

Context in which the Holocaust is taught in the Netherlands and what strategy to use in order to get the topic fixed in the (collective memory and) educational system.

The Dutch educational system does not have a fixed national curriculum in which all the subjects to be taught are summed up in detail. Instead the Ministry of Education relies on a list of ‘main objectives’ that schools are supposed to achieve. What pupils should know and be able to do by the end of primary school, at age 12, is divided into ‘domains’. Students learn about ten historical periods, so as to be able to place events, developments and people in their times, and must learn to connect main events and developments in the 20th century, including the World Wars and the Holocaust, with modern day developments. Students have learn to understand modern day tensions, conflicts and wars in context, and learn how these influence individuals, society on national level, influence European societies and on a more international level, in order to understand the meaning of international co-operation.

The vast majority of primary and secondary schools teach about the Second World War and the Holocaust in one way or another. In primary school education, history books usually devote just a few paragraphs to the Holocaust, always within the framework of the German Occupation of the Netherlands and/or the larger framework of the Second World War. In secondary schools most historical textbooks devote relatively more attention to the War and the Holocaust. In addition to the regular lessons, in which these textbooks are used, many teachers will use documentaries and films. They sporadically invite guest speakers or eye-witnesses and occasionally visit a historical site or museum. About a thousand primary and secondary schools have adopted a monument dedicated to the War and/or the persecution of the (Dutch) Jews. And prior to the national commemoration day (on May 4th) these schools pay some attention to the relationship between the monument and the school. Apart from history lessons, students may learn about the War and the Holocaust through lessons about Dutch modern literature after 1945, and/or through subjects related to religion, but the content of these lessons is not strictly determined.

The vast majority of children in the Netherlands is, more or less, informed about the Second World War and the Holocaust, but it may be expected that the meaning and relevance of these major events of the 20th century will change for future generations. A consequence might be that the time spent on teaching about the War and the Holocaust will decrease and so it is important to fix the Holocaust in the (collective memory and) educational system.

The Dutch Center of Holocaust and Genocide Studies tries to change the still largely national framework of the teaching of history and develop it, in the direction of a more cosmopolitan, internationally oriented, 'shared' framework – at least on a European level, and possibly even on a global level.

Examples of the strategy and educational material which the Dutch Center of Holocaust and Genocide Studies uses to influence the educational system.

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