

Research Briefing N° 77

Transforming Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust through Research-Informed CPD

Research began in 2008 with a national survey into teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools. This subsequently informed a national Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme. Research is now being undertaken into students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust.

Key words: Holocaust education; classroom practice; CPD; Continuing Professional Development



Key findings

The research produced wide-ranging findings, relevant to academics, educators, teachers and policy-makers.

- The Holocaust was taught in all secondary years in several subjects, with most attention in Year 9 History (aged 13 to14). Teaching time varied considerably, with an average of six hours spent on the subject.
- Although some teachers demonstrated detailed specialist knowledge and clear understanding, others had significant gaps in subject knowledge. Many seemed to draw on popular rather than academic discourse.
- Teachers indicated their teaching tended to be dominated by a focus on Auschwitz and the persecution of the 1930s. Scant attention was given, for instance, to pre-war Jewish life, or victims' perspectives. This reflected and perpetuated perpetrator-orientated narratives found in many textbooks.
- 85% of teachers believed the Holocaust should be compulsory in the secondary history curriculum, but many struggled to articulate its distinct historical significance.
- Many teachers prioritised civic-based (e.g. focused on broad understandings of racism, prejudice, discrimination) over subject-specific teaching aims (e.g. focused on understanding the Holocaust as an historical phenomenon). There was also uncertainty over how to define the Holocaust, though most indicated they understood the Holocaust to include various victim groups rather than focus on the particular fate of Jewish people.
- Very few teachers received specialist professional development. 82.5% considered themselves self-taught and 77.5% wanted CPD.

Ongoing evaluation of the Centre for Holocaust Education's (Institute of Education) CPD has found 100% of teachers rate it as either 'excellent' (84%) or 'good' (16%). 91% share its resources with colleagues, and teachers regularly report more engaged, inquisitive students who produce more mature written work.

What we did

A symposium on Holocaust education in 2007 raised concerns over teaching practices and the support given to teachers. Subsequently, the Pears Foundation and the Department for Children, Schools and Families provided joint-funding for a research and development programme.

Landmark national research began at the **IOE's Centre for Holocaust Education** in 2008 and was published in 2009. This informed a free national CPD programme for teachers in England. To date, approximately 1,000 teachers have participated in the Centre's intensive CPD programme and more than 2,500 teachers have participated in other Centre events, symposia and conferences.

The research sits at the heart of the Centre's work with trainee teachers, its unique online Masters (MA) module, and Beacon Schools Programme.

The Centre's new pioneering research into young people's knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust started in 2013. This will include a national survey of some 10,000 students and thematic studies of emerging issues within Holocaust education in England.

Further information

More than 3,200 teachers and in excess of a million pupils are estimated to have benefited from the Centre's programmes since 2008, thus transforming Holocaust education. The ground breaking nature of its research has had wider resonance throughout the UK and beyond. The full report of the 2008 research – 'Teaching About the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools' – may be downloaded from [the Centre for Holocaust Education's website](#).

Further information on our CPD programme is also available online via www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust

In 2015 the Centre will publish the findings of its current research into student knowledge and understanding.

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