

Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research

Holocaust education in Task Force member countries : SWITZERLAND

This report has been written by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (Political Affairs Secretariat, Historical Unit) with the full participation of a national ITF support group. Members of the support group are the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, the Federal Commission against Racism, several teachers as well as NGO and other institutions.

NGO and institutions involved in the national support group are the following: ACOR SOS-Racisme, Aktion Kinder des Holocaust, Amis suisses de Yad Vashem, Archiv für Zeitgeschichte, B'nai B'rith Switzerland, CICAD – Coordination intercommunautaire contre l'antisémitisme et la diffamation, DAVID – Das Zentrum gegen Antisemitismus und Verleumdung, Fédération suisse des communautés israélites, Gesellschaft Schweiz-Israel, Haute école de travail social [institut d'études sociales] Genève, Institut für Jüdische Studien der Universität Basel, Kontaktstelle für Überlebende des Holocaust, LICRA – Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme, Pädagogische Hochschule Bern, Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse – Dachorganisation der Jenischen der Schweiz, Stiftung Erziehung zur Toleranz, Stiftung gegen Rassismus und Antisemitismus, Stiftung Elsbeth Kasser, Tamach – Psychosoziale Beratungsstelle für Holocaust-Überlebende und ihre Angehörigen in der Schweiz.

Overview

Education, research, schooling and all (but two) universities, as well as school textbooks, are in the responsibility of the 26 Cantons (federal states), not the federal government. However, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDPE) has taken up the coordination of this field of education. Following a decision taken by the European Ministers of Education on 18 October 2002 at the Council of Europe to set a "Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the prevention of crimes against humanity" in the 48 states that have signed the European Cultural Convention, the CDPE took several decisions on 12 June 2003, among them the decision to retain the 27 January as Holocaust Remembrance Day in Swiss schools.

The Holocaust is a mandatory subject. The Holocaust remembrance strives to implement the guidelines provided and to reach the goals defined by the Cantonal teaching curricula. On the compulsory-school level the teaching of Holocaust remembrance is oriented toward the goals of civic and citizen education, aiming at helping students to become active and responsible citizens. On a higher level (*Gymnasium / Lycée* and vocational training), the teaching of Holocaust remembrance contributes to violence prevention, aiming at analyzing, understanding and preventing the causes and forms of violence, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Teaching methods are more interactive, insisting on the ability to respect human rights, as well as other people's values, and promoting interactions, solidarity and mutual understanding.

The Holocaust as the extermination of the Jews of Europe by the Nazi regime and its collaborators during the Second World War is taught within the context of history teaching and civic education. Aspects of the Holocaust are also addressed in social science, religious studies and literature.

The existing decentralized teacher training schools and institutes were replaced, in 2003, by 16 universities of teacher education (*Hautes Ecoles Pédagogiques*). All over Switzerland there is a wide choice in terms of professional training for teachers and continuing education, such as: *Preparing «Holocaust Remembrance Day», Racism at school, Comment analyser des sites révisionnistes avec les élèves?*, etc. In addition to that, most Swiss universities offer post-graduate courses in the field of human rights, thus enabling the participants to recognize occurrences of abuse or violation and providing them with the tools to fight against discrimination, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

The following difficulties can be encountered at times while teaching and learning about the Holocaust:

1. Swiss schools are aware of the fact that taking a stand against National-Socialism is not enough to explain the Holocaust, the role of Anti-Semitism and racism.
2. Given the absence of centralized data, the impact of Holocaust education in Swiss schools is hardly measurable.
3. Insofar as approximately one fifth of the population of Switzerland does not own Swiss citizenship and schools are becoming more and more multicultural, European history is not always perceived as a common heritage, and the unicity of the

Holocaust is sometimes challenged against the background of current international politics (situation in the Middle East).

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, research, schooling, all but two universities are in the responsibility of the 26 Cantons (federal states), not the federal government. The corresponding ministries define by means of curricula, at what age, in what context and to what extent the Holocaust is taught. There is no specific curriculum devoted to Holocaust education in Swiss schools.

However, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDPE) has taken up the coordination of this field of education. Following a decision taken by the European Ministers of Education on 18 October 2002 at the Council of Europe to set a "Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the prevention of crimes against humanity" in the 48 states that have signed the European Cultural Convention, the CDPE took the following decision on 12 June 2003 :

1. *The 27 January is retained as "Holocaust Remembrance Day" in Swiss schools.*
2. *The topic chosen : "Teaching remembrance. Education for prevention of crimes against humanity" will contain the three following fields of study:*
 - *remembrance of the Holocaust tragedy*
 - *general remembrance of the genocides which have marked European history in the 20th century*
 - *reflections upon human rights, tolerance, as well as inter-religious and intercultural dialogue*
3. *Cantons will be free to decide themselves how to outline and shape the commemoration".*

Question 2

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

With the mentioned decision taken by the CDPE on 12 June 2003, it can be assumed that Holocaust is a mandatory subject.

Holocaust remembrance is taught according to the guidelines provided and the goals defined by the Cantonal teaching curricula. On the compulsory-school level (grades 1-9) these goals are defined as 1) identifying situations and historical periods, 2) analyzing the evolution and alterations within collective organizations of individuals, 3) grasping the complexity of a decision making process. The teaching of Holocaust remembrance is likewise oriented toward the goals of civic and citizen education, aiming at helping students to become active and responsible citizens.

On a higher level (*Gymnasium / Lycée* and vocational training), the teaching of Holocaust remembrance contributes to violence prevention, aiming at analyzing, understanding and preventing the causes and forms of violence, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Teaching methods are more interactive, insisting on the ability to respect human rights, as well as other people's values, and promoting interactions, solidarity and mutual understanding. In this respect, competences are just as important as knowledge.

(Sources : Plan d'études cadre romand, janvier 2004 ; Programmes d'études cadre pour les maturités professionnelles, 2001-2003 ; Plan d'études cadre pour les écoles de maturité, 1994; PEC ECG, CDIP, octobre 2004.)

Question 3

How is the Holocaust defined?

In principle, the Holocaust is defined as the persecution and extermination of the Jews of Europe by the Nazi regime and its collaborators during the Second World War. Other definitions commonly include all victims of Nazi ideology, including Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, Jehova's witnesses and victims of the "T4-Aktion".

Question 4

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

In Swiss schools, the Holocaust is not taught as a distinctive and separate topic within school curricula, but as a part of history teaching and civic education. Aspects of the Holocaust are also addressed in literature teaching and religious studies.

As mentioned before (cf. question 2), the aim of school in Switzerland is not only to transmit knowledge, but also to shape the students' personality, to form a critical mind, that is to provide the student with behavioural role models (behaviour, activity, learning, living in a group).

Question 5

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

Topics associated with the learning outcomes of Holocaust education (tolerance, inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, respect for diversity) are taught in the lower elementary grades. But pupils acquire as well issues of the Holocaust in the higher elementary grades (approximately at the age of 14 and 15). In this context, Holocaust education focuses on the knowledge and awareness of the historical facts (where, who, when, how, why).

In the Secondary Level II (vocational school and high-school), students examine and discuss Nazi theories and extermination mechanisms and study fascist movements. This teaching takes place in every canton without exception and irrespective of the various cantonal study plans.

Question 6

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

There is no national survey listing all figures and tables. A rough estimate in some German speaking Cantons indicates 2 to 6 hours per year. On the whole, compulsory school (grades 1-9) provides students with 470 to 500 lessons in history and civic education. These are the subjects where Holocaust remembrance is taught. In the Secondary Level II (vocational school and high-school), 10 to 20% of the entire teaching time are dedicated to science and humanities (history, geography, civic education, human rights, etc.). This is when Holocaust remembrance teaching also takes place.

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.

History: the Holocaust is taught as a major event of the Second World War, as well as to outline the complexity of understanding historical process.

Literature: testimonies of Holocaust survivors are studied to outline the importance of testifying in facing oppression and discrimination, as well as the huge difficulty to tell about what could not have been imagined.

Social science: the Holocaust is taught together with human rights and intercultural education as part of the preparation for democratic citizenship and to learn about the role and responsibilities of citizens, states and organizations.

Religious studies: the Holocaust is focused on both moral aspects and the fight against racism.

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?**

In 2003, the cantons replace the existing decentralized teacher training structures by 16 universities of teacher education (*Hautes Ecoles Pédagogiques*). There is a wide choice in terms of continuing education and professional training for teachers, such as: *Preparing «Holocaust Remembrance Day», Racism at school, Comment analyser des sites révisionnistes avec les élèves? Holocaust-Gedenktag: Handeln statt schweigen*, as well as information websites for the teachers.

Dozens of teachers are involved in the teacher training sessions.

As for ongoing education most Swiss universities offer post-graduate courses in the field of human rights. These courses do not revolve around the Holocaust. However, they convey basic knowledge about human rights, thus enabling the participants to recognize occurrences of abuse or violation and providing them with the tools to fight against discrimination, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism (cf. particularly the Institut interdisciplinaire d'éthique et des droits de l'homme, Université de Fribourg ; Université d'été des droits de l'homme et du droit à l'éducation, Geneva and Lausanne ; Fondation Education et Développement, Berne).

Furthermore, Swiss teachers and educators can attend one of the workshops and courses organized by the Council of Europe member States in relation to the Council of Europe project "Teaching memory. Prevention of crimes against humanity."

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?

Since 2004, Holocaust Remembrance Day is commemorated on 27 January in Switzerland, and since 2005 the president of the Swiss Confederation delivers a message. The CDPE decided the Holocaust Memorial Day will be commemorated in schools each year. Commemoration takes place in various ways. Some schools invite survivors or other witnesses to tell their stories. Other sites are also visited, such as synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Educational resources are provided on websites, such as www.educa.ch/dyn/84899.asp including other web links, or www.dodis.ch. Various NGO offer and organize activities in relation to Holocaust Memorial Day. Unfortunately teachers are often not aware of all that is being done by these NGO.

In order to solve this problem, the CDPE organised at the end of 2005 two National Days (*Journées nationales. Enseigner la mémoire de l'Holocauste en Suisse*). Several dozens of teachers and pedagogical specialists attended those National Days.

Question 10

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

There is no national Holocaust memorial or museum in Switzerland, nor is there a Swiss Institute or Museum for War Documentation.

Nevertheless, the Swiss National Museum in Zurich will permanently integrate components of the travelling exhibition, which from 2002 on broadcasted the results of the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland World War II. Besides, the Archive for Contemporary History in Zurich (Archiv für Zeitgeschichte, <http://www.afz.ethz.ch/english/fsdokustellen.html>) is known for its manifold activities focusing on various aspects of the Second World War and on Holocaust Remembrance. This Archive

comprises the Centre for Jewish Contemporary History (documenting persecution, Holocaust, emigration, Swiss refugee policy, right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism).

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.

Guided tours to Auschwitz-Birkenau are organized or financially supported by CICAD (*Coordination intercommunautaire contre l'antisémitisme et la diffamation*), the Foundation Education towards tolerance and B'nai Brith. (CICAD: some 1400 participants since 2000). For several years now, Swiss students have visited former concentration camps (Natzweiler-Struthof, Dachau, others) and commemoration sites where Jewish children lived during Nazi occupation (Izieu).

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 the fact that Switzerland has 26 Cantons, a decentralized school system and three official languages (German, French, Italian), it is hardly possible to identify "the three major textbooks".

Nevertheless, among the textbooks widely used are the following books or brochures, which are used as educational materials.

- Peter GAUTSCHI und Helmut MEYER, *Vergessen oder Erinnern? Völkermord in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Zürich 2001). A French version will be published soon.
- Beate KOSMALA und Revital LUDEWIG-KEDMI, *Verbotene Hilfe. Deutsche Retterinnen und Retter während des Holocaust* (Zürich 2003)
- Peter GAUTSCHI, e.a. *Hinschauen und Nachfragen - Die Schweiz und die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus im Licht aktueller Fragen* (Zürich, 2006).
- Eva PRUSCHY (dir.), *ÜberLebenErzählen - Holocaust-Überlebende in der Schweiz / Survivre et témoigner. Rescapés de la Shoah en Suisse* (Booklet and DVD in two languages, Zürich et Genève, 2006).
- François WISARD, *Les Justes suisses. Des actes de courage méconnus au temps de la Shoah* (Genève, 2007).

Generally speaking, the Holocaust is not necessarily taught in a classical (ie. ex-cathedra) way, but rather through events, exhibitions or movies. The notion of textbook is too narrow.

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?

There is no official strategy. Nevertheless, it is clear that different age groups and levels require different strategies. Testimonies are rather meant for lower school classes, whereas historical textbooks with a focus on contextualisation are primarily meant for higher school classes.

Question 14

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

The main topic connecting Switzerland's national history and the Holocaust in teaching material has been the refugee policy (admission into Switzerland of several thousands of Jewish refugees and the turning away of others). New developments in this field tend to place the Swiss refugee policy in a regional but supranational

perspective, such as the exhibition *La Svizzera e La persecuzione degli ebrei in Italia 1938-1945*, accompanied by a series of conferences.

In recent years, attention has also been given to economic and financial relations with Nazi Germany, to biographies of Holocaust survivors who came to Switzerland and to the rescue efforts of the Swiss Consul Carl Lutz in Hungary, who saved approximately 62,000 Jews.

Question 15

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

As we have seen, schools in Switzerland pursue a twofold aim: transmission of knowledge and transmission of competences and behavioural tools. In doing so, the following obstacles can be encountered:

- Moving from « the obligation to remember » to « remembrance work »: the former deals with the extremes, with concentration and extermination camps and crematories. The emotional impact is very strong but it does not suffice to explain how one got there. As a result, the students are morally outraged over Nazism, but they are unable to explain Hitler's ascent to power, his immense popularity, the concessions that paved his way to power and mass murder. Therefore, condemning Auschwitz is not enough to understand Auschwitz. That is where the didactics of history step in, aiming at transmitting some complex historical knowledge all the while stressing the necessity of constant political vigilance.
- The school curricula provide guidelines, yet teachers are quite free to shape the contents of their teaching according to external factors, and there is no supervision, nor are any sanctions implemented. Given the absence of centralized data, the impact of Holocaust education in Swiss schools is hardly measurable.
- In a school which is becoming more and more multicultural, the remembrance work mentioned above encounters new difficulties. European history is not always perceived as a common heritage. The unicity of the Holocaust is sometimes challenged against the background of current international politics (situation in the Middle East). Pedagogical tools, in order to help students with non-European background and different identities and family histories understand the reality of the Holocaust, have yet to be devised and created.

These are the challenges which have an impact on the new didactics of history in Switzerland today, as well as on civic education. It all narrows down to the transmission of knowledge and transmission of competences and behavioural tools. This is the real challenge which pedagogy specialists are tackling right now.