



# Political Emotions in the Classroom

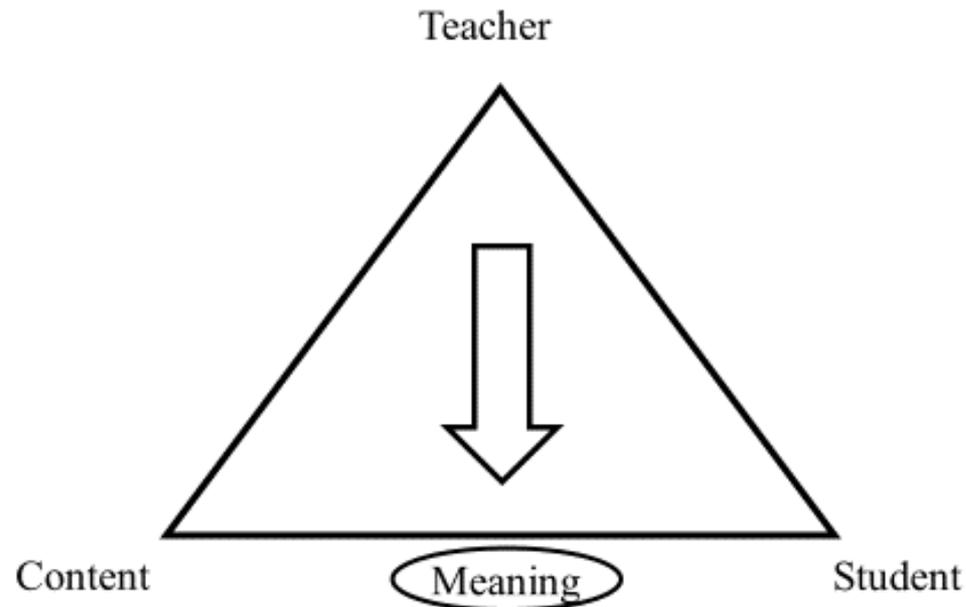
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# On the political in social science education Agonism, populism and didactics

- 1. What makes an emotion “political”?**
- 2. How are they relevant in classrooms?**
- 3. Simplification – an idea for teaching strategy**
- 4. Examples and consequences**

**I want students to feel something – to be invested in burning issues and problems that we are facing.**



after Öhman, 2014

# Emotions

World Health Organization

Health Topics ▾

Countries ▾

News

News / Detail / Global hunger continues to rise, new UN report says

## Global hunger continues to rise, new UN report

821 million people now hungry and over 2 billion children stunted, putting hunger eradication on track

11 September 2018 | News release | Rome

## The Guardian

### Just 100 companies responsible for 71% of global emissions, study says

A relatively small number of fossil fuel producers and their investors could hold the key to tackling climate change



**Emotions will be there even if I don't recognize them.**



Peter Tillberg, 1972. (*Blir du lönsam lilla vän?*)

# Emotions

**I want students to  
feel something**

**I don't want the  
classroom to be a  
therapy session**

**What kind of emotions are  
relevant in education?**

**POLITICAL EMOTIONS**

## Emotions are political if they:

- (a) revolve around the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’
- (b) relate to different visions of society.

(Tryggvason & Mårdh, 2019; cf. Ruitenbergh, 2009; Zembylas, 2018)

## Conflictual aspect in this definition

Håkansson, Östman & Van Poeck, 2018  
Öhman & Öhman, 2014

# POLITICAL EMOTIONS



**Political emotions relate to *intensity* of “us” and “them”**

**Can be directed toward myself - my own life as a being in this world with others.**

- Not always verbal**
- Not always in what we traditionally categorize as political**

(see Tryggvason, 2017).

# POLITICAL EMOTIONS

## Risk of placing emotion in a strong rationalistic framework

- **What kind of emotion am I feeling?**
- **Does it match with criteria A and B that Ásgeir Tryggvason talked about?**
- **This seems to be a political emotion – okey, then I will feel it...**



To think educationally about political emotions



# Simplification



**How can we expect students to get emotionally involved in the issue if it is always presented as a complex issue in terms “on the one hand... but on the other”**

## **The content**

- **Simplifying conflicts**
- **Simplifying complexity**

## **The students**

- **Lack of engagement**
- **Lack of emotions**



# Simplifying the **conflict**



**People**

**Planet**

**Profit**

Deepwater Horizon, 2010

# Simplifying the **conflict**



**People**

**Planet**

**Profit**

**“On the one hand.... but on the other...”**

**“Either ... or ...”**

(Simplifying the conflict)

# Simplifying the complexity



**As an**

- accident?**
- disaster?**
- crime?**

**How do we present this event to students?**

# **POLITICAL EMOTIONS**

## **An example from Sweden**

**Protests against  
Sweden Democrats**

# POLITICAL EMOTIONS



**“we are using our democratic right to not listen”**

(student in a local newspaper)

**“here, everyone can be who they are”  
“Racism? No thanks!”**

# POLITICAL EMOTIONS

”If you think that freedom of expression is the only thing that is important in a democracy, then perhaps we are undemocratic. But the way that we define democracy is that you should be able to come to your school, which should be the safest place, and you should be able to be in school without getting your own existence put into question.”

(student in local newspaper)

“I think I began at this point *to feel that politics was not something ‘out there’ but something ‘in here’* and of essence of my condition” (Adrienne Rich, as cited in Boler, 1999, pp. 114–115).

**Is it legal?**

**Is it in line with liberal democracy?**

**Is it democratic?**

**What about the educational questions?**

**What about the educational questions?**

**What can this tell us about teaching with  
and through political emotions?**

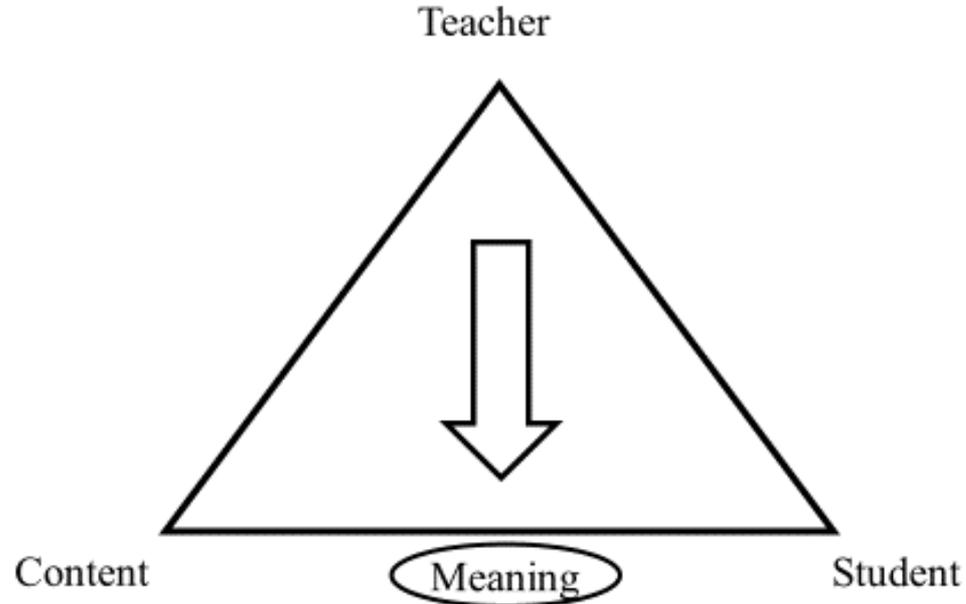
**Political emotions are perhaps something we  
should handle with care**

## Debate teams

***“You have to defend this political idea...”***

## Personal confessions

**“What do you think about migrant workers?”**



after Öhman, 2014

**Handling political emotions is not about  
“handling” the emotions,  
but about handling the teaching content.**

Thank you.

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## Further reading:

**Mouffe, C. (2005)** *On the political*. London: Routledge

**Ruitenbergh, C.W. (2009)** Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*

**Todd, S. (2011).** Educating Beyond Cultural Diversity: Redrawing the Boundaries of a Democratic Plurality. *Stud Philos Educ* 30:101–111

**Zembylas, M. (2011)** Ethnic division in Cyprus and a policy initiative on promoting peaceful coexistence. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 6(1) 53–67

# References

**Boler, M. (1999).** *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. New York, NY: Routledge

**Ruitenberg, C.W. (2009)** Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*

**Håkansson, M., Östman, L. and Van Poeck, K. (2018)** “The political tendency in Environmental and Sustainability Education” *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(1) 91-111

**Öhman, J. (2014).** Om didaktikens möjligheter – ett pragmatiskt perspektiv. *Utbildning & Demokrati. Tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik*, 23(3), 33–52.

**Öhman, J. & Öhman, M. (2013)** “Participatory Approach in Practice: An Analysis of Student Discussions about Climate Change” *Environmental Education Research*, 19 (3) 324-341

**Tryggvason, Á & Mårdh, A. (2019)** Political emotions in environmental and sustainability education. In. K. Van Poeck, L. Östman & J. Öhman, eds. *Sustainable development teaching*. New York: Routledge.

**Tryggvason, Á. (2017)** The political as presence. On agonism in citizenship education. *Philosophical Inquiry in education* 24(3), 252-265.

**Zembylas, M. (2018)** Political emotions in the Classroom. *Democracy & Education*, 26(1), 1-9.