

## Report on Holocaust Teaching Activities 2013-2014

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### Introduction

The Yad Vashem seminar held in August 2013 was a unique opportunity to learn about and reflect upon Holocaust teaching.

As a history teacher in a secondary school focused on humanities (pupils aged 16-18), I developed three main projects with different groups of pupils; one of them has been achieved in cooperation with Yad Vashem French Desk, being French an official language in the region where I teach (Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste).

A longer report on these activities can be found (in Italian) in a forthcoming article on the review *L'École valdôtaine* (special issue on Holocaust teaching, Spring 2014).

### Participation in the national contest on the Holocaust

A first group of 19 seniors partaked in the national Holocaust contest *I giovani ricordano la Shoah*, by submitting a work entitled *Come puoi negare l'evidenza?* [How can you deny the obvious?].

Firstly pupils were introduced to the history of the Holocaust through "big pictures" and case-studies; then to Holocaust denial, mainly through Ephraim Kaye's booklet *Desecraters of Memory*.

The class was then divided into groups, who first pinpointed the main Holocaust deniers thesis: denial of Nazi extermination plans and/or the use of technologies to perform them; reduction of the number of the victims; refusal of testimonies as means for proof.

Subsequently each group was invited to study a group of documents originating from victims, perpetrators and bystanders, in order to find evidence of the extermination against Holocaust deniers.

As a result of this activity, the class developed a deeper insight in Holocaust history, as well as in the methodology of the historical narrative.

The workshop was followed up by a reflection on history and memory held in cooperation with the local institute for contemporary history (Istituto per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea).

**Videoconference on Holocaust terminology**

A videoconference from Jerusalem on Holocaust terminology was held on January, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014.

The lesson was taught in French by Dr. Yoni Berrous (Yad Vashem) to a class of 24 pupils, as an introduction to Holocaust history. The chosen title was: *Shoah, Holocauste et Génocide. Étude sur la terminologie des crimes de génocide.*

The videoconference was followed up by a reflection in cooperation with Dr. Berrous, on the opportunities and the limits of these methods of teaching.

**Workshop: Auschwitz: Gazes from the Generation of Postmemory**

In February 2014 I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau camps with a group of pupils from my region's secondary schools.

I proposed to a smaller party of 8 seniors to take pictures of the camps and write some comments on their photographs.

On the return, they were invited to choose 12 pictures each and to present them to their peers.

The workshop was a surprising occasion to reflect upon the representation of the Holocaust: the influence of mass-media archives; the role of memorial sites and their musealization; empathic imagination and its limits.

**Further steps**

Following this last teaching experience, I am writing a photo-essay on the pictures taken by pupils in the camps and their comments.

Hopefully I will organize, in cooperation with Yad Vashem French desk and the local department responsible for schools, a series of videoconferences on Holocaust teaching addressed to teachers of my region.