



Received: 14 December 2016
Accepted: 12 March 2017

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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

How they teach the Holocaust in Jewish day schools

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Abstract: Though Holocaust education is of critical importance in the world of Jewish Day Schools, little research has been conducted about it. The purpose of this paper is to answer some critical questions about how they teach the Holocaust in Jewish Day Schools—the who, what, when, where, how, and why questions. Additionally, comparisons are made between how the Holocaust is taught in America’s public schools versus Jewish Day Schools.

Subjects: Social Sciences; Education - Social Sciences; Educational Research

Keywords: Holocaust education; education; Jewish; public schools

1. Introduction

... the more serious failure ... is the omission of the history of anti-Semitism—especially its roots in Christian doctrine—as necessary background to the murder of the European Jews. (Lucy Dawidowicz in *How They Teach the Holocaust*)

Few subjects are as critical to a Jewish school education as the Holocaust. Only with a meaningful Holocaust education can we be certain that memory of the Holocaust is kept alive for future generations; only with a meaningful Holocaust education can Jewish students be armed with the information necessary to combat Holocaust revisionism/denial, anti-Semitism, and the oftentimes intendant anti-Zionism; and only with a meaningful Holocaust education can students gain an understanding of their people’s history, and thereby a better understanding of their own identities. Yet, in spite of its seminal importance, little research has been conducted about Holocaust education within the world of Jewish Day Schools. This paper represents a first step in answering basic questions about

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Jeffrey Alan Ellison has been involved in public and private education for the past 30 years. For the last 24 years he has served as a humanities teacher at the Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School in Chicago. In 2004, he received his doctoral degree from Florida Atlantic University in the area of Holocaust education and since that time he has published several articles in academic journals concerning the Holocaust and Holocaust education. Most recently, he became the proud grandfather of a beautiful baby girl named Lyla Shay.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Few topics are as critical to a Jewish Day School education as the teaching of the Holocaust. However, little research has conducted about even the most basic questions—who, what, when, where, how, and why. One purpose of this article is to provide answers to these basic questions. A second purpose of this article is to compare and contrast how the Holocaust is taught in Jewish Day Schools versus American public schools. Based upon the findings of this study, though there are important similarities, the differences in rationale for teaching the Holocaust raise important questions about how the Holocaust will be taught in the future. If the universalist rationale becomes the dominant position, it is possible that the real historiography of the Holocaust will become a subject taught by Jews to Jews only within the context of Jewish Day Schools.

this critical yet often times neglected topic. Additionally, comparisons will be made between how the Holocaust is taught in Jewish Day Schools and America's public schools.

2. History of Holocaust education

Contrary to popular belief, silence about the Holocaust was not absolute in the decades immediately following World War II. In 1946, there was extensive newspaper and radio coverage of the Nuremberg Trials. During the 50s, Holocaust survivors told their stories on such popular television shows as "This is Your Life" and "Queen for a Day." In 1960, Elie Wiesel's autobiographical classic *Night* first appeared, while Raul Hilberg's seminal work *The Destruction of European Jewry* was first published in 1961. Other books such as the *Wall, Mila 18*, and *Exodus* and films such as the "the Diary of Anne Frank" and "Judgement in Nuremberg" were popular and critical successes.

The extensive media coverage of the Eichmann Trial in 1961 signified an important shift in popular understanding of the Holocaust. According to Lipstadt (2011), it was not the facts about the Holocaust that changed with the Eichmann Trial, rather it was people's hearing of the facts.

... as a result of the trial, the story of the Holocaust, though it had previously been told, discussed, and commemorated, was heard *anew*, in a profoundly different way ... The *telling* may not have been entirely new, but the *hearing* was. (p. 193)

The trial served to deepen people's consciousness of the Holocaust and, as a result of the trial, the word "Holocaust" became part of the American lexicon.

Though the Eichmann Trial was important in raising consciousness about the Holocaust, the decades of the 1970s and 80s demarcate the time period when awareness of the Holocaust expanded and attained special prominence within American culture. It was in the 1970s that universities first offered classes devoted solely to the Holocaust. The television series "the Holocaust" garnered one of the largest audiences in television history. In 1977-78, a national controversy erupted over the Neo-Nazi's planned March in Skokie, focusing even more attention on the Holocaust. Perhaps most important, in 1979, in part, to placate the Jewish community over a controversial arms deal with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the Carter administration formulated plans to build a national museum on the national mall dedicated to the Holocaust. As stated by Peter Novick (1999):

By the 1970s and 1980s the Holocaust had become a shocking, massive, and distinctive *thing*: clearly marked off, qualitatively and quantitatively, from other Nazi atrocities and from previous Jewish persecutions, singular in its scope, its symbolism, and its world-historical significance. (p. 19)

The year 1993 probably represents the zenith of public interest in the Holocaust. That year, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened its doors and the film "Schindler's List" premiered. The film won the Oscar for best picture and Steven Spielberg the Oscar for best director. In the aftermath of the film's success, Spielberg offered free copies of the film to any schools wishing to use it for educational purposes. Proceeds from the film were used to videotape Holocaust survivors from around the world through a program entitled, "Survivors of the Shoah." With heightened public interest, entire sections of bookstores, such as Borders and Barnes and Nobles, were devoted to Holocaust historiography and to the memoirs of survivors and victims. Holocaust memorials and museums sprang up around the United States. So many were built that, today, it might take weeks or possibly months to take a grand tour all the Holocaust museums and memorials which criss-cross the United States, north to south and east to west. The selling of the Holocaust had become big business.

With growing fascination about the Holocaust in popular culture and universities, special interest groups joined forces with politicians and educators to push for the Holocaust to be included the curricula of America's public schools. The push grew even more intense as Gallup surveys suggested an ignorance about the subject among America's youth. However, there was a problem in teaching this

subject to younger students. The vast majority of materials published up to that point in time were more suitable for college students and scholars than younger students.

3. Holocaust education research

Thus, in its earliest phase, Holocaust education research focused its attention on creating age appropriate resources for America's school children. Newly formed Holocaust Commissions, Boards of Education, Universities, Museums, and non-profit organizations, such as Facing History and Ourselves, created and oftentimes competed with each other to produce the most readable, comprehensive, and age appropriate Holocaust curricula guides. For a time, production of Holocaust guides became a highly lucrative cottage industry whereby organizations developed guides, sold them, and then charged schools or districts in training teachers how to use them. The competitive zeal became so intense that some organizations even created Holocaust guides for children as young as fourth grade, which in turn sparked debates among scholars about how young was too young to learn about the Holocaust, e.g. the debate between Harriet Sepinwall and Samuel Tottens. When the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) opened its doors in 1993, some believed that the Museum might create and then distribute a definitive national Holocaust curriculum for schools. However, this was not to be. Though the Museum created resources and guidelines, they never created a national curricula. Since education falls under the jurisdiction of states rather than the Federal Government and since the Museum receives federal funding, to create such a curricula might well have exceeded the Museum's mandate.

Once Holocaust education became firmly embedded in the curricula of schools across the United States, aided in no small measure by an increasing number of state legislatures which voted to require Holocaust education, the next phase of Holocaust research ensued. Researchers shifted their attention from creating the ideal curricula guides to an even larger question: how historically accurate were the curricular guides and, more important, how was the Holocaust actually being taught in American schools. In short, attention shifted from "what should be" to "what is." In her 1990 article entitled "How They Teach the Holocaust," Lucy Dawidowicz was prescient in attempting to answer some of these broader questions. Dawidowicz surveyed and critiqued many of the Holocaust materials used in public schools. She found many of the materials to be fraught with factual and conceptual errors. She found that 15 of the 25 curricula never mentioned that anti-semitism had a history that predated Hitler (p. 26). According to Dawidowicz,

Omitting all references to Christian anti-semitism is one way some curricula avoid the sensitivities of the subject. The more acceptable and pedagogic strategy is to generalize the highly particular nature and history of anti-semitism by subsuming it under general rubrics like scapegoating, prejudice, and bigotry. (p. 28)

In her article, Dawidowicz concluded that a major problem in researching Holocaust education is the decentralized nature of education. Each state, each school, indeed, each teacher had the ability to teach the Holocaust in different ways, depending, to some extent, on state and local educational guidelines and practices along with the needs of the community, making it exceedingly difficult to determine the state of Holocaust education in America's schools.

Beginning around 2000, some researchers tried to confront the issue raised by Dawidowicz by analyzing how the Holocaust was being taught in different states and within different school systems. State-wide studies about Holocaust education were conducted in New Jersey, Indiana, and Illinois. The shifting focus on the "what is" question culminated in the United States.

Holocaust Memorial Museum's national study about Holocaust education for the 2003–04 school-year. (More will be said about this study later in the paper.) Though highly instructive and important, a major problem with all these studies, including the one conducted by the Museum, was that researchers relied on surveys as the preferred methodology. Classroom visitations were rare, leaving

open the question whether there was a direct correlation between teacher survey responses and actual classroom practices.

The most current phase of Holocaust education research in America's public schools will be even problematic than research conducted in previous decades. No longer is it just the problem of decentralization that confronts researchers, now it a shifting paradigm. From the 1970s until the early 2000s, the focus in education and research was solely on the teaching the Holocaust. However, mirroring changing perceptions about genocide at the university level and popular culture, a new paradigm has taken hold. According to this paradigm, the Holocaust is no longer viewed as a unique and isolated event, rather, it is one of multiple genocides that have occurred throughout human history, particularly in the context of 20th century. Each group who suffered from genocide or genocidal acts began to ask "why just the Holocaust, why not genocides that victimized us" and museums and education have responded to their cries.

In schools and museums the Holocaust has been subsumed under the topic of genocide. It is now common for Holocaust Museums to include exhibits or films about other genocides, including Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur as part of their presentations. The language of the more recent legislative mandates about educational standards reflect this shifting paradigm for schools. In the 1990s, the majority of legislative mandates and standards passed by Boards of Education required that educators focus solely on teaching about the Holocaust. However, an examination of mandates and guidelines passed during the last five years reveals a change in focus and language. Four states including Maryland, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois either expanded the educational language of their mandates or created new mandates. Three of the four states, Maryland, Kentucky, and Illinois, now require not just the teaching of the Holocaust, but other genocides as well. (<http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/states/>). Since this shift in paradigm is relatively recent, it may well be too early to determine its impact upon the current state of Holocaust education. As was the case with Holocaust in its infancy, one problem with the new paradigm is the availability of age appropriate materials to teach about the various genocides that have taken place in human history. In all probability, the cycle will begin anew whereby organizations race to develop resources to teach about genocide that are age appropriate and then offer, for a fee (of course) to train teachers in the new curricula. Unfortunately, the net effect of the paradigm shift upon Holocaust education is that Donnelly's statement "... there has been an absence of reliable nationwide information on how the Holocaust is actually taught in U.S. schools" (2006, p. 51) may be more true today than ever before.

Scarcer than research about how the Holocaust is taught in America's public schools is research about how the Holocaust is taught within America's private schools, whether parochial or secular. There has yet to be a study of how the Holocaust is taught at private schools such as Boston's Latin School or Choate or Andover to determine if there are differences between how the Holocaust is taught in these settings rather than public schools. Moreover, there has yet to be a study of how the Holocaust is taught in Catholic or Protestant schools. Perhaps most surprising, the question as to how the Holocaust is taught in Jewish Day Schools has been virtually neglected. To date, only one study on Jewish schools has been conducted on teaching practices within the world of Jewish Day Schools, and this dissertation had a narrow focus, i.e. Holocaust education in orthodox schools in New York (Kass, 2006). A second study was conducted by the Berman Center for Research and Education in Jewish Education (2006), but this study did not examine the current state of Holocaust education in Jewish schools. Rather the authors offered recommendations for best practices in Holocaust education. Again, the focus was on "what should be," rather than "what is." This study represents an initial attempt to answer the basic who, what, when, where, and why questions about Holocaust education in America's Jewish Day Schools.

4. Methodology

For purposes of this study, a new survey was created to reflect the specific needs and demands of teachers in private Jewish Day Schools. This survey was based upon one created by this author in the analysis of Holocaust education within Illinois' public high schools. In 2009–2010, this survey was

sent to 163 Jewish Day Schools across the United States via Zoomerang. It was directed to the Head of the School who was asked to distribute the survey to any and all teachers who teach about the Holocaust in their classrooms. The list of surveyed schools was compiled using the RAVSAK membership directory along with the Jewish Directory Day School site (<http://www.jewishdayschools.net/>). There were a total of 43 responses to the online survey. Eleven of the schools indicated that they were not full time Day schools, meaning that the total of schools who responded was 32, roughly a 20 percent response rate. Three of these then responded that they did not teach a unit of study on the Holocaust so the total number of responses was 29 schools. Given the low response rate, no claim is made in this study as to statistical validity, however, the initial results offer some tantalizing insights about Jewish Holocaust education and the differences between how the Holocaust is taught in public schools versus Jewish Day Schools.

5. Findings

5.1. *Who teaches the Holocaust in Jewish schools*

The greatest number of respondents were older teachers. Fifty nine percent were aged 51+ and 24% were aged 31–50. The majority of respondents were female (66%), and born in America (76%), while 17% of the respondents were born in Israel. The greatest number of respondents would be classified as veteran teachers: 59% had 16+ years of experience and 21% had between 11–15 years of experience. As would be expected, a high percentage of respondents classified themselves as Jews (86%), the majority identified with the Orthodox tradition (36%). However, there were a significant number of reform and conservative respondents, 24% and 20%, respectively. Though the majority of responding schools were classified by respondents as transdenominational, the majority of teachers who teach about the Holocaust, classified themselves as orthodox, which makes sense, given that the majority of the teaching about the Holocaust takes place within Jewish studies departments (see *What is being taught about the Holocaust*).

Respondents to the survey would be classified as highly educated: 45% have either an MA degree or a PhD degree. The greatest number of teachers who responded to the survey identified Jewish studies as their field of specialization. Next in frequency were respondents who identified history as their field of specialization. Twenty-one percent identified social studies as their field of specialization, while 17% identified literature as their field of specialization. As is commonly the case in private schools, the majority of responding teachers in Jewish Day Schools (55%) were not certified to teach in their state. Though the majority of respondents tended to be older teachers, the majority only had been teaching the Holocaust for a shorter period of time, 1–5 years (41%). However, 31% of the respondents reported teaching the Holocaust between 11–20 years. In other words, teachers were either newer to Holocaust education or had taught it for a long time.

Responding teachers indicated that they learned about the Holocaust in undergraduate school. 72% of the respondents in this study reported taking 1–2 classes in which they studied the Holocaust, while 24% reported taking 3–6 classes. Fewer teachers learned about it in graduate school (41%). However, postgraduate seminars were an important source of knowledge. Thirty-eight percent reported taking graduate seminars through Facing History and Ourselves, 14% took seminars through the United States Holocaust Museum; others reported that they took seminars at Yad Vashem or the Association of Holocaust Organizations. Though academic training in the Holocaust was deemed important, it was not the most important source of knowledge.

The single most important source of knowledge would be classified as informal education. When asked about the most important sources of knowledge of the Holocaust, teachers reported, from most important to least important: independent reading, informal learning, film or media, travels abroad, conferences or seminars, family history, formal professional development, and only last, academic undergraduate or graduate course work. In other words, though exposed to the Holocaust in formal academic settings, teachers identified independent study as their primary source of knowledge about the Holocaust. The importance of informal education in learning about the Holocaust is

reinforced by the number of books teachers reported reading beyond classroom materials: 55% reported reading 1–3 books on the Holocaust in the last year, while 45% reported reading more than 4 books on the Holocaust in the last year.

Viewed as a whole, teachers in Jewish schools feel academically prepared to teach the Holocaust. 86% of the respondents in this study felt academically prepared to teach a unit of study on the Holocaust. In spite of their overwhelming confidence in teaching about the Holocaust, 55% of respondents said that they would teach the Holocaust to an even greater extent if they had additional training.

5.2. What is being taught about the Holocaust?

Whether in middle or secondary school, the Holocaust falls largely within the province of Jewish Studies Departments. The fact that the Holocaust is taught within Jewish studies departments helps to explain the amount of time devoted to the topic and the emphasis placed upon it. Fifty-nine percent of teachers in Jewish Day Schools spend more than one month on the topic and 14% spend more than 3 weeks on the topic. It also helps to explain that 93% of respondents said that they teach the Holocaust as a completely independent unit, not embedded into a larger or broader unit.

A Jewish-centric emphasis is evident in how teachers approach the causes of the Holocaust. The single most frequently cited cause of the Holocaust in Jewish Day Schools was antisemitism. Political instability of the Weimar Republic, intolerance, prejudice and hate, Hitler and the Nazi Party ranked second and they were cited with approximately equal frequency. The third most frequently cited cause was World War I and the Treaty of Versailles.

In terms of topics covered, a Jewish centric focus again is evident (from most frequently cited to less frequently cited): anti-Jewish laws (86%), life in the ghettos (86%), Jewish life pre-Holocaust (82%), the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (82%), Auschwitz (79%), creation of the ghettos (79%), Kristallnacht (79%), the Final Solution and death camps (75%), and boycotts and book burnings (75%). All of these topics would be considered central to understanding the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective. Perhaps the only exception to this particularly Jewish focus was an emphasis placed on the Righteous Gentiles (82%).

5.3. When the Holocaust is taught

According to the respondents, the most prevalent time for teaching the Holocaust in Jewish Day Schools is in middle school, particularly seventh and eighth grades. The fact that the subject is emphasized so much in middle school makes sense when one considers the relative freedom middle school teachers have in choosing what to teach versus that of secondary school teachers, where the curriculum tends to be more structured and circumscribed. However, according to respondents, teachers in Jewish Day Schools return to the subject in 11th and 12th grade. In other words, once high school students have completed the majority of their requirements in 9th and 10th, time is again allotted for them to return to the subject through elective courses, where they can explore the subject in greater depth and complexity than they did in middle school. In Jewish Day Schools, the Holocaust is most frequently taught within Jewish elective courses, with names such as Jewish History, Modern Jewish History, the Holocaust and Modern Middle East History, or it is taught as a separate elective, with titles such as, Holocaust Imagery, the Holocaust and Human Behavior, and Seminar.

Respondents indicated that the subject is generally taught in the spring (48%), but a significant percentage also teaches it in the winter (34%). When taught in the spring, it is most often taught in conjunction with the Israeli Day of Remembrance, Yom HaShoah, rather than the American counterpart, Days of Remembrance.

5.4. Where the Holocaust is taught

Respondents to the survey represented all regions of the country: East coast, West coast, the South and North. The majority of respondents taught in three states: California (16%), Florida (16%), and New York (12%). The dominance of these states reflects the uneven distribution of Jewish populations across the United States. The greatest number of respondents came from smaller schools with student populations between 1–250 students (38%), followed by medium-sized schools with student populations between 251–500 (34%). The greatest number of respondents worked in schools with a transdenominational student body (28%), but this was closely followed by orthodox schools (25%). The majority of respondents worked at schools with relatively high tuition costs, \$7,001–15,000 (56%), and \$15,000+ (38%). Eighty-one percent of the respondents indicated that classes were not separated on the basis of gender. Based upon the high percentage of non-separated classes, even the majority of responding orthodox schools would probably be classified as modern orthodox rather than traditional orthodox schools.

Ninety-one percent of the schools reported that a unit of study on the Holocaust was taught in their schools. When taught, respondents most frequently indicated that it was taught in 1–2 classes (48%), but a significant number of respondents said it was taught in 3–5 classes (45%), 7% indicated it was taught in more than 7 classes. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that a unit of study on the Holocaust was required for graduation.

5.5. How the Holocaust is taught

5.5.1. Materials

The greatest number of respondents used films/videos and primary sources in teaching about the Holocaust (93%). Next most commonly used were visits by survivors (83%), followed by the use of survivor literature (79%), internet websites (72%) secondary texts/readings (72%) and curricular guides (62%). A wide range of films were mentioned, but “Schindler’s List” and some version of the “The Diary of Anne Frank” were the most frequently mentioned films. “Night” and the “The Diary of Anne Frank” were the most commonly used primary sources. Responding teachers use a variety of local organizations to find survivors for class visitations such as the Birmingham Holocaust Education Committee or the Holocaust Resource Center of Buffalo, but teachers also contacted survivors on their own. The USHMM website was the site most commonly mentioned online site used as a resource, while the most commonly mentioned secondary text and curricular guide was that produced by Facing History and Ourselves. For preparation, teachers consult a wide range of materials including previously used books and family stories. They also consulted notes from academic courses, internet sites, newspapers, curricular guides, the literature they are going to teach, films, and documentaries, as well as materials from Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. One teacher noted that he/she consults the Torah before teaching classes.

5.5.2. Methodology

Respondents to the survey indicated that they used traditional methods in teaching the Holocaust. These methods, in order of most frequently to least frequently used, were:

- (1) Discussions
- (2) Reading Texts aloud in Class
- (3) Question and answer sessions with survivors
- (4) Lectures and power-points
- (5) In class research assignments
- (6) Student presentations
- (7) In class writing assignments
- (8) Acts of Remembrance including memorial services
- (9) Watching films

- (10) Field Trips
- (11) Simulations

5.5.3. Assessment

Responding teachers also use traditional assessments in determining students understanding of the Holocaust. Assessments, from most frequently to less frequently used, were:

- (1) Class participation
- (2) Research-based papers or essays
- (3) Presentations
- (4) Artwork
- (5) Objective-based questions on tests or quizzes
- (6) Personal diaries
- (7) Poetry

5.6. Why teach the Holocaust

Jewish Day Schools, like other private schools, are not required to conform to state curricular standards and the greatest number of respondents (38%) reported that they were not even certain whether their particular state mandated the teaching of the Holocaust. In other words, the Holocaust is not being taught because of state mandates. Rather, teachers view the Holocaust as an important event in history, and believe in the necessity of presenting the facts accurately. In describing this goal, respondents used phrases such as “chronology,” “how it happened,” “historiography,” “cause and effects,” “learning the historical context of the Shoah,” “knowledge of historical events,” “knowledge of history,” “understanding the events,” “teaching the history of the Holocaust,” and “providing accurate factual information.”

Not only are facts about the Holocaust important, respondents also believe that students learn important lessons about human ethics, values, and morality. One teacher wrote, the importance of Holocaust education was so “students understand that people have choices.” In teaching the Holocaust, teachers want students to stand up to injustice whenever and wherever it occurs: “Part of the choice is being an upstander not a bystander” and the corollary, “teach what humans can do if you don’t resist and stand-up.” Respondents believe that a goal of Holocaust education is to fight against future genocides and to become advocates for human rights. One teacher wrote that the rationale for teaching the Holocaust is to inspire students “to prevent atrocities and discrimination,” while another wrote “to care and speak out for all the persecuted.” In teaching the Holocaust, teachers pointed to the importance of learning compassion, tolerance, pluralism, and empathy. One teacher said they teach about the Holocaust so as “to teach the dangers of prejudice,” another said, “so students discover the dangers of hate,” while still another said its importance was to teach “awareness and sensitivity.” Other teachers responded: they were “teaching respect” and wanted students “to consider personal values.” One teacher’s rationale for teaching the Holocaust was simply to make each student “a better person” while another teacher reported that the most important lesson to be learned in studying the Holocaust was “God expects humans to make good of the world.”

However, for teachers in Jewish Day Schools, the single most important rationale for teaching the Holocaust is the importance of the topic in terms of Jewish identity and Jewish history. Respondents view the Holocaust as a uniquely Jewish tragedy. Eighty-two of respondents reported spending less than 10% of class time discussing other victims of the Holocaust, and 64% reported stressing the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Only 50% of teachers reported that they study other genocides in conjunction with the Holocaust. The primary rationale for teaching the Holocaust is not the Holocaust’s importance to world history, rather the Holocaust’s impact upon Jewish history and identity, specifically.

In terms of Jewish history and identity, the Holocaust is a means of teaching Jewish students about antisemitism, the antisemitism “that was,” the antisemitism “that is,” and the antisemitism “yet to come.” In terms of the past, lessons in teaching the Holocaust included: “Understanding the background of Euro-Anti-semitism,” “to connect this persecution to Jews to other times,” and to teach “the history of how anti-semitism can gradually lead to the destruction of a people.” In terms of the antisemitism “that is,” one teacher wrote that the main lesson is for students to learn how “antisemitism begins innocuously,” while another wrote to “keep awareness for antisemitism to-day;” while still another simply wrote “Jew hate is still there.” But for many teachers in Jewish Day Schools, a key lesson to be learned from the Holocaust relates to antisemitism “yet to come:” The theme of “Never again” was evoked by numerous teachers in a variety of forms. Most eloquently, one teacher put it this way: “We must remember: Zachor Amalek!”

Along with a focus on antisemitism, responding teachers also emphasized lessons associated with Jewish memory. Responding teachers emphasized the importance of teaching the Holocaust, not just for the sake of the living, but for the sake of those who perished. Students are instructed to Always Remember, Zachor! One teacher wrote that the most important lesson of the Holocaust was “legacy and memorialization;” another wrote, “so this generation won’t forget what happened,” and another wrote “to remember for the sake of those who died.” Other teachers expressed similar ideas when they wrote: “to remember,” “this generation is forgetting,” “to learn the stories of the Jews who were murdered,” “remembrance of those lost.” One teacher just used the phrase “Remembrance” as the primary lesson for teaching the Holocaust.

Jewish memory associated with the Holocaust, means memory, not just of individuals who perished, but a way of life that also perished. One responding teacher wrote that the seminal lesson in teaching the Holocaust was for “students to understand the Jewish world that was lost,” another wrote, “help students better understand family and community,” while still another wrote, “Teaching students about their history.” The Holocaust serves to remind students about the world that once was and the world from whence they came, i.e. their Jewish identity and roots.

As part of the Jewish history and identity, respondents also emphasized the role of resistance, physical as well as spiritual. Responding teachers wrote that key lessons involve teaching about the unimaginable conditions that Jews faced in the ghettos and camps during the Holocaust, making resistance nearly impossible. One teacher wrote the most important lesson is “understanding the psychological aspects of the survivors,” another said the main lesson was “introducing students to first person accounts (memoirs, poetry, etc.) and survivor testimony,” while another said it was to teach “daily life/chronology/resistance.” One teacher wrote that the lessons of the Holocaust is about “the commitment of Jews to produce art and literature under the most trying of circumstances.” Teachers in Jewish Day Schools do not want students to leave their classrooms with an impression that Jews went “like sheep to the slaughter.” Instead, they stress the importance and prevalence of different forms of resistance during the Holocaust.

One teacher wrote that the primary lesson is to “relay stories of Jewish resistance,” another wrote “to show courage of Jews in impossible situations,” another wrote: “that it was a time of tremendous resistance,” and finally, one teacher wrote, “to appreciate the courage of Jews in WWII.”

As destructive as the Holocaust was in terms of Jewish history, respondents use the Holocaust to emphasize the continuity of Jewish history, i.e. Judaism is defined by much more than this singular event, irrespective of the magnitude of the tragedy. Judaism survived, Nazism perished. One teacher expressed the idea this way: the rationale for teaching the Holocaust is to teach about “life, before, during and after the Holocaust;” while another wrote, the lesson is, “creating continuity/Jewish identity.” Another teacher wrote that the primary lesson for teaching the Holocaust is: “it is an important part of Jewish history, “another spoke of” the importance of the Holocaust within Jewish history,” while another teacher wrote “it continues to shape us as a people.” In teaching about the continuity of tradition, one teacher expressed the idea this way: we teach the Holocaust so those students can

“teach their children the lessons of the Holocaust.” In a sense, students are instructed that Judaism cannot be defined by this singular event and, they have an obligation to pass knowledge about the Holocaust onto their children, so that their children, in turn, become part of the continuity of Jewish tradition, *l’dor Vador*.

Concomitant with the focus on continuity is an emphasis on the complex interplay between life and death, so central to Jewish tradition and thinking. This dichotomy plays out in the calendar of Jewish holidays whereby commemorations of death are followed almost immediately by holidays that commemorate life, such as Yom Hazikaron, which immediately is followed by Yom Haatzmaut. In relation to the Holocaust, Emil Fackenheim captured this interplay with his 614th Commandment: “Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews lest the Jewish people perish” (1987, p. 176). Death and life are involved in a complex dance. Responding teachers mentioned the significance of teaching about survivors’ lives after the war and the dispersion of Jews throughout the world. One teacher wrote, “Help students better understand ... the flow of Jewish history both prior to the Shoah and in its aftermath,” while another wrote, “Contextualization of the Holocaust in today’s world.” Death and destruction are central to the Holocaust narrative but so is life and rebirth.

For a few teachers, lessons about continuity and life/death were connected to Jewish migration to Palestine in the aftermath of the war, and ultimately to the creation of a Jewish state in Israel. To this end, one teacher wrote that the main lesson in teaching the Holocaust was to see “how Israel was and is impacted by the Holocaust.” More succinctly, one teacher said the main purpose in teaching the Holocaust was “teaching students *Klal Yisrael*.” Though the Holocaust’s impact on Jews and Judaism was “unimaginable,” ultimately, Nazism was defeated, and perished, and Israel was created.

Though some respondents connect the Holocaust and Israel, they do not teach that the creation of the State of Israel was a direct result of the Holocaust, rather that the connection is more complicated. One respondent wrote “this is a dangerous theological connection, one that has not been proven but is a matter of speculation.” Another said “(the Holocaust) played a role, but Zionism and Jewish settlement in Palestine predated the Holocaust.” One teacher wrote “I teach that the two are connected but it is hard to tell to what degree.” Finally, one teacher emphasized the difficulty of linking the creation of Israel and the Holocaust when he/she stated:

It is difficult for me to believe that the State of Israel is built upon the ashes of the 6 million Jews who were brutally murdered. Instead I explain that if the State of Israel had been created during the HolocaustSix million Jews would not have been killed.

Since the Jewish narrative is endangered and undermined by the growth of Holocaust for teachers in Jewish Day Schools the deniers can never be allowed to negate the Jewish memory of the Holocaust. Hence, students are exhorted to continue the fight against the deniers. One teacher wrote, the primary lesson to be learned in teaching the Holocaust is the “importance fighting denial of the facts of the Shoah,” another wrote “how to argue against people who denied the Holocaust happened,” and another wrote “the facts are undeniable.”

5.7. General views about Holocaust education

Respondents to the survey did not believe that Holocaust education was overly emphasized in their school (96%), nor did the Jewish Studies Departments within their schools believe that too much emphasis was placed on the Holocaust (75%). Further, respondents to the survey did not believe that the Jewish identity of their students was too heavily dependent upon the Holocaust (86%). That is, they did not believe that the main source of Jewish identity for their students was derived solely from the Holocaust. If anything, the majority of respondents believed that more Holocaust education would be beneficial to the students (83%). Moreover, respondents to the survey did not believe that the Holocaust was taught to students at too young an age (93%), a controversy that has

become more prominent in Holocaust education literature. The fact that age was not a concern for teachers is also supported by the fact that the vast majority of respondents felt that parents in their schools were not concerned about emphasis placed upon Holocaust education (76%). Finally, responding teachers believed that Holocaust education would continue even if they were no longer employed by the school (93%). Clearly, respondents believe Holocaust education is safely embedded in the world of Jewish Day Schools.

6. Holocaust education in public schools and Jewish day schools

Based upon a review of the National study of secondary teaching practices in Holocaust education (2004) survey conducted by USHMM, there are similarities between Holocaust education as practiced in public schools and Jewish Day Schools. In terms of the who question, in both cases the teachers tend to be highly educated. In Jewish Day Schools, 45% of teachers held a master's degree or higher whereas in public schools, 58% of all teachers who taught the Holocaust held a master's degree or a more advanced specialization or degree (p. 16). In both types of schools, teachers, though introduced to the subject in academia, gained most their knowledge from informal education versus formal study. In Jewish Day Schools, independent reading, informal learning, film or media, travels abroad, conferences or seminars, family history, formal professional development, and only last, academic undergraduate or graduate course work are the most important sources of knowledge about the Holocaust. In public schools, "... the highest proportion of respondents cited informal learning (not including Web research) as the way they acquired knowledge of the Holocaust (p. 25)." In both Jewish Day Schools and public schools, teachers feel prepared to teach the Holocaust.

In terms of the where question, again there are similarities. In Jewish Day Schools, the Holocaust is taught everywhere irrespective of region. In public schools, "A majority of teachers in all regions reported that they taught the Holocaust in one or more of their courses in 2003–04 ... (p. 15)." In terms of the when question, again there are similarities. In Jewish Day Schools, the subject is taught in middle school and again in high school. In public schools, "... 75 percent of teachers at the middle/junior high school level reported that they addressed the Holocaust in at least one of their courses during the 2003–04 school year, compared with 70 percent of all high school teachers (p. 14)." Similarities also exist in terms of the how. In Jewish Day Schools, teachers rely on multiple methods for teaching the Holocaust. In Jewish Day Schools, the greatest number of respondents used films/videos and primary sources in teaching about the Holocaust (93%). Next most commonly used were visits by survivors (83%), followed by the use of survivor literature (79%), internet websites (72%) secondary texts/readings (72%) and curricular guides (62%). In public schools, film was also the commonly used resource (69%), followed by first hand accounts, photos, documentaries, survivor testimony, textbooks, and materials from Holocaust museum/centers. (p. 22) The film *Schindler's List* and the *Diary of Anne Frank* play prominent roles in both Jewish Day Schools and public schools.

However, though there are similarities, the differences far outweigh the similarities. It begins with time spent in teaching the Holocaust. Fifty-nine percent of teachers in Jewish Day Schools spend more than one month on the topic and 14% spend more than 3 weeks on the topic. In public schools, even for those teachers who report receiving professional development about the Holocaust, they spend roughly 389 min, or roughly 2 weeks with 45 min periods teaching the Holocaust. In Jewish Day Schools, the subject is generally taught within the department of Jewish studies, then history, and literature classes, whereas in public schools, the subject is primarily taught in literature class (61%) and secondarily in history classes (39%). (p. 17) To some extent, the fact that in Jewish Day Schools the subject is taught within Jewish studies departments helps explain why the Holocaust is treated as an independent unit. Ninety-three percent of teachers in Jewish Day Schools teach the Holocaust as a unit unto itself. However, in public schools, the situation is quite different. The Holocaust is embedded in topics such as human rights and issues surrounding America's involvement in WWII (p. 21). In other words, in public schools the goal is not just to teach the Holocaust as an independent entity but the Holocaust serves as a mechanism for teaching broader issues. The Holocaust is used as a mechanism in teaching students how to live in America's multicultural society and as a mechanism to show America's role in defeating Nazism.

However, it is in terms of the rationale for teaching the Holocaust that one finds the biggest difference between Holocaust education in public schools and private schools. It is true that in both cases, teachers stress the importance of learning an accurate history of the Holocaust and teach the subject, not because of state mandates or guidelines, but because they believe it is vitally important for students to learn about it (pp. 31 and 36). Also it is true that a key rationale for teaching the Holocaust in both Jewish Day Schools and public schools is to create students with a greater sense of morality, tolerance, empathy, and compassion: Teachers hope to create good citizens who are upstanders, not bystanders (p. 36).

But, on a deeper level, the results reported in this study reflect a profound difference in the rationale for teaching the Holocaust in Jewish Day Schools versus public schools. Based upon the findings of the USHMM the primary reason for teaching the Holocaust in public schools, particularly in literature classes (the class in which the Holocaust is primarily taught) relates to teaching about the dangers of prejudice and stereotypes and respect for human rights (p. 36). Whereas, in Jewish Day Schools, the rationale for teaching the Holocaust is not about the general or universal dangers of prejudice and stereotyping, rather it is about teaching a particular brand of prejudice and stereotyping, namely antisemitism. It is critical to note that teaching about the history of antisemitism is not mentioned in the USHMM survey. In fact, the term antisemitism is not even mentioned once in their report.

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to debate the merits of these differing conceptual constructs of the Holocaust, however, for the long history of antisemitism to not even being mentioned as a rationale for teaching the Holocaust by public school teachers raises important questions about the historiography of the Holocaust as presented in public schools. Though scholars may debate its uniqueness, few would question that its importance in explaining why the Holocaust, indeed WWII, occurred. In terms of Nazi cosmology, as articulated by Hitler, world Jewry was deemed responsible for starting the War; world Jewry needed to be defeated in order to win the War; and, ultimately, it was World Jewry who was blamed for the loss of the War.

Hitler believed that it was the Jews who were responsible for the loss of WWI by “stabbing Germany in the back” and it was the Jews in the Weimar Republic who were responsible for signing of the hated Treaty of Versailles. Though Hitler may have realized that the “Protocols of the Elders” were a forgery, he believed in the premises about the diabolical role of international Jewry. While the Aryans represented everything good in the universe, the Jews represented everything evil. The struggle between Nazism and world Jewry was the equivalent of the religious apocalypse in which good would triumph over evil and Hitler was the prophet. According to Ian Kershaw, in *Hitler's Role in the Final Solution*, it may be possible to trace the decisions about the Final Solution by examining the context and repeated use of Hitler's prophecy about the fate of the Jews after America's entry into the War. When America entered the war, international Jewry had triumphed in creating the world war, and the mechanics for the Final Solution went into full gear. In other words, for Hitler, it was World Jewry who had surreptitiously and deceitfully connived Russia, England, and the United States to act as their surrogates in a war against Nazi Germany. No less a figure than Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering invoked the image of the Jew as the grand puppet master, when at a speech at the Berlin Sports Palace in 1942 he stated:

Churchill and Roosevelt were 'drunken and mentally ill people who dangle from the Jews' wires'. The war was a 'great race war ... about whether the German and Aryan will survive or if the Jew will rule the world. (Evans, 2008, p. 279)

Because of the Jews special status in creating and waging war, they were to receive “special treatment” during the war. In his seminal book, “the Reich at War,” Richard Evans (2008) explained how the unique perception of the Jew impacted their treatment during the war:

.... Particularly in the lower ranks of the SS, but also in the regular army, Jews, when encountered individually or in small groups, frequently aroused a degree of personal, sadistic brutality, a desire to humiliate as well as destroy, that was seldom present when they dealt with ordinary Poles, Russians or other Slavs. Slav prisoners were not made to perform gymnastics or dance before they were shot, as Jews were; nor were they made to clean out latrines with their bare hands, as Jews were ... *But what put Jews at the bottom of the hierarchy ... derived above all from an obsessively pursued ideology that regarded the Jews not simply as the dispensable of the inhabitants of occupied Eastern Europe, but as a positive threat to Germany in every respect, conspiring with Jews everywhere else in the world, and especially Britain and the USA, to wage war on the Third Reich.* (pp. 316–318)

Even in writing his last will and political testament in the bunker, Hitler continued to focus on the “Jewish problem” and singled out the Jews as being responsible for the war and warned that the struggle must continue against world Jewry:

It is untrue that I or anybody else in Germany wanted war in 1939. It was desired and instigated exclusively by those international statesmen who were either of Jewish origin or working for Jewish interests ... Above all, I charge the leadership of the nation and their followers with the strict observance of the racial laws and with merciless resistance against the universal poisoners of all peoples, international Jewry.

In public schools, to teach the Holocaust without referencing the history of antisemitism seems as ludicrous as teaching WWII without referencing Adolf Hitler.

7. Conclusion

There can be little question that Holocaust education is secure in America’s Jewish Day Schools. Teachers in Jewish Day Schools are highly educated. They have extensive knowledge about the Holocaust and subject, and though additional training would be preferred, they feel well prepared to teach the Holocaust. Significant time is spent on the teaching of the Holocaust: More than half the teachers spend one month on the topic, while more than 10% spend more than one month. Indicative of their belief in the importance of the subject, the Holocaust is treated as its own unit and not as a subset of a larger unit, e.g. WWII. Over 90% of teachers reported that a unit of study on the Holocaust was taught in their schools. Teachers rely on traditional materials including film, secondary sources, and survivor literature, and they use traditional methods in teaching about the Holocaust such as discussions, read alouds, and lectures. Only a small proportion of teachers (21%) report using simulations of any kind. Also traditional, are the methods used in assessing students understanding of the topic, i.e. discussions, papers, and presentations. Perhaps, most indicative of the Holocaust’s importance in Jewish Day Schools, is that over 90% of teachers believe that the subject would continue to be taught even if they were no longer employed by the school.

However, a comparison of how they teach the Holocaust in Jewish schools with how they teach it America’s public schools raises the same concern as Dawidowicz expressed in her 1990 article. Rather than focusing on the Holocaust as a particular event in time with specific causes, antisemitism, in public schools, the Holocaust has been transformed into an abstraction with general causes—stereotyping, prejudice, and intolerance of others. However, historically, the Holocaust was not about hatred of the other, it was about hatred of Jews, in particular. As the Holocaust becomes increasingly subsumed under an even more general category, i.e. genocide, we move further away from any historical understanding of the Holocaust. The difference between how the Holocaust is defined and understood in Jewish Day Schools versus public schools does not reflect simply differences in semantics or style, but goes to the very core of what the Holocaust was, how it should be remembered, and how it should be taught. In effect, it is a battle over memory and the stakes could not be higher because whoever wins the battle will determine the fate of American Holocaust education for decades to come. If the universalist position becomes the dominant position, it is possible that the real historiography of the Holocaust will be taught by Jews to Jews within the context of Jewish Day Schools.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information

Cite this article as: How they teach the Holocaust in Jewish day schools, Jeffrey Alan Ellison, *Cogent Education* (2017), 4: 1310010.

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