

## Exploring controversial issues through international collaboration

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Controversial topics are pivotal in the daily operations of educational institutions. However, their management often involves uncertainty and avoidance, especially in the context of formal education in schools. Research indicates that educators exhibit a degree of reluctance to engage with controversy, possibly arising from challenges in facilitating such discussions and meeting students' expectations regarding historical truths in discussions in the classroom. Nevertheless, adopting an adept approach towards controversy is essential, as emphasised by the Beutelsbach Consensus. Negotiating controversies embody a fundamental democratic principle and constitute an integral facet of democratic pedagogy. Furthermore, controversial debates serve as a barometer and a requirement for stable democracy, necessitating their incorporation within educational settings. Therefore, it becomes clear that it is necessary to look beyond national borders to understand the influence of social and historical-political factors. The exchange responds to empirical findings that point out that the controversy is not sufficiently realised in history lessons. It has been observed repeatedly that teachers generalise or omit controversial content or problems under the pretext of limited time to avoid controversy. This often occurs because of uncertainty. Therefore, the seminar and exchange aim to empower prospective teachers to deal with the controversy in history lessons.

After conducting a practice-oriented formulation of the problem, theoretical

approaches were undertaken to explore controversiality in contrast to multi-perspectivity and plurality based on empirical classroom findings. The seminar was organised between prospective history teachers from the University of Pretoria in South Africa to sensitise the students to the context-dependency of controversy. In preparation for the exchange, students from Leipzig analysed parts of the history of South Africa and created timelines of the most significant events to familiarise themselves with the country's past and present. This task sparked controversial discussions among the students during the seminars. They also analysed South African history curricula and found that the topics covered are highly controversial from a German perspective, such as the question of what makes a good leader. This shows how different cultural backgrounds can lead to different perspectives on controversy. During the seminar, the Leipzig students were allowed to prioritise their group work with South African students from the University of Pretoria based on criteria they devised collectively, such as analysing internship reports from South Africa and Germany about controversy in history lessons or investigating how controversy can be created through teaching methods. Students needed to engage in self-directed dialogue with each other before discussing the issues in a larger group.

Sensitising students to conditional factors that inhibit controversial discussions and providing opportunities for action are crucial to enable them to deal appropriately with controversy in everyday school life. In general, the professionalisation of teachers and the internationalisation of the teacher profession are of central importance in preparing future teachers appropriately to negotiate controversy in the classroom. This includes both support within the training programme and the promotion of solid partnerships and contacts outside the university, which could be provided through the Pretoria-Leipzig exchange in the later everyday life of teachers. Through a holistic approach, teachers can be empowered to accept controversy and actively utilize it to convey democratic values and educate students to become responsible, reflective citizens.