

## HANDOUT 3.5.4 HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN TASK FORCE MEMBER COUNTRIES - GERMANY (INTERNATIONAL REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE)

### HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN TASK FORCE MEMBER COUNTRIES - GERMANY

#### ► Question 1

**What official directives from government ministries and/or local authorities regarding the teaching of the Holocaust exist in your country? Please attach these directives to your answer.**

Education, culture, research, schooling, universities etc. are the responsibility of the so-called 16 *Länder* [federal states] (Bayern, Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, Sachsen, etc.). Through curricula, the corresponding ministries arrange at what age, in which context, and to what extent the Holocaust is taught. They do not establish lesson plans. The students are taught about this complex topic in line with the teaching profiles of the respective school types and with due regard to the stage of their psychological development.

In all 16 *Länder* the Holocaust is a mandatory, binding subject.

To coordinate and to standardise this field of education in a certain way there exists a "Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs". This Standing Conference in different declarations and resolutions emphasised repeatedly the importance of the topic and reaffirmed the need to communicate a fundamental knowledge and insights on the National Socialist reign of violence generally and the Shoah in particular (see *On the Treatment of the Holocaust at School*).

#### ► Question 2

**If the Holocaust is not a mandatory subject, what percentage of schools chooses to teach about the Holocaust?**

The Holocaust is a mandatory subject in all the 16 *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany.

#### ► Question 3

**How is the Holocaust defined?**

There is no official definition, no general consensus about the use of the term "Holocaust". This term has been known in Germany since 1980 and quite frequently used, meaning the Nazi murder of the European Jews. The central "Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe" – this is (literally translated) the official name – is for example often called "Holocaust monument" in the public. Others, however, avoid the term because of its religious connotations. They feel that the terms "National Socialist murder of the European Jews" or "genocide against the European Jews" is more precise when speaking about a crime without any religious sense.

Some people think that "Holocaust" should be used for all mass crimes committed by the Nazis on the basis of their racist ideology.

Curricula, textbooks, etc. use different terms, among them "mass murder of Jews", "genocide", annihilation, "extermination of the European Jews".

#### ► Question 4

**Is the Holocaust taught as a subject in its own right, or as part of a broader topic? Explain the reasoning behind the decision?**

The Holocaust is taught as a part of the subject "History". It is dealt with as a major topic of German and European history in the twentieth century. This is done in a way which clarifies the historical context: rise of the National Socialist movement in a specific historic situation, establishment of a dictatorship in Germany and the abolition of the rule of law, Nazi ideology, antisemitism in Germany, Nazi crimes against other groups, and the Nazi criminal war of aggression.

It is taught not only in history lessons but also in other subject matters, in particular civics, German literature, religious instruction (both Catholic and Protestant), and others make an important contribution to teaching the topic (see7).

#### ► Question 5

**At what age(s) do young people learn about the Holocaust at schools? Do students encounter the Holocaust in schools more than once? Please give details.**

The Nazi persecution of the Jews can be studied first at the age of 12 (6th graders), but it is not a mandatory topic yet at this age.

At the age of about 14/15 years all students study and learn the history of the twentieth century and the period of National Socialism. The Holocaust is taught in this context. The topic is taught and studied again on the upper level (18 years) with students who pass the Abitur exam (prerequisite for university).

#### ► Question 6

**How many hours are allocated to teaching and learning about the Holocaust?**

Altogether about 16 – 20 lessons are scheduled for the period of National Socialism. It is the responsibility of the individual teacher to decide how many lessons to allocate to the Holocaust. It is taught again on the upper school level with about the same number of lessons.

### ➤ Question 7

**In what areas of study (history, literature, sociology, theology) is the Holocaust taught? In each case, briefly outline the rationale for teaching the Holocaust in this particular subject area.**

The Holocaust is a mandatory part of history lessons and civics. It is frequently taught in classes on (German) literature and religion, or ethics. Aspects of Holocaust history might also occur in classes on biology (racism), art (pieces of art produced during the Holocaust period or by artists dealing with this topic afterwards), and music (e.g., music composed in Theresienstadt).

Diverse approaches are integrated in long-term educational projects. (Some of these projects are presented on the multilingual Website [www.holocaust-education.de](http://www.holocaust-education.de)).

In history lessons the Holocaust is dealt with as a major topic of German and European history in the twentieth century.

In civics, students study the political, ideological, and psycho-social conditions which made the Holocaust possible and the planning and organisation of the genocide. Another important topic is the way Germany dealt and deals with this part of its history.

Since the Holocaust is a major topic in postwar German literature (novels, plays, poems, essays), it is addressed in classes on contemporary literature, starting in 6th grade. This can also include literature translated from other languages (e.g., writings by Primo Levi, Imre Kertész). It can be combined with media studies dealing with feature films.

Classes on religion deal with the attitudes of the churches towards the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the theological efforts to create a new Christian approach to Judaism, and the ethical challenges for every human being which are involved in the history of the Holocaust.

### ➤ Question 8

- A. **What historical, pedagogical, and didactic training is provided to teachers of the Holocaust at either the university level or the professional development level in your country?**
- B. **How many teacher-training sessions are held each year, and how many teachers are involved?**
- C. **What funding is available for training in the teaching of the Holocaust in your country?**

- A. Courses on the Holocaust or courses which include Holocaust history are offered at German universities (most frequently at departments for history, political science, pedagogy, literature). As with any other topic, the students are free to choose these courses or others. The post-university training of young teachers can include programs on how to deal with the Holocaust in diverse subjects.

- B. The amount of teacher-training sessions differs from federal state to federal state. Courses on the Holocaust and study trips for teachers to historical sites are offered by teacher-training centers, state agencies for political education, associations (e.g. the trade-union for teachers, foundations of political parties), and by memorials. Teachers are entitled to take part in such courses as part of an in-service training, but they can also choose other topics.
- C. Most of the institutions mentioned under (b) get funds from the federal government or a federal state. They can apply to foundations for additional funds if they plan major projects like international seminars or study trips abroad.

### ➤ Question 9

**Has your country instituted a national Holocaust Memorial Day? If so, in which ways is this day marked and commemorated? What difficulties have you encountered in establishing this day of remembrance in the national consciousness?**

27 January is the national Memorial Day for the Victims of the Nazi Crimes. It is marked by special parliamentary sessions, also in the federal states. Some states prepare for this event by competitions for young people to develop commemorative projects.

There was no opposition to the introduction of the memorial day. But not every citizen is aware of its existence. It should be mentioned here that many groups, including school groups, commemorate the victims of the Holocaust by diverse ceremonies on 9 November, the anniversary of the so-called Reichskristallnacht (November Pogrom) 1938.

### ➤ Question 10

**Has your country established a national Holocaust memorial and /or museum? What numbers of students visit this memorial/museum each year?**

In Germany there exist just under 100 memorial museums for victims of the Nazi regime. They are connected to "authentic" sites and deal with the victims, the perpetrators, and the site of the crime. These memorial museums explain the history of concentration camps, gas chambers used for "Euthanasia", prisoner-of-war camps, and Gestapo and other prisons, etc. The memorial museums in Germany work very closely together and consider themselves as a network. Whereas the individual memorial museum may address the history of only one crime complex of the Nazi regime – depending on the history of the site where it is located – the memorial museums together cover all parts of the crime complex committed by Nazi Germany.

The task of the memorial museums is to explain the history of Nazi persecution and to describe the treatment of the different groups of persecutees in a manner expressing sympathy for the victims. Memorial museums also engage in social tasks toward the survivors

and their relatives and friends. Memorial museums in Germany serve as evidence of the crimes committed and work to provide information about who was responsible for these atrocities.

Hence, memorial museums are also places of critical self-reflection in German society. For research on the Nazi past, educational work, and gaining public attention it is very helpful not to have one large Holocaust museum which dominates the whole subject. The different approaches that memorial museums take to address the same subject and the friendly competition over the best methods of addressing Nazi crimes have led to a very thorough knowledge and wide range of experience in the development of memorial museums in Germany during the last two decades.

Memorial museums are financially supported and run by different state agencies. The large memorial museums on the site of former concentration camps are paid for by the federal government and/or the states, some are run by cities, some by counties, others by private action groups – with the support of public finances. All memorial museums have different advisory boards. Associations of survivors also serve as members on these bodies as public official representatives of national agencies and delegates from different groups which are important in civil society. The structure of these different advisory committees provides a platform on which the survivor groups, civil action groups, and the public agencies can work together toward the common goal of dealing with the various expectations placed on memorial museums.

The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe was inaugurated in May 2005. In addition to the huge monument in the center of Berlin a “Site of Information” in the basement of the memorial provides information about the Holocaust by documentation and also about the broad network of memorial museums. It is not a German Holocaust Museum.

The House of the Wannsee Conference shows a new permanent exhibition about the Holocaust, opened in January 2006, and provides seminars on diverse Holocaust-related topics for students and adults.

Museums of contemporary history also show temporary exhibits about the Holocaust and the Nazi period. The German Historical Museum in Berlin presented such an exhibition in 2002, which was the most successful of all its displays; the Holocaust is also part of its permanent exhibition which has been open to the public since June 2006.

### ► Question 11

**Please estimate the percentage of students in your country who visit authentic sites, and list three primary sources of funding available in your country for visits to authentic sites.**

Over the last decade each year at least three million people have visited the nearly 100 memorial museums in Germany. There is a wide range of visitors to the diverse memorial museums. Institutions known worldwide, such as Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, or

Sachsenhausen, have several hundred thousand visitors each year. Smaller institutions of regional importance have 5,000 or more visitors a year. These smaller institutions are of special importance for the local city or state because they show in detail how close the history is to the lives of the visitors today.

The average age of the visitors differs from memorial museum to memorial museum and it is impossible to give an exact account. Generally, school classes make up the majority of visitors, in particular of guided groups. But adult visitors are by no means overlooked in the educational work.

Most important for the visits of school groups are the teachers. In Germany the 16 states have different curricula. More or less all of them recommend a visit to a memorial museum. The teachers are responsible for suggesting and preparing such a visit. Many teachers take this very seriously. The Nazi dictatorship is an important issue in German society today. Visits to a memorial museum are often motivated by discussions in society.

There are many guides published in German which give overviews of memorial museums on different levels: particular institutions, memorials in a certain region, or a nationwide overview. For younger visitors and for the organisation of a tour to a memorial museum it is also important that basic information be available on the Internet – also in foreign languages, e.g. [www.gedenkstaettenforum.de](http://www.gedenkstaettenforum.de).

### ► Question 12

**What are the three major textbooks used in teaching the Holocaust in your country? How many pages do your school textbooks allocate to the Holocaust, and on which aspects do they focus?**

Due to its federal structure, Germany has a large and diverse textbook market. The following list consists only of textbooks which were approved for the lower level of secondary schools, and which are used in more than one federal state. The list does not include textbooks which are used singularly by only one German state, or only in a particular type of school. It is therefore impossible to determine with precision how many pages are dedicated to the issue of the Holocaust. However, it can be stated that the space allocated to the presentation of National Socialism and the Holocaust has steadily increased during the last two decades.

Furthermore, German teachers use not only history textbooks, but also additional teaching materials dealing with the issue of National Socialism and the Holocaust, e.g., CD-ROMs and other media. Free offers of media information (films and other media) by local and regional media services on this subject, embracing well over a hundred different titles, are to be mentioned as well.

**TEXTBOOK LIST:**

- Abiturwissen Geschichte : das Dritte Reich / Walter Göbel [et al.]. - Stuttgart: Klett, 2004. - 176 p. (*Abiturwissen : Geschichte*) ISBN 3-12-929636-0
- Anno / edited by Bernhard Askani and Elmar Wagener. - Braunschweig : Westermann vol. 4. Das 20. Jahrhundert 2000. - 320 p. ISBN 3-14-110944-3
- Entdecken und Verstehen : Geschichtsbuch für Hessen / edited by Thomas Berger-v[on] d[er]
- Heide and Hans-Gert Oomen. - Berlin : Cornelsen vol. 4. Von der Weimarer Republik bis zur Gegenwart.- 2001. - 174 p. ISBN 3-464-64154-6
- Expedition Geschichte / edited by Florian Osburg. - Edition G. - Frankfurt am Main : Diesterweg vol. 3. Von der Entstehung des Deutschen Kaiserreiches bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges.- 2003. - VII, 246 p. ISBN 3-425-03263-1
- Forum Geschichte. Edited by Hans-Otto Regenhart. - Edition for Hessen. Part: 4. Vom Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gegenwart.- 1st edition Berlin : Cornelsen, 2004, 352 p. ISBN: 3-464-64357-3
- Geschichte kennen und verstehen. - München : Oldenbourg Grade 9. - 2003. - 191 p. ISBN 3-486-88869-2 Signatur: HD-V 252(1,2003)9
- Geschichte plus / [edited by Bernd Koltowitz]. - Edition Berlin. - Berlin : Volk-und-Wissen- Verl. Grade 9.- 2001. - 196 p. ISBN3-06-110922-6
- Geschichte und Geschehen.A. - Stuttgart [et al.] :Klett vol. 4. 1999. - 319p. ISBN3-12-410041-7
- Geschichtsbuch : die Menschen und ihre Geschichte in Darstellungen und Dokumenten / [edited by Hilke Günther-Arndt ...]. - New edition B. - Berlin : Cornelsen vol. 4. Von 1918 bis 1995.- 1997. - 279 p. ISBN 3-464-06923-0
- Geschichtskurs - Weimarer Republik, Nationalsozialismus / Harald Schneider. 4th edition. [Stuttgart] : Manz, 2005, 176 p. Series: Manz-Lernhilfen : Geschichte 12/13 : Verstehen ISBN: 3-7863-4101-X
- Historia : Geschichtsbuch für Gymnasien / edited and written by Bernhard Müller. - Paderborn : Schöningh vol. 4. Das 20. Jahrhundert.- 1999. - 357 p. ISBN 3-506-34884-1
- Der Nationalsozialismus : die Zeit der NS-Herrschaft und ihre Bedeutung für die deutsche Geschichte / Stillig, Jürgen, Wippermann, Wolfgang. - Berlin: Cornelsen, 2000. - 160 p.

(Kurshefte Geschichte)

ISBN 3-464-64813-3

- Wir machen Geschichte. - Frankfurt am Main : Diesterweg vol. 4. Vom Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gegenwart - 1998. - VII, 310 p. ISBN 3-425-03309-3
- Zeit für Geschichte : geschichtliches Unterrichtswerk für Gymnasien. - Edition A. - Hannover : Schroedel vol. 4.- 2003. - 320 p. ISBN 3-507-36504-9
- Zeiten und Menschen / edited by: Hans-Jürgen Lenzian and Wolfgang Mattes. - Paderborn : Schöningh vol. 4.- 2002. - 335 p. ISBN 3-506-34503-6
- Zeitreise : Nordrhein-Westfalen. - Stuttgart [et al.] : Klett vol. 3. - 1999. - 275 p. ISBN 3-12-411030-7
- Das waren Zeiten : Geschichte, Sekundarstufe I.[Editor: Dieter Brückner]- Bamberg : Buchner vol. 4. 1999. - 272p. ISBN3-7661-4504-5

In order to meet the approval criteria, textbook authors have to take into account the curricular guidelines of the respective German federal states. Although the latter may differ from one to the other, due to the already mentioned elaborate federal structure, certain standard contents are common to the curricula of all German states:

The Weimar Republic Hitler's "seizure of power"

Comparative study of other totalitarian systems (Italy, USSR, etc.)  
Nazi ideology (above all, race ideology)

Propaganda (also in the sense of techniques of domination)  
Everydaylife

Persecution (of Jews and other minorities) Economic and foreign policy (preparation of war) World WarII

Holocaust (generally treated in a special chapter)

Resistance (in all aspects: in the Army, in the churches, with students and young people in general, etc.)

Defeat and collapse

Association with the present (neofascism, right-wing extremism, "policy of memory", i.e., construction of the past)

**➤ Question 13**

**What strategies of differentiation are typically used to make the study of the Holocaust accessible to students of different ages and with different learning needs?**

Occasionally, the topic of the Holocaust is dealt with in primary schools as well. Since 1995, it is compulsory teaching matter for grades 9 and 10 (students aged ca. 14 to 16 years).

Teachers have two hours weekly at their disposal. At the higher level (grades 11, 12, and 13), there is the possibility to expend on certain aspects of the topic, an opportunity which is used by many teachers and students. The curricula of some German states prescribe a diachronic study of topics, such as “medicine in society”, “childhood”, or “women’s role”, which also include the Nazi period.

Young children are often introduced to the topic through children’s literature, primarily from the perspective of history as an individual’s life story. Empirical studies have shown that primary school pupils are as yet unable to order historical events; they are, however, keen on learning about the Holocaust and they are capable through empathy to relate to problems such as the formation of prejudices, exclusion, and social discrimination. In higher level classes, pupils are then able to tackle the topic in its full complexity. The emphasis is thereby no longer laid on structural and factual history, but rather on the analysis of the experience of different groups: perpetrators of crimes, victims, willing and unwilling executioners, profiteers, collaborators, members of the Resistance movement. The central question is: Why did people behave as they did in a certain situation, and what alternatives might they have had? Issues related to the history of everyday life and mentalities, social history, and psychology are essential in order to approach the topic. This again is related to the question of the importance those past events may have for today’s pupils.

Given the fact that now there is no ethnic “German” community of memory, but that the Federal Republic of Germany is *de facto* an immigration society, research (to some extent also empirical studies) is dedicated to how young people from migrant families handle the topic of the Holocaust. Can we demand that they share the negative heritage with the “old- established” population? Can this contribute to the identification processes they go through? Is it possible, and does it make sense, to treat in a comparative perspective mass crimes perpetrated in the countries they come from – e.g., the extermination of the Armenians by the Young Turks? However, this academic and public debate about the universalisation of the Holocaust and the importance of genocide and state - organised crimes in contemporary history has not yet found its way into textbooks and classrooms.

#### ➤ Question 14

**How far and in what ways is your country’s own national history integrated into the teaching of the Holocaust?**

In Germany, history teaching follows as a rule a chronological order. The Holocaust is part of German national history (see question 12). Textbook presentations thereby also refer – without constructing a linear course of history – to the roots of race ideology in the nineteenth century, to the authoritarian character of the German Empire, to the relationship between World War I and the rise of right-wing ideologies, and to the shortcomings of the first German democracy, which contributed to Hitler’s “seizure of power”. Whereas previous German history textbooks and curricula raised the topic of the Holocaust within the framework of World War II, the extermination of European Jews is currently dealt with in a special chapter.

#### ➤ Question 15

**What are the three major obstacles to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in your country?**

The Holocaust is taught to every student in German schools. Holocaust denial is a marginal problem. Nevertheless there are difficulties and new challenges.

When this topic is taught, students often feel that there is still an implicit accusation of guilt. Thus they feel urged to defend themselves which sometimes results in a rejection of dealing with the topic.

The Holocaust is permanently a topic of public discourse. Therefore some students believe that they are already sufficiently informed about the Holocaust, although their knowledge is in fact rather superficial. Teachers must find new ways to motivate students for studying the Holocaust in depth. In-service teacher training is crucial to support the teachers.

The history of the Holocaust is competing with many other relevant topics when it comes to the amount of time dedicated to certain subject matters and topics. Continuing efforts are needed to convince curriculum designers, teachers, and the public of the extraordinary significance of the Holocaust.

Since the Holocaust is taught in Germany, focussing on German history, immigrants from other countries might feel that this is not their history and is less relevant for them. Since in many urban centres a high and growing percentage of the student population has an immigration background, this is an issue of great importance. New approaches have to be developed to teach the Holocaust in a multicultural society. Discussions about this challenge have begun.