivalent of a business plan, which sets out what you want to achieve, why and how; the problem you want to address, your solution and critical evidence about it; who can help or hinder (stakeholders), what actions you plan to take, the risks involved and other factors.
Chis Rose describes campaigning as a conversation with society (Rose 2010: 1) which follows a planned sequence of communications, from raising awareness to proposing solutions and a call to action (20) to create a dialogue with the public about the issue and how to deal with it (see figure 12). This is a particular theory of change based on Rose’s work with Greenpeace which may not be applicable in all cases, but the concept of campaigning as a public conversation is a useful one.

Figure 12: Rose’s campaign strategy

I do not believe every campaign needs a victim and an enemy. Targeting an enemy draws their fire and may create unnecessary battles. Attack may even strengthen the opposition to your cause. Sometimes it is much simpler to focus on the solution and its benefits, taking attention away from the problem altogether (Jackson & McKergow 2002). Big difficult problems like climate change, population growth, over-fishing and destruction of the environment may have complex solutions which can’t be solved by demonising an enemy. However, even if you choose not to identify an enemy, any skilled political actors needs to identify and be prepared for attack from any quarter, including sometimes people on your own side who may be threatened by your solution or the approach of your campaign.

Figure 13: Capabilities for practical politics

Education for practical politics needs to create the space for people to look at issues in the round and then test their hypothesis by taking action.

Figure 13 pulls together some of the core elements of education in practical politics, from the above, the campaign trainer Chandler and others, from Alexander, *Learning Power* (2006).

Create the safe space through a democratic learning community, in which people develop confidence as well as interpersonal and communication skills. This is also where people develop or clarify values and political objectives.

Three areas of knowledge which come together in action are:

1. The problems or issues you are addressing;
2. the power structures and people who make decisions about that issue;
3. strategy, tactics and techniques of advocacy campaigning, including theories of change and communication.

The abilities in the circle round the three spheres of knowledge are more important for effective politics – confidence, communications, interpersonal and analytical skills, as well as the ability to network, make contacts and build support. But above is the need to have a clear vision, values and goals to guide action. To develop this properly people need a safe space in which to question their assumptions, the evidence and arguments on all sides of an issue, otherwise political education becomes propaganda training. Every classroom should therefore be a safe space to explore all sides of an issue.

Action is at the centre, because it is the main test in politics. However much you know about the subject, it means little if you cannot bring about the change you want.

6. Promoting education for practical politics

So far I have argued that people in powerful positions get extensive training and support to make their voice heard in the intense competition to influence events, while most people don’t even know how the system works. Part of the remedy is to develop education for practical politics as a basic skill and create opportunities to learn how to have an effective say. The previous section outlined a curriculum in practical politics and gave examples from history and the present. This section outlines a strategy for making learning for democracy a central mission of education at all levels, as an exercise in practical politics.

Subjects that have moved from the margins into the mainstream include business studies, information technology, sustainable development and even science education, with varying success. In adult and further education adult literacy, numeracy, family learning and parenting education offer more examples, while IT and citizenship education or civics are relevant examples in schools. This makes the promotion of EPP itself an ideal campaign in which to practice political skills.

Some common features of these campaigns are:

1. communities of practice develop and promote the subject, often on a voluntary basis using their own resources in the face of scepticism or hostility, to create models of provision which inspire other pioneers;
2. champions and patrons emerge, who use their influence as managers, funders, academics, commentators, officials or politicians to increase provision and make the case for it;
3. practitioners working on different aspects of the subject form networks or alliances to share and develop practice, gather evidence of its benefits, build cross-party support and organise to influence policy and funding for it;
4. an agency takes the lead to host and service the alliance, marshalling of evidence that the subject meets a need and has wider social benefits, often expressed through stories, a vivid image or phrase and a few memorable facts;
5. an individual or agency seizes an opportunity to put the subject onto the political agenda: this may be a crisis, a report, an anniversary, international year, special event, curriculum review, parliamentary bill or combination of these;
6. the subject gets sufficient political support to be mainstreamed in some form;
7. an implementation phase, during which the subject may be mangled, diluted, distorted or high-jacked, but effective practitioners and institutional leaders overcome these dangers to inspire new generations of teachers and students to enable it to flourish.

This suggests a theory of change for mainstreaming education for practical politics. There are many communities of practice, mostly in the charity and community sector, but increasingly in schools and colleges. The challenge is to connect these various strands to get mainstream recognition and create a political peg to establish it.

Three sets of action could accelerate this process:

- Teachers, curriculum leaders and principals can use their discretion to create courses in EPP across the curriculum, then link up to create a Campus Compact or Democracy Project, as in the US;
- People working on community empowerment, democracy and campaign training in civil society, charities and local authorities can develop community-based political education and build links with universities;
- Persuade the Speaker, a Parliamentary Committee or independent agency to create a national commission into ‘education for democracy’ to build cross-party support for a national programme of education for practical politics accessible to all.

Join these three together and you create a movement.

**Dealing with opposition**

Education for practical politics will always be contentious and challenging, because it cannot avoid contemporary problems and power struggles. Vested interest will try to stop educators from teaching advocacy, campaigning, citizenship or political skills at any level. For this reason it is important to acknowledge and address concerns when highlighting its benefits.

The main arguments against EPP are that it is partisan and at worst indoctrination; that there is no demand for it, particularly since citizenship education in schools is often boring; and it is unnecessary, since politics needs no instruction.

Politics is by its nature partisan and competitive, as is business, sport and many other activities for which training is a recognised public good. Companies do not oppose business education even although most graduates will work for their competitors, but they welcome the difference it makes to business as a whole. Business studies often promote only one model of enterprise and ignore cooperatives, social enterprise and other forms of mutual ownership. Nevertheless, it is important that political education as a whole is pluralistic, questioning and challenging. Promoting one particular doctrine or theory of change would not equip people to deal with the complexity of contemporary politics, in which there are many different political systems and viewpoints. It would be bad pedagogy as well as bad politics to teach only one approach to politics. However, if people want to learn particular models of politics in depth, such as community organising, election campaigning or policy advocacy, they should be able to do so in a pluralistic democracy.

The strongest defence of education for practical politics is to make it an ethical and empirical discipline, committed to the Nolan principles of public life, pluralism, pragmatism and peaceful problem-solving, as outlined earlier. The strongest arguments for it are that political abilities are essential for a healthy democracy; that many political problems remain unsolved, and the present system is clearly not working. The most privileged and powerful in society have extensive access to political education, while the majority feel they have no part in the system. For democracy to work,
people need equality of influence. To deny people the opportunity to learn how the system works and how to influence decisions is to deny access to democracy.

Conclusion

In Britain the 2012 London Olympics are remembered for the enthusiastic public participation, as volunteers, contestants and spectators; for the opening ceremony’s eccentric, exuberant celebration of British life, and for the diversity of athletes who won medals in the Paralympics and Olympiad. In 2014 the Scottish independence referendum also achieved unparalleled participation, with 97% voter registration, 85% turnout and intense political debate at all levels, as well as winning promises of greater devolution of power to Scotland.

Both events sought to break out of the elite ghettos of premier league sport and politics respectively. They were based commitments to inclusivity, diversity and striving for excellence in everyone, not just the elite. The Olympics took intense, sustained political effort for ten years, starting with the bid by London’s socialist Mayor Ken Livingstone and Conservative former Olympic champion Sebastian Coe. The event was the result of numerous political decisions, about finance, building the Olympic park in East London, organising the torch relay across the country, appointing Danny Boyle to create the opening ceremony, getting the Queen to parachute into the stadium, painting gold post boxes in medal winners’ home towns, and the final parade of winners. Most of it was office politics among the organising teams, International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Mayor’s office, but the offices of three Prime Ministers, the army, Palace, press commentators, public and protesters all took part in the politics of the event. Any one of them could have undermined it, by chance, skill or determination. Contrast the Olympics with the Millennium Dome in 2000 to see how backroom politics could have messed it up. Likewise, the 2011 Alternative Vote referendum offers a salutary contrast for the Scottish referendum, showing how skilled political operators defeated reform without any compensation or compromise.

Participation in sport or politics depends largely on the encouragement and support for people to take part, by the organisers as much as contestants. Politics happens everywhere there are different interests and opinions about how things should be done. Bernard Crick dismissed the “common-tongue” idea that politics takes place in “any old castle called ‘government’” (1962: 162), but I have argued that every decision-making arena is a ‘polity’ in which different interests conflict and are resolved, whether the International Olympic Committee or a referendum on nationhood. Open, democratic political systems are relatively new and still rare in human history. Even in the West most practical politics of government takes place behind closed doors, among the parties, officials and lobbyists who know how the system works. The ‘master science’ of politics is open to all, but only a few have the opportunity to learn how to take part.

The arts of persuasion, influencing and organising are taught in business schools to help people do well in the market place, but not in ordinary schools to help people do good as part of democracy. As a result, commerce is much stronger, more productive and effective than democracy. The market offers abundant diversity, disruptive innovation and competition all the time, but in politics the main choice is between a few tarnished brands offering unbelievable promises at election times. Yet politics, like markets, never sleep. Someone is always organising to gain advantage in the ceaseless tussle between different interests, only most people are barely aware it’s happening.

This essay, like Bernard Crick’s celebrated Defence of Politics, “simply seeks to help in the task of restoring confidence in the virtues of politics as a great and civilizing human activity.” (1962: 15) I have disagreed with Crick about the scope of politics, because I see it everywhere there are conflicts of interest and differences in power, but I agree that politics is “something with a life and character of its own. Politics is not religion, ethics, law, science, history, or economics” (15). It “arises from
accepting the fact of the simultaneous existence of different groups, hence different interests and different traditions, within a territorial unit under a common rule.” (18) But it is now clearer than in Crick’s day that international rules of trade, transport, finance and communications are as much part of our domestic life as our national government, and they are determined by political processes in many different polities. Moreover, decisions by transnational corporations and groups like Greenpeace or al-Qaida are as much politics as those of national parties competing for votes, and may have more impact on how we are actually governed than any party.

Like Crick, I agree with Aristotle that politics is the ‘master science’. For me this means we cannot exclude Charter 77, Solidarność or pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong just because they are not part of open political systems. Both they and their Communist adversaries are intensely engaged in politics. It takes more political skill and courage to operate in a closed political system, so there it is even more important to learn the arts of politics appropriate to their circumstances. Likewise company employees seeking to introduce the living wage, a works council or sustainable supply chains, are engaged in politics, just as much as the boss who insists that shareholder value is the only thing that matters, or the politician who pursues similar causes in parliament. All sides are involved in a political process with social and economic consequences.

“Politics are” Crick wrote, “the market place and the price mechanism of all social demands – though there is no guarantee that a just price will be struck; and there is nothing spontaneous about politics – it depends on deliberate and continuous individual activity.” (24) The problem is, for most people the market place appears closed most of the time, or at best a bear pit behind a glass barrier. In democratic societies the majority are invited to take part at election time and largely ignored the rest of the time. But politics takes place all year round, often in circumstances more like a corporate hierarchy than the ideal of an open political system. Politics is a complex activity, which, I have argued, can be learned through a mixture of experience and study, but more experience than study, because it is indeed more like sport or business than history, where the proof is in the result.

Crick also wrote that “neither the activity nor the study [of politics] can exist apart from each other” (164) and concludes his book with the words “Only political solutions can meet whole world problems.” (288) So I will also conclude with a proposal for an activity that aims to help find better political solutions to problems.

Universities have a vital role in developing advanced skills and knowledge as well as the pursuit of truth for the common good. Universities are the dominant institutions in education, and have greater freedom that any other part of education. Politics is a discipline relevant to all subjects and all aspects of society. In a democracy, everyone needs political skills and knowledge to take part as equal citizens. Universities should therefore take a lead in making education for practical politics available to all. To ensure that this does not widen the participation gap, by training an elite who leave the majority behind, this should include a large element of service learning, in which students learn political skills and knowledge by working with disadvantaged communities to strengthen their influence in society. In this way everyone can benefit from the extension of learning for democracy through higher education.

Finally, to take this issue forward, I propose a Commission on Learning for Democracy to address four questions:

1. What knowledge and abilities do people need to take part in politics effectively?
2. Where do people learn political knowledge and abilities at present,
3. What is the current state of political knowledge?
4. By what means can political ability and understanding be developed, particularly for those who currently have least ability and confidence to take part in politics?

The Commission would draw on the work of the Speakers’ Commissions and Crick Reports, as well as international experience of education for citizenship and political education, mentioned in the previous section. It should make recommendations to government, education providers, local authorities, public service media and civil society on how best we provide learning for democracy.

Setting up such a Commission is itself a practical political project which could sow seeds for democratic politics to flourish, just as the London Olympics allowed sport to flourish among people of all ages and abilities. Like the Olympics, it will be controversial, but the legacy could be great.

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1 See for example http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-25949029