

THURSDAY OCTOBER 14, 1999
AFTERNOON SESSION B 16:30-18:00

Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust: German and Jewish Perspectives on the Aftermath of the Holocaust for the First and Second Generation

by
Ruth Barnett and Angelika Rieber

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES

We use the term 'first generation' to include Jews and non-Jews who were born during or before World War II and are caught up with 'inherited' issues around the experiences of their parents during the war.

Psychologists, therapists and researchers, who have written about their work with Holocaust-affected people, offer three major findings. Firstly they describe the effects of massive trauma on the mental and emotional functioning of the sufferers and individual responses to trauma. Secondly, they explore the phenomena of a 'conspiracy of silence' between the two generations in which each experiences an inability to talk about the war and traumatic experiences in order to protect the other. Thirdly, they consider how the task of knowing and mourning is transmitted to the second generation when the first generation has been unable to begin this work. We shall summarize how these three phenomena have been found to operate and give illustrations from our own work with individual clients, learning groups of teachers and school classes that involved 'live witnesses' (i.e. people who lived through the time-period and events being studied).

We shall look at similarities and differences between the task on the British and German sides. How far have the survivors who were victims of the Holocaust been able to rebuild their lives in normal peacetime society? To whom have they told their experiences? Did they find people who were prepared to listen? How far have the 'surviving' perpetrators reintegrated into the community? What are the effects of their de-nazification? To whom have they told their experiences? Did people want to hear? What are the experiences of the children of Jewish survivors and the children born to Germans after the war? We shall quote from published testimonies to tackle these questions.

Finally, we look at the link between the 'two sides' using, among other theories, Clarkson's model of the 'four positions' whenever people are caught up in a drama that is being played out: the victim, the perpetrator, the rescuer and the bystander. The majority of 'players' in the drama usually opt for the bystander role which has the effect of allowing, if not condoning, the assault that is being perpetrated, (e.g. Goldhagen's ordinary Germans' and the passivity of the Pope and Catholic Church.) What have the bystanders and rescuers (helpers and resisters) to tell us?

There is evidence to suggest that, when Jews and Germans meet, powerful unconscious fantasies of each other are stirred up. The German fantasy is that the

Jews will inevitably, at some time, come to wreak revenge for what was done to their people. The Jewish fantasy is that Germans can never be trusted because they will surely, at some time, do it all over again. Usually the individual people involved are totally unaware of thinking or feeling any of this. We believe that these fantasies influence our personal, political and educational attitudes and may affect the way we approach teaching about the Holocaust unless they are brought up to consciousness, acknowledged and owned by both sides. We believe these unprocessed issues and feelings cannot be resolved by violent means (war) and the only hope is education through dialogue. Each side needs the help of the other to locate vengeful and guilty feelings in themselves.

EDUCATIONAL WORK AND TRAINING TEACHERS

It has taken over 50 years, since the end of World War II, for Europeans to reach the stage of beginning to bear knowing about and address the reality of the Holocaust. Although there were scattered individuals and small groups that have been working on this for much longer, something was set off by a spate of 50th anniversaries of various events to do with the war and the Holocaust.

In England the first National History Curriculum (only about six years ago) prescribed teaching of World War II with no mention of the Holocaust. An out-cry against this and lobbying from several Jewish organizations achieved a revised curriculum which now requires all 12/13 year olds in Britain to be taught about the Holocaust in the context of History, Religious Studies, or Social Education. A few teachers have been teaching this for a long time, but many, who would have liked to do so, found that parents complained. Teachers, as a group, need the support of the National Curriculum requirement so that they are not in conflict with parents. But this is not enough. The subject is highly charged, difficult to present and unfamiliar to most teachers. The issues raised in the previous section need to be borne in mind when developing such teaching. The Spiro Institute has developed a resource-bank for Holocaust teachers, including a pack, peripatetic courses and volunteer survivors to go into schools as 'live witnesses'. There is still a long way to go. Without sensitivity and consciousness-raising, there is a danger of scape-goating Germany and creating a cult of hatred towards Germany and Germans.

In Germany, "The Third Reich" has been part of the state curriculum since the 1950s. Therefore, the question is not so much 'if' as 'how' teachers deal with the Holocaust. Since about 20 years, several regional history projects started to work on the Nazi time in their own village or city, often initiated by teachers who want to bring the subject as close as possible to the students own experience. Parallel to this, the fates of resisters and Jewish neighbors became increasingly important. Survivors were invited to speak to students – not an easy task. On the one hand this opens the chance to speak and be heard, to ask and get answers, to speak with, to accept and respect each other. On the other hand there is a gap between the stories told by the parents and grandparents of the German students and the stories of the survivors. How do the participants deal with this gap?

More recently, the exhibition, detailing the crimes of the Wehrmacht, and the Goldhagen debate opened up the question of the role of ordinary soldiers during World War II. Children and grandchildren started to ask fathers and grandfathers

questions that hitherto had not been formulated, and with mixed feelings somewhere between curiosity, love, consideration, understanding, anxiety, mistrust and rage. Most of the teachers today in Germany are second generation and feel personally and emotionally involved. They have to address their own personal background, the wounds and difficulties about being German, through exchanging experiences with colleagues as part of their in-service training. German-Israeli exchange programs have become part of this.

In England, most teachers today, although their fathers and/or grandfathers may have fought in World War II, do not feel personally involved. They tend to distance themselves from the horrors that were perpetrated and suffered and are more likely to succumb to a neat division into victorious/righteous allies and defeated/criminal Nazis and the myth that it was all thought-up and carried out by a small group of Nazi thugs. The Spiro program aims to help them to think more deeply and widely, to relate their own and their students' experience to the subject matter at an emotional rather than academic level. We believe this task can be enhanced by a dialogue between German and British educators.

THE FRANKFURT – LONDON PROJECT

Angelika Rieber has been working for some years with a seminar group in Frankfurt, the members of which all make an input into researching, learning and teaching about the Holocaust, particularly focusing on what happened in the Land of Hessen to its Jews. Ruth Barnett was invited to this group as a 'live witness' and was so impressed by its work that she suggested a joint project to learn and work together in a weekend workshop in London. Twenty-five people from 'both sides' took part in this weekend and hope to organize another one in Frankfurt. We intend to present details of this project up to date.