

# NERA 2024 Conference at Malmö University

Teaching as a roller coaster: encountering and embracing the unknown

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## Abstract

The changing societal context invites the teachers to rethink their way of teaching. Not only regarding the digital innovation tools, but also regarding the way they approach challenges they face in the history classroom. The last decade much research been done regarding diversity and inclusion in school and class context, hence research regarding the role and place of emotions are scarce. My research focuses on the role, place and positive lever emotion can have in heated debates and discussion in a class context, more specifically related to controversial and sensitive historical topics. Western educational system mostly focuses on cognitive and analytical skills. Hence, approaching and discussing controversial and sensitive historical topics need inherently affective skills as empathical communication, perspective taking, non-violent communication, etc. The lens through which we observe the interpersonal relationships (teacher-pupil, pupil-pupil) lays at the intersection of social sciences, psychology and history education. In my interdisciplinary research, I interviewed history teachers (N=30) regarding their beliefs and values, as well as the pedagogical and didactical methods they use when discussing controversial and sensitive topics are discussed. The interviews were coded via NVIVO based on a code tree with codes, subcodes and items. The findings are relevant to Nordic countries as they face specific and broad challenges present in the European area, for example climate change, religious conflicts, impact of current wars, economic crisis, uprising of right wing, and international link (cfr. attack in Belgium on Swedish people) between events outside Nordic countries and rest of the Western area. We found that not every teacher experiences the same topic as 'controversial or sensitive'. Moreover, it depends on the class composition, the societal/historical topic, the current/contemporary events, and the perspectives of the pupils present in class. The beliefs and values of the teachers play a significant role in the way they tackle, deal with, and approach the 'heated debate' related to controversial and sensitive topics. Stimulate and support novice teachers to open up to new 'emotional' adventure and encounters is not an easy path. The emotional pathway is an unknown and undiscovered path in Flemish secondary education, specifically, and Western education, more broadly. To understand and 'feel' the 'other', imagination and perspective taking are key concepts. In that sense, the new Flemish Competence Framework for secondary education (2019) creates a 'pedagogical room' and gives (more) 'freedom' to the teacher to experiment new ways of 'encounters' in/with differences. Even, if the affective dimension is not explicitly mentioned this 'room' creates opportunities to evolve in educational adventures. To do so, I developed a historical empathy tool including pedagogical-didactical instruments stimulating imagination, perspective taking and encounter of the unknown to help them navigate on the educational roller coaster to experience the positive effects of encounters 'in' differences. In the policy and educational proposal section of my study I formulate several advices for teachers' training programs.

**Key words:** affective dimension of learning, historical empathy, teachers' training, encountering the unknown

**Presentation type:** paper presentation