

What do we know about Holocaust education?

Paul Salmons www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust



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What do we know after 25 years of expanding Holocaust education?

- Many grand claims about what teaching about the Holocaust can achieve
- Little empirical evidence to show what actually happens
- We know remarkably little – the field is underdeveloped and immature



A major shift in the landscape

- IHRA's Educational Research Project
 - Multi-lingual literature review (12 languages)
 - For the first time we will get an empirical picture of what is known
- UNESCO and Georg Eckert Institute's research into Holocaust textbooks and curricular
 - Assessment of curricula from 195 countries
 - Comparison of school textbooks from 20 countries
- UCL's Centre for Holocaust Education: major national studies into teacher and pupil thinking about Holocaust education

Distinctive contribution of UCL's Centre for Holocaust Education



It is at the intersection of research and pedagogy that we make a distinctive contribution to the field.

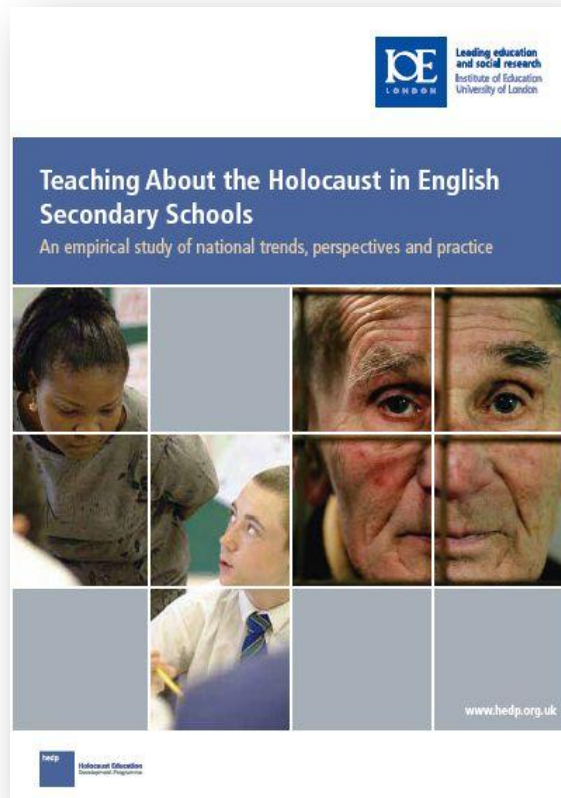
Research
team

Pedagogical
team

The research team draws upon the experience and needs of the pedagogical team for its research questions and relies upon them to help interpret and analyse the research findings.

The pedagogical team develops its new educational materials and teaching approaches to address the key issues revealed by the research.

Ground breaking research



Empirical research into the views of more than 2,000 teachers
enrich and inform all our educational materials and teaching programmes

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Teachers overwhelmingly support teaching about the Holocaust



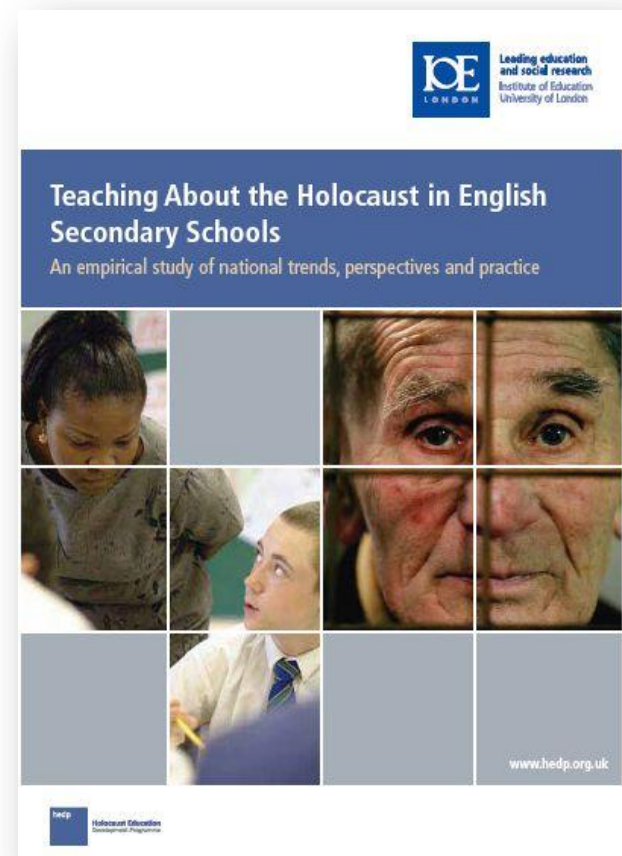
- 93% of history teachers agreed ‘it will always be important to teach about the Holocaust’
- 86% agreed that ‘it is right that teaching about the Holocaust is compulsory in the history school curriculum’
- Strong professional commitment and some impressive practice

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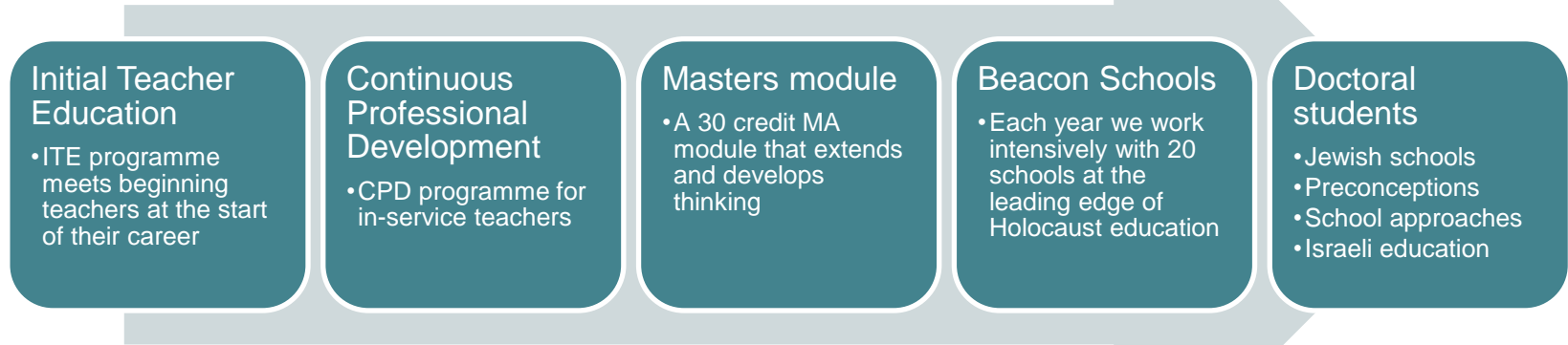
Key findings and challenges

- Confusion over aims
- Uncertainty about definitions
- Gaps in subject knowledge
- Limited awareness of national and international scholarship
- Widespread teaching of narrow, 'Auschwitz-centric' and 'perpetrator-oriented' narratives



Pathway of professional development

UCL's Centre for Holocaust Education designed the first pathway of teacher development directly responding to classroom challenges revealed by national research and targeted at teachers' needs at different stages of their careers.



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How research informs practice

Research finding

Only 25% of teachers include the diversity of Jewish communities or their contribution to wider society.

Issue

Jews appear on the historical stage only as victims to be persecuted and killed; many students have little knowledge of who Jews were or what Europe lost in the Holocaust.

Resolution

Our teaching resources focused on pre-war life are a central part of our work at ITT, CPD and Masters level and our work with Beacon Schools.

Impact

Pupils see Jews as subjects with agency rather than as objects of persecution.

The voices of victims and survivors are restored to the historical narrative.

Pupils are more able to understand the devastation of the Holocaust.

New research into what young people think about the Holocaust



- Given that young people are exposed to high levels of (mis)appropriation of the Holocaust
- More important than ever to map where, when & how pupils encounter the Holocaust
- And to understand how does this shape their knowledge and understanding?

What do young people think and know about the Holocaust?



Research into young people's understanding

Some 9,500 students have participated in the world's largest research project into young people's thinking about the Holocaust

How are we going about this?

Students have completed a survey to examine:

- Substantive knowledge of the Holocaust
- Recognition of key words and images
- Sources of Holocaust knowledge within and outside of school
- Attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust
- Attitudes towards other salient variables like fairness and equality

How are we going about this?

Focus groups are exploring students’:

- experiences of hearing survivor testimony
- engagement with the Holocaust from contemporary sources (e.g. *Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*)
- Holocaust knowledge and understanding (e.g. their explanations of the Holocaust)
- attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust; and attitudes towards fairness, equality and group identity

Mixed methodology

- **The survey** – with thousands of respondents – enables us to explore the scale of students’ knowledge and attitudes, and determine if there are any patterns.
The data collected from the survey will also enable us to conduct statistical analyses to explore relationships and differences between variables.
- **Focus group interviews** enable us to explore why these patterns or trends emerge.
Enables us to capture the nuances of students’ knowledge, understanding, misconceptions, attitudes etc.

What will we learn?

- What do students know and understand about the Holocaust (and what do they *think* they know and understand)?
- What are the principal sources of students' knowledge about the Holocaust, and how do these different sources influence students' knowledge and understanding?
- Are there relationships between students' Holocaust knowledge and their attitudes towards 'the other', fairness and equality?
- What will this mean for:
 - Our aims and rationale: why do we teach about the Holocaust?
 - What content, questions and issues should we focus on?
 - What does progression look like?
 - How can we assess learning and know if we are successful?

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