

## Teaching the Holocaust in Geography

Debbie Moss

*“...human geography (the study of people and places) has the power to contribute to ways of understanding how one of the most shocking human tragedies happened. It can help account for part of the human condition and what it means to be European.”*

(Machon and Lambert, 2005, p. 129)

In this essay I hope to convince the reader of the potential for Geography to enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding of contemporary Holocaust education. Geography is a subject which has until relatively recently been underrepresented in the area of Holocaust education. I hope to contribute to the discourse from academic geographers, who *would* advocate placing Citizenship, an important dimension in geographical education, at the centre of their work. Lambert and Machon make explicit the importance of this aspect of geographical education:

*“We focus on the Holocaust for among its powerful political elements is a fundamental concern about rights to, and exclusion from citizenship”*

(Lambert and Machon, 2001, p. 122)

I will make clear to the reader how developments in the pedagogical framework of geographical education should be used to ensure that Holocaust education relates to pupils experiencing education in the 21st century and which relates to the future needs of these pupils and society. I will be using evidence from my own practice in teaching in schools, teacher education and work produced as part of my project for the Fellowship in Holocaust Education from the Imperial War Museum and Institute of Education.

### The hegemony of subjects

What is certain in contemporary political debates on the education for pupils in schools in the 21st century is illustrated clearly in recent revisions to the curriculum at both the primary and secondary level. Curriculum developments in both stages of education support movement away from subject hegemony. One of the main benefits of the new Programmes of Study (PoS) for all subjects at secondary level is that the PoS capture the conceptual significance of the subject, whilst encouraging cross-curriculum, creative, collaborative curriculum making. Concepts such as cultural understanding are identified in several subjects across the national curriculum. Effective collaboration should enable subjects to enhance conceptual understanding within subjects as well as contributing to broader educational aims. (please see Appendix 2).

The power of hegemony of subjects and topics is identified by Lambert and Machon (2005) when reading a review of their edited book on citizenship through geography, having agreed to co-write a chapter on the denial of citizenship using the Holocaust as a case in point. Both writers were amused to read that they had failed to convince that the Holocaust did still not belong to history (Lambert and Machon, 2005). It was not the intent of these writers to 'steal this topic' but to present the challenge to Geography educators to consider ways in which their own subject had the potential to make a significant contribution the area of Holocaust education through its contribution to Citizenship and pupils' education as a whole.

The above response is not surprising given the limited exploration of Holocaust education and research in subjects outside of history. Short states 'Studies of Holocaust education in secondary schools have tended to focus on how the subject is taught as part of the history curriculum. Comparatively little work of either theoretical or an empirical nature has looked at how the subject is handled in other curricular areas (Short, 2001). I would go further and state that neither has the potential of many other subject areas been researched as to how they might potentially move Holocaust forward to meet contemporary educational needs of pupils.

A key development to address this challenge has been current research carried out by the Institute of Education (Foster et al, 2009). This research has the capacity to be one of the most significant pieces of research ever carried out in England which will enable the researchers to analyse the state of Holocaust education in a variety of schools across the country and see what patterns emerge with regard to what, why, how and who is teaching about the Holocaust in schools. However my concern is that this research is already limited by the fact that the questions asked will have encouraged responses from departments already involved in Holocaust education as it exists at the present time. My concern is what is the potential of each subject in school to contribute to the Holocaust? This question is not asked and yet in my opinion is crucial to the debate. Neither is a sense of place or identity specified under aims for teaching about Holocaust, yet is critical to understanding notions of citizenship. Who owns the Holocaust and who owns investigating the future potential of Holocaust education? Historians, RE specialists, Citizenship teachers or has the time come to dispense with this pre-occupation with subjects traditionally associated with enabling pupils to learn from the Holocaust. Why? Because why, what and how pupils' learn about the Holocaust may benefit from different insights in the 21st century, insights which can be enhanced through subjects across the curriculum, not just 'crusty favourites'<sup>1</sup> associated with Holocaust education.

### **Education for historical understanding- some important gaps**

The Holocaust as a subject clearly has the potential, when taught well to address the claims made the importance of history statements as stated in the in the History National Curriculum (2008, please see Appendix 3) and the subject is a statutory requirement at Key stage 3. The question which needs to be

<sup>1</sup> I have used Lambert's reference here as he applied it to Geography's need to reinvigorate or get rid of traditional geographical areas of study in school in manifesto for Geography, 'a different view' published by Geographical Association, 2009.

asked is can history alone, or even supported by collaboration with effective teaching in RE and Citizenship education, address effectively all the claims made in the History National Curriculum statement of aims. As Margot and Davies, stress in their abstract to 'The Holocaust and education for Citizenship: the teaching of history, religion and human rights in England, (1998), there may be too little time devoted to teaching about the Holocaust, the events of the Holocaust may sometimes be used as a mere context for understanding World War Two. Also teachers may not perceive the Holocaust as being significantly unique and there may through, lack of collaboration, be a lack of clarity about the nature of the affective and cognitive aims of such work.

### **Why teach the Holocaust at all?**

All education is socially constructed and the content which makes up the curriculum in schools has and will continue to be affected by a range of social, economic, political, cultural and environmental factors. I feel strongly therefore for the need to contextualise the importance of Holocaust Education within the present social, economic and political climate in state schools, and how this particular content area of the curriculum meets principal educational aims.

The importance of teaching the Holocaust is made clear in first line of the Imperial War Museum's introduction to a whole-school approach to teaching the Holocaust

*"The story of the Holocaust touches upon so many aspects of human behaviour and experience that is profoundly relevant to teachers across a range of disciplines."* (Salmons, 2004, p.8)

Although Salmons goes on to acknowledge the work done by different specialisms already covering the Holocaust, and the need for co-ordination of this work between departments, he fails to recognise the potential of geography. There is probably an assumption in Salmon's statement that Geography's contribution would be through Citizenship education, and writers such as Machon and Lambert (2005) would certainly support Geography's potential in this field but I would argue, as would these writers, that Geography as a subject has much to contribute as a subject through its own distinctive conceptual approaches to understanding places and through contributing to collaborative work across the curriculum.

The need for a collaborative approach to Holocaust education is identified by many writers with an interest in educational approaches to the teaching of the Holocaust, most notably by Brown and Davies (1998). From small scale research using data from teachers' perceptions they identify the problematic nature of subject boundaries which 'may serve to act only as obstacles to better practice' (Brown and Davies, 1998, p 80). In their work, the authors were mainly concerned with the dialogue which took place between teaches of history, religion and human rights.

My own personal philosophy with regard to learning and education and reasons for teaching the Holocaust is best supported by the work of Abbs who refers to the need of the teacher to take the pupil “into the living field of your discipline and in some way to change him by so doing. No transformation, no education!” (Abbs, 2003). I would like think that we are educating teachers who will enable pupils to go through ‘a series of transformative experiences, to enter a cultural democracy as reflective citizens and radical contributors to the workplace’ (Abbs, 2003). If teachers are to rethink the needs of schools and schooling for the 21st century they need to feel confident, competent and energized and aspirational about the possibilities of education to bring about such transformation.

To what extent any subject is capable of ‘transforming’ pupils could itself be an important area for debate (Freire, 1970, Boyd and Myers, 1988, Mezirow, 1996). Although writers in the field of Transformative Learning Theory area might differ in their perspectives on the processes by which transformation is brought about in learners, what is central to all their perspectives, is the learner’s sense of self and relationship to society. I would argue that it is this positioning which central to pupils’ learning and response to events of the Holocaust. The curriculum aims stated for all national curriculum subjects assumes that education does have capacity to ‘transform’ pupils, especially the third of three stated aims, that relating specifically to education’s potential contribution to citizenship (see Appendix 2).

### **Geography’s contribution to Holocaust education – a problematic discipline**

Geography has long suffered and will probably continue to do so as a result of its ‘fragmented and contested nature as an academic discipline’ (Lambert and Morgan, 2005). However I agree with Jackson (1996) that:

*“...rather than policing our own disciplinary boundaries it is human geography’s encounter with social theory and its excursions into neighbouring social sciences that are the most promising sources for meeting the intellectual and political challenges of the future.”* (Jackson, 1996, p.92)

I would argue that contemporary approaches to Holocaust education must address intellectual and political challenges: How do human and processes associated with the Holocaust help us to understand human processes associated with contemporary genocides which have taken place in their lifetimes? How does learning about the Holocaust enable pupils to critically reflect on their own identities? How does learning about the Holocaust in History affect pupils’ knowledge and understanding of European cultural identities today, including their own?

Responses given by Geography PGCE students at the beginning of a session on the teaching of Controversial/Sensitive Issues (Moss, 2009, see Appendix 5), demonstrates that future Geography

teachers were very confident in being able to identify specific ways in which their subject could contribute to Holocaust education.

One area of the Geography curriculum which is key to how geography teachers engage pupils and develop knowledge, skills and understanding, is in relation to the concept of place, one of the seven key concepts identified in the new national curriculum (2008). How can students learn about places? (Please see Appendix 6) In the past and even today, in many geography classrooms, teachers are preoccupied with teaching about places as case studies. This can reduce places to a series of issue-based stereotypes. An alternative approach could be applied by adopting ethnographic approaches and describing places in detail from as many directions and points of view as possible, in order to achieve a better understanding of their multidimensional complexities. Liz Taylor of Cambridge University presents a strong case for 're-presenting' geography and enabling pupils to look at places using 'different spectacles' (2004).

Geographers have a significant role to play in developing pupils' critical thinking with regard to how are places represented? How and where do pupils get their knowledge and understanding of places from? What does it mean to be European? How are European countries represented in Geography Textbooks? What image of Germany will pupils have after studying the Holocaust in history? What important role could geography teachers play in counteracting negative stereotypes of German people and contributing to knowledge and understanding of a 'new Europe'? Today many pupils will develop their conceptions of people and places from the media, especially films. Geographers need to use films, and enable pupils to deconstruct films so that 'the contemporary world can be navigated' (Aitkin and Zonn, 1994).

It is possible that when studying the Holocaust through history, pupils may be left with a specific image of a country because of the way in which it has been represented through their Holocaust studies. Pupils may come to think of Poland as a country associated with World War 2, or Rwanda, as country devastated by recent genocide. But what other perspectives should pupils have and how else might we as responsible, 'morally careful' (Lambert 2005) educators want pupils to be able to perceive these places? Lambert makes a powerful argument for geography teachers to place citizenship at the centre of their work (2005). I would go further and argue that the Holocaust provides rich opportunities for pupils to engage in studying and developing their concept of place, scale, interdependence as well as human processes and cultural diversity, as recognised by trainee teachers in their subject (Ibid, 2009, see Appendix 5). Furthermore I would argue that if pupils are really to understand the scale of the Holocaust, key to its historical significance, then using pupils' local environments to contextualise the scale of the Holocaust would enhance pupils' historical understanding.

Contextualising the scale of the Holocaust and relating it to pupils' own personal knowledge and understanding of places has been an important dimension of one of my Holocaust projects for the Imperial War museum. Different groups of ICT Trainees were working collaboratively with geography trainees to plan a multimedia resource to use as a stimulus for an introduction to the study of the Holocaust. One group's presentation focused on the idea of 'What would be the consequences, if the whole of your school

population were unable to attend school tomorrow?’ In order to confer to pupils the loss of Jewish children during the Holocaust, one group of trainees the trainees used local Google images, first drawing on a school population building up to zooming in on of large, urban areas close to the pupils, which would be equivalent to the number of children who died in the Holocaust. Evaluations by fellow trainees and curriculum tutors rated the presentation highly in the potential of the resources to enable pupils to access and identify the scale of the loss of Jewish children. Follow up discussions would also have the potential to reflect on how such a loss could affect the social, economic and cultural future of communities over time. The high quality of the outcomes of this particular presentation was attributable to the combined ICT skills of the ICT trainees and the conceptual understanding applied by geography trainees, relating to the concept of place applied in a meaningful context to the pupils, an important input from the geography trainees.

### **The Holocaust - towards a spatial understanding**

In an address to the 2009 Geographical Association Geography Teachers’ Educators’ conference, I outlined the potential of geography to contribute to Holocaust education in four specific ways:

- Understanding spatial patterns established throughout the Holocaust
- Understanding European countries in 21st century - addressing change as well as continuity
- Impact of Holocaust on identity of countries and individuals, encouraging understanding of multidimensional complexities of European countries and people in them today
- Understanding potential of driving forces of climate change, globalisation, population increase, competition for space, racial tensions to bring about new genocides and encourage individual, community, national and global responsibility

Lambert and Machon provide clear evidence for how spatial understanding of processes during Holocaust can contribute to broader understanding of Holocaust itself and help address Citizenship education- especially issues of cultural identity which are often misconceived both in terms of understanding of Jews and German identity during Holocaust and problematic nature of engendering cultural understanding throughout time and space even today. Contemporary studies of the Holocaust must enable pupils to see how communities are emerging from the Holocaust and what pupils can learn about their own communities and address questions such as:

Who makes up their communities?

What links them with their communities?

What is the history of their communities?

What is the future of their communities?

What part could / should they play in ensuring that they can contribute to their local and wider communities?

I am hoping that my Imperial War Museum project on project on 'The Austerlitz Scroll' will enable pupils in primary/secondary classrooms to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in subjects across the curriculum which will enable them to relate to different elements of Holocaust education, historical and contemporary events through relating to the story of Ruth Matiovska. Ruth is living in the Czech Republic today and survived the horrors of Terezin. Thinking spatially will be key to pupils addressing the resources and developing an understanding of the communities presented in the materials as well as reflecting on their own communities.

### **Futures Geography?**

David Levene's session to Fellows in Holocaust Education at the Imperial War Museum in July 2008, made explicit his own concerns that that there would be more genocides in 21st century than the 20th century as a result of interacting driving forces, physical, but especially human - mainly climate change and globalisation. One of my concerns at the present time when pupils study the Holocaust in schools in history is that they identify genocide with historical events – removed from their own places and times. It is important for geographical education to ensure pupils are aware of very real dangers the planet can face and impact on human condition if we fail to take seriously our global responsibilities. David Hicks in his keynote address at the Geographical Association's 2007 conference on 'Geographical Futures' stressed the importance with young people's concerns about the future. He identified a real need to enable pupils to understand spatial and temporal interdependence in geography and the need for students to think more critically and creatively about the future. These aims are not just the preserve of geography teachers, just as Holocaust education should not just be the preserve of the history teachers but effective education in all these areas is the responsibility of all of those who profess to have the future needs of our pupils at heart.

### **Conclusion: Holocaust – a future perspective**

All educational aims will encompass aspects of preparing pupils for the future. As Toffler states 'All education springs from images of the future and all education creates images of the future. Thus all education, whether so intended or not is a preparation for the future.' (1974). What is clear to me is that the curriculum on offer to pupils in the 21st century must include a contemporary approach to study of the Holocaust to relate to pupils in the 21st century and that national curriculum developments in all subjects, and I would argue significantly geography, have the potential to play an important role in shaping pupils' learning from this critical period of our history.

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## Appendix 1

Statements taken from Cambridge Primary Review, (Alexander and Flutter, 2009)

- starts from a clear statement of aims grounded in analysis of children's present and future needs and the condition of the society in which children are growing up
- dispenses with the notion of the curriculum core as a small number of subjects and places all eight domains within the curriculum on the principle that although teaching time will continue to be differentially allocated, all the domains are essential to young children's education and all must be taught to the highest standards

## Appendix 2

National curriculum aims for all subjects, 2008

Learning and undertaking activities should contribute to achievement for all young people to become:

- Successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- Confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society

### Appendix 3

The importance of history (statements selected which author would claim are supported by geographical knowledge, understanding and skills)

History fires pupils' curiosity and imagination, moving and inspiring them with dilemmas and beliefs of people in the past. It helps pupils develop their own identities through an understanding of history at personal, local, national and international levels. It helps them to ask and answer questions of the present by engaging with the past.

Pupils find out about the history of their community, Britain, Europe and the world.....They investigate Britain's relationships with the wider world, and relate past events to the present day.

History prepares pupils for the future....It encourages mutual understanding of the historic origins of our ethnic and cultural diversity, and helps pupils become confident and questioning individuals.

## Appendix 4

- Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their 'new order,' the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust.
- The Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of others as well. Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, trade unionists, political opponents, prisoners of conscience, homosexuals, and others were killed in vast numbers.

Imperial War Museum, London

Definition of Holocaust given in IWM

## Appendix 5

### Responses to Keele University PGCE Joint ICT/Historian/Geography session: Teaching Controversial/Sensitive issues in the classroom: The Holocaust

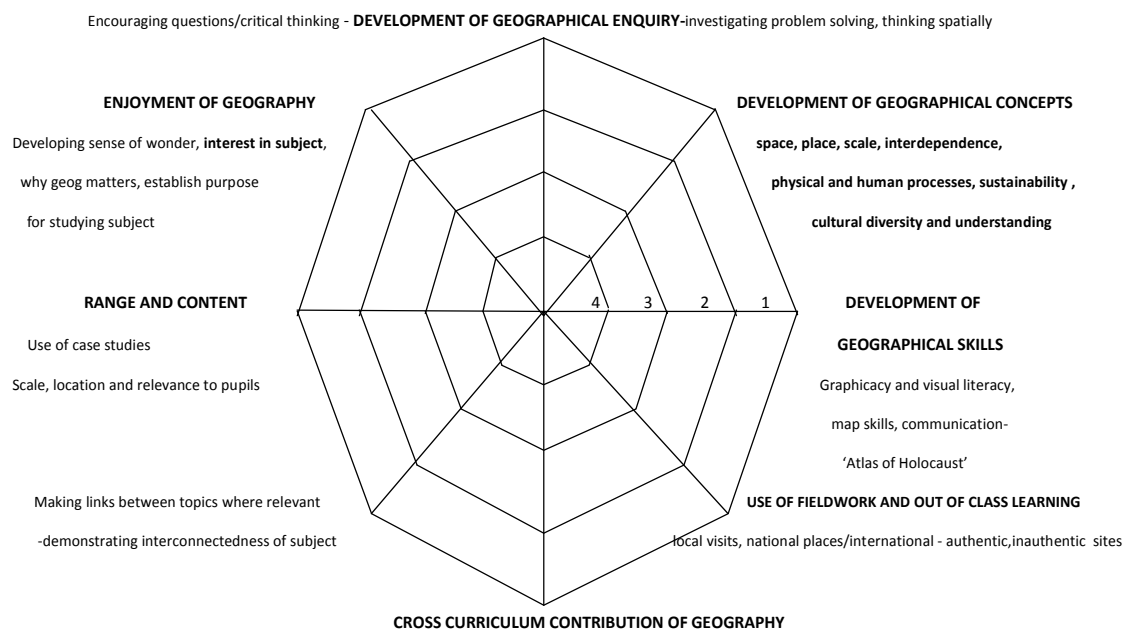
Questionnaire given out at beginning of session before any teaching had taken place,  
responses analysed by Moss, 2009

	Number of responses
<b>Areas identified as ways in which Geography could contribute to knowledge and understanding of Holocaust</b>	
Showing spatial patterns throughout Holocaust	7
Understanding cultural diversity	6
Understanding place and space	5
Understanding scale	4
Addressing misconceptions of places associated and involved with Holocaust	2
Use Holocaust to address recent Conflicts	2
Holocaust is a study of people and actions on their planet	2
Understanding democratic processes	2
Understanding needs more than one subject	1
Understanding concept of interdependence	1
Address cultural misconceptions	1
Mapping of memory	1
Understanding economic diversity	1
Understanding impact on human processes/movement of people today	1
Important contribution to Citizenship education	1
Understanding human processes	1

<b>Geography PGCE Trainees' personal reasons for teaching Holocaust</b>		
	Enormous event-everyone should know about, can't be forgotten	4
	To emphasis significance and magnitude of relatively recent events in history	2
	Important topic for young people	2
	Understanding global issues today	2
	Helps to understand human processes recent genocide	1
	To enable pupils to understand horror of real events in world today	1
	Addressing racism in Stoke-on-Trent	1
	Having met Holocaust deniers	1
	Need to understand role of own religion 'Christianity' in Holocaust	1
	Understanding cultural diversity today	1
	Wouldn't want to teach it	1

## Appendix 6

### Frameworks for reflecting on geography's contribution to Holocaust education



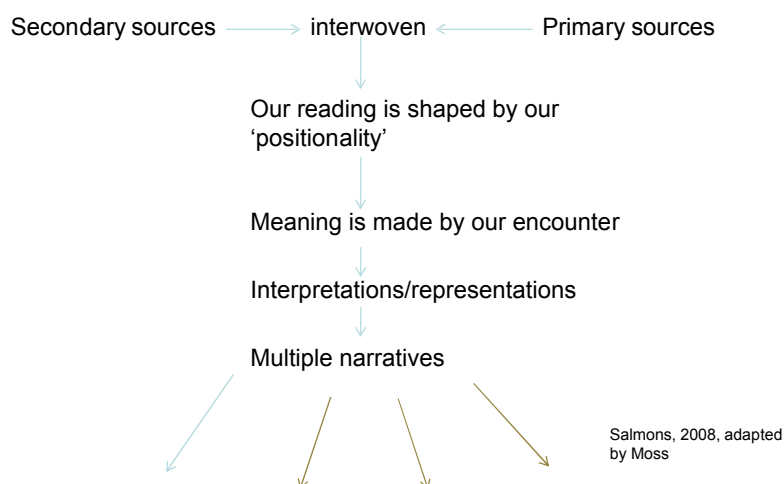
*The Holocaust-Potential of Geography?*

Links to literacy, numeracy ICT, Citizenship, history Moss, 2008

Numbers could be used to identify significance different areas of planning

Joint session with History, Geography and ICT students

### Making sense of the past / a place / an event / a multimedia resource



Why and how do we teach about the past and places?

