

Reflection: Exploring Teaching Controversial Topics in History between pre-service teachers from the University of Pretoria and the University of Leipzig

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My collaboration with students from the University of Pretoria in South Africa and Leipzig University in Germany has been a truly enriching experience. Our group focused on exploring how to teach about the Holocaust and Apartheid in history classrooms, tackling the challenges of addressing sensitive and controversial topics.

The German students approached the Holocaust with a deep sense of responsibility, emphasising the importance of contextualizing the historical events within the country's complex political and social landscape. They discussed the need to address the ongoing legacies of the Holocaust and promote critical thinking about racism and discrimination. In contrast, the South African students brought a unique perspective on teaching Apartheid, highlighting the importance of decolonizing the curriculum and centring marginalised voices.

Through our discussions, I have learned about the specific challenges that teachers face in both countries when teaching controversial issues. The German students shared their experiences with confronting denialism and neo-Nazism, while the South African students discussed the ongoing struggles for justice and equality. I was struck by similarities in how both groups approached the topics, emphasising the importance of empathy, critical thinking and inclusivity.

One specific issue that stood out was the use of primary sources in teaching the Holocaust. The German students introduced me to the concept of 'authentic historical sites', which involves using original artefacts and documents to humanize the victims and convey the magnitude of the tragedy. In contrast, the South African students emphasized the importance of oral histories and personal narratives in teaching about apartheid.

It is safe to conclude my reflection by indicating that I have learned that effective teaching requires creating safe and inclusive learning environment, using diverse sources and perspectives and encouraging critical thinking and empathy. It requires understanding

of the complexities of teaching controversial issues and the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.