

Preservice teachers' voices from the University of Leipzig in Germany

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The opportunity for communicative exchange with students from South Africa regarding the theme of controversy in history education was highly valuable. Particularly noteworthy was that the South African students were in their examination phase leading up to our joint Zoom meeting. We appreciate that, despite this, they took the time to engage in this conversation, mutually exploring controversial topics within the context of education. While preparation for the meeting and initial communication via WhatsApp varied in intensity and therefore led to some uncertainties regarding the extent of prearranged content, we finally engaged in lively and profound exchanges during the main Zoom meeting that brought us together.

Within smaller groups, we discussed a specific question provided beforehand and argued about differences and similarities concerning teacher education, school systems, and political issues. Building on our prior knowledge of South African history, we received intriguing questions that, although deviating slightly from the primary task, were important to discuss. Indeed, the meeting offered a great opportunity to gain insights into the realities of a country's controversial topics within schools.

Simultaneously, it became evident that the time allocated was insufficient to delve deeply into all possible topics. Thus, it would have been preferable to expand the project to allow for more frequent and/or longer exchanges, facilitating comprehensive understanding and exploration. In our small group, we witnessed a willingness to ask questions and observed a growing number of engaging inquiries. Major themes included historical-political topics such as the apartheid system and the Nazi regime, as issues that have left indelible marks on both countries and remain primary subjects in history education.

Despite differing national histories, we identified similar critical perceptions regarding controversial themes in schools and observed comparable influences. The danger of neglecting important and intricate historical issues was apparent to us on various levels.

It was heartening to recognize that both German and South African students attributed significant importance to historical inquiry and saw clear motivational connections within their studies. In so doing, we established an awareness of historical repetition and engaging with specific topics, even if they may lead to discomfort in educational settings, which emerged as crucial objectives for all participants.

Following the group discussion, it was extremely enlightening to learn about the insights from other groups, revealing overlaps and introducing new perspectives. These diverse and stimulating insights would undoubtedly have led to further intriguing questions and discussions in a larger setting if we were given more processing time. Overall, the project proved enriching on both personal and academic levels, demonstrating significant potential for informative and engaging exchanges, particularly concerning educational controversies.

It was heartening to observe that despite our diverse nationalities, there were similarities in motivation and interest among us students, aiming to engage more intensively with controversies in education and not shying away from addressing and processing important topics. A more intensive collaborative engagement through multiple meetings aimed at deepening knowledge and reducing inhibitions would undoubtedly benefit all involved parties.