Political Emotions in the Classroom

Ásgeir Tryggvason, PhD
Örebro University, Sweden.
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 ▼ New

ews / 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 200 million children stunted, putting hunger eradication further away

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. Ruitenberg, 2009; Zembylas, 2018)

Conflicting aspect in this definition

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

Deepwater Horizon, 2010
Simplifying the **conflict**

“On the one hand…. but on the other…”

“Either … or …”  
(Simplifying the conflict)
Simplifying the complexity

How do we present this event to students?

As an
- accident?
- disaster?
- crime?
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?”
Handling political emotions is not about “handling” the emotions, but about handling the teaching content.

after Öhman, 2014
Thank you.

Contact
asgeir.tryggvason@oru.se
Further reading:


References


