

The Institute of Education's Holocaust Education Development Programme (HEDP)



In a **Nutshell**

Why has the Institute of Education in London set up their 'Holocaust Education Development Programme': isn't there already an awful lot of attention given to the Holocaust in schools?

It is true that the Holocaust has become 'probably the most talked about and oft-represented event of the twentieth century' and that it is a compulsory topic at Key Stage 3.¹ Being 'well known' and being 'well understood' are different things, however: the IOE's programme was set up in response to concerns that popular attention was not always translated into effective teaching practice in schools.

So, what is new about the IOE's approach?

A distinguishing feature of the programme is the extent to which it is directly research informed. In April 2007, Pears Foundation – a UK based charitable foundation – and the DCSF (DfE), announced that they would jointly commit to a total of £1.5 million to provide professional development support for teachers who teach about the Holocaust in England's secondary schools. It was considered vital to first find out exactly what was already going on in schools and an early priority was to conduct a detailed and extensive investigation of teachers' perspectives, experience and expertise.

Who did the HEDP team talk to and what did they ask?

Between November 2008 and April 2009 over 2000 teachers responded to a 54-question, online survey and 68 teachers at 24 schools took part in follow-up small group interviews. Teachers from a representative range of backgrounds, experiences and school types participated. The survey was open to teachers from any school subject, however, during interview, the main focus was teachers of history. Teachers were asked about a range of issues including: understandings of the Holocaust, teaching aims and pedagogical choices, previous professional training and support, and whether or not they encountered any particular challenges when teaching about the Holocaust.

What did the research reveal?

The IOE research report is available at www.hedp.org.uk. It revealed that, although there was enormous support for and commitment to teaching about the Holocaust, very few teachers had received any professional support or prior training in this area. While some teachers demonstrated detailed specialist subject knowledge and understanding, for many others knowledge was often drawn largely from popular rather than academic sources. The most commonly reported challenge among teachers was managing limited curriculum time and many declared that they found it difficult to know how to judge what content to include. Teachers wanted to be able to address topic complexity with

students but also to achieve coherence and they were not always at all sure about how to achieve this aim. This challenge appeared to be exacerbated where teachers were unclear why the Holocaust was part of the curriculum and what they hoped to achieve when teaching the subject.

Why might any of that matter?

Selecting content for any time-bounded unit of study always involves decisions about what to include and leave out, however, historians and specialist educators in this field could interpret the IOE research findings with concern. For example, a number of teachers appeared to focus on perpetrator-oriented narratives rather than explore victims' responses to persecution and genocide. The pre-war lives and post-war responses of Jewish people and communities were regularly neglected dimensions of classroom study, yet it is arguable that it is impossible for students to understand the devastating impact of the Holocaust unless they have an awareness of what was lost and destroyed.

And so what is the IOE going to do about it?

The full research findings have been interpreted by a team of history teacher educators and specialist Holocaust educators and used to design a five-part CPD programme. This includes two full days of workshop activities supported by preparation, interim and reflection materials accessed through a web-based virtual learning environment (or VLE).

Not all teachers can or want to become Holocaust specialists, of course, but this CPD programme provides opportunities for all teachers to clarify subject knowledge and access the latest historical and pedagogical developments in this field. Hands-on activities focus on airing and challenging misconceptions and provide a clear, but nuanced, understanding of historical events. Through developing specialist knowledge, providing high quality teaching and learning resources, and by modelling age-appropriate activities, the programme encourages teachers to consider new approaches and content. The programme also fosters reflection on topic inclusion and on developing a coherent course of study within curriculum time constraints.

How could I get involved?

If you are teaching in a state-maintained secondary school in England then your CPD place is already paid for. The CPD will be held in a town near you at one of various venues across the country. Places are also provided at a heavily subsidised rate for teachers from independent schools. Full details including dates, content, and venues are provided at www.hedp.org.uk.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Cole, T (2000) *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler; How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold*. London: Routledge, p3.