

Preparatory documents

Exploring teachers' aims, understandings and pedagogical practice

(This is an excerpt from a detailed analytical report from a survey of teachers in the United Kingdom more than a decade ago on their experience in teaching the Holocaust. For more: <https://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-Master-Document-19-October-2009- HIMONIDES .pdf>)

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Conclusions from the survey. Is it the same for you?

4. One of the most commonly reported challenges to teaching about the Holocaust was managing limited curriculum time. As a consequence, some teachers appear to find it difficult to know how to decide what content they should include.

5. Analysis of the topics that teachers report including in their teaching tentatively suggests that, rather than explore victims' responses to persecution and genocide, teachers are more likely to focus on perpetrator-oriented narratives. Two content areas appear to dominate teachers' coverage of the Holocaust: the period of persecution in the 1930s and a focus on Auschwitz-Birkenau. Other key aspects of the Holocaust, including the pre-war lives of Jewish people and important stages in the development of genocide (for example, the Einsatzgruppen, Wannsee Conference and Operation Reinhard) appear to receive less attention.

8. 85.1% (n887) of those who completed the survey and who had experience of teaching in this area believe that it is right that the Holocaust is a compulsory part of the secondary school history curriculum. **However, many teachers found it difficult to articulate the distinct historical significance of the Holocaust. More regularly, the Holocaust was framed by teachers in terms of 'universal lessons,' often divorced from any specific historical context.** Irrespective of subject background, in both the survey and follow-up interviews, teachers were more likely to describe their practice when approaching the Holocaust in terms of broad, overarching objectives such as tackling racism or encouraging respect for diversity than to do so with reference to distinct, subject-specific teaching aims. Making a study of the Holocaust 'relevant' in the context of twenty-first century classrooms, appeared, for many teachers, to be a key concern.

9. 94.7% (n1,002) of all teachers who responded to the survey and who had experience in this area considered that it would always be important to teach about the Holocaust. However, 41.3% (n426) said that they believed it was difficult to do so effectively. In addition to the challenge of organising content within limited curriculum time, other reported difficulties include: managing effective cross-curricular co-operation, dealing with emotional content and responding to some students' misunderstandings and prejudice.

Central issues of the discussion are:

1. What do you think is the most difficult for students to study about the Holocaust?
 2. What are the most recurring questions that students ask?
 3. What is your most successful way to draw students' emotional attention to Holocaust lessons?
 4. Summarize your most interesting (successful) experience in teaching Holocaust topics.
5. Sensitivity questions.

