

IOE national research into pupils' thinking about the Holocaust

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A new research project promises to have a significant impact not only on our teaching about the Holocaust but also on our understanding of how young people make sense of the past. Surveying up to 10,000 secondary students across the country and conducting a range of thematic and case studies in schools, the findings will be of international importance, the first time a research project on Holocaust education on this scale has been attempted anywhere in the world.

Why does research-informed practice matter?

Basing its work directly on research allows the IOE to be uniquely responsive to the actual issues, challenges and opportunities faced by teachers and students in the classroom. Following national research into teachers' experience of and attitudes to Holocaust education, the IOE established the world's first research-informed pathway of professional development to meet teachers' needs at all stages of their careers, from ITE days, through free CPD programmes for in-service teachers, to a Masterslevel course and the establishment of Beacon Schools.¹ Funders the Pears Foundation and the Department for Education recognise that it is essential to further develop and enrich this work by listening to students themselves, through large-

scale and in-depth research into young people's thinking.

What is the aim of this research?

The principal aim of this new phase of research is to explore secondary school students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. However, we are also interested in examining how knowledge/ understanding is related to other issues, such as students' attitudes towards out-groups or their beliefs in a 'just world'. Additionally, the researchers want to examine attitudes to learning about the Holocaust and have sought to frame this by investigating students' attitudes towards the purpose of education more generally.

Why is this research being done?

Despite a huge amount of teaching about the Holocaust – not only in the UK but in schools, museums, and memorials around the world – there still has been no large scale attempt to explore what young people actually make of this complex and emotionally-challenging subject; how they learn; or what progression might look like. There is a dearth of research that examines students' consciousness of the Holocaust before they are formally taught about it, and what they know and

understand about the Holocaust after they learn about it in school.

Given the prominence of the Holocaust in National Curriculum history (and that it is often taught in other subjects such as religious education and citizenship), and given that the IOE research with teachers highlighted a diversity of approaches to Holocaust education, it is essential that students' perceptions in this area are explored.² This will improve the evidential base for developing and disseminating careful, thoughtful and age-appropriate teaching about the Holocaust, as well as having important implications for the wider teaching of history and other subjects.

How is the research being carried out?

There are two major strands to the research: a large scale survey to be completed by up to 10,000 secondary school students from across England, and a series of in depth case studies and thematic studies. The survey includes a number of questions to measure students' knowledge about the Holocaust, as well as a number of scales (some pre-existing, and some developed by the IOE research team) to tap into students' attitudes. The thematic and case studies collectively will provide an essential qualitative dimension to the research. Techniques

such as classroom based observations and interviews will explore the dynamic and multifaceted ways in which students' knowledge and understanding about the Holocaust are formed.

How will the results be used to inform classroom practice?

The findings of this research will be widely disseminated to teachers, academics and policy makers. The findings will tell us what students know about the Holocaust, the prevalent sources of information that inform young people's thinking, and will reveal patterns in their knowledge, for example, common preconceptions, myths, or areas of confusion and inaccuracy. The research will give teachers crucial insight into students' Holocaust consciousness, and enable them to anticipate (and prepare for) potential questions, attitudes and misconceptions held by students.

The findings will allow the IOE's teaching team to build upon the CPD (Figure 1), teaching and learning materials that they already offer free of charge to teachers across the country, and to develop new resources and approaches from a hitherto unprecedented evidential base, empirical evidence that will provide a far richer understanding of what students think about the Holocaust, their questions, and how they make sense and meaning of this complex past.

What stage is the research at?

The survey was launched in November 2013, following extensive piloting work spanning several months. The pilot studies principally focused on survey development, and ensuring that the subscales we used were reliable. The pilot studies also provided the opportunity to assess data collection techniques, and highlighted the suitability of using an online questionnaire wherever possible. The survey will be completed by students until July 2014. A number of exploratory focus groups have already taken place alongside an extended period of classroom observation in the summer term 2013. The main thematic and case studies will take place from January 2014 until December 2014,

Figure 1: The IOE's research-informed CPD, offered free of charge to teachers across the country

Day 1 Workshops

Authentic Encounters: classroom approaches

How can we move young people without shocking or traumatising them?

How can we capture pupils' interest in the Holocaust?

Through the interrogation of an authentic artefact, teachers encounter Leon Greenman, an Englishman deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with his wife and child. Leon's story provides a clear thread through all the programme's lesson materials.

Pre-war life

How is it possible to understand the significance of genocide if we do not appreciate what was lost?

Challenging and engaging ideas for exploring the vibrancy and diversity of European Jewish communities on the eve of the Holocaust.

Resistance and resilience

Why didn't people fight back?

This pressing question that so many young people ask their teachers is fully explored. Placing the actions of people in the past firmly within the context of their time, this workshop models how pupils' concepts of historical empathy can be developed, while helping them to understand why historical interpretations change over time.

Interactive timeline – a historical overview

This practical classroom activity provides a clear historical overview without oversimplifying complex events.

Using a combination of individual case studies and Nazi decrees to see the impact of state policy on individual men, women and children, teachers create an interactive timeline that interweaves the narratives of multiple victim groups.

An optional second day of workshops explores the roles of perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers, as well as the continuing significance of the Holocaust.

Participation in our CPD entitles you to apply for a free place on our 30 credit online MA module, 'The Holocaust in the Curriculum'.

and will respond to emergent themes from the survey data as well as issues identified through an extensive review of the literature on Holocaust education. We hope to start releasing reports of the findings in early 2015.

How can my school get involved?

If you would like further information about the research and/or would be interested in your school taking part, please contact the Research Project Manager, Chitro Ghose: c.ghose@ioe.ac.uk

If you wish to book a free place on the IOE's professional development in Holocaust education, apply for a

fully-funded place on our Masters module, or apply for your school to become an IOE Beacon School in Holocaust Education, then visit our website at www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust.

Dr Rebecca Hale is a member of the Institute of Education's (IOE) research team exploring young people's understanding about the Holocaust.

REFERENCES

- Pettigrew, A., Foster, S., Howson, J., Salmons, P. (2009) Teaching about the Holocaust in English Schools. An empirical study of national trends, perspectives and practices, London: Centre for Holocaust Education, Institute of Education, University of London. For information about the IOE's teacher development programmes, free educational materials, and the IOE Beacon School in Holocaust Education, please visit www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust.
- Pettigrew, A., et al, op cit.