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Making the links: the relationship between learning about the Holocaust and contemporary anti-Semitism

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Abstract

Learning about the Holocaust is an important part of understanding the past to avoid repeating the horrors of the past. There is a seeming paradox that although there is more learning about the Holocaust than ever before, there is an increase throughout Europe of racism in general, including anti-Semitism. Our research, sponsored by the Scottish Executive) was quantitative longitudinal questionnaires in two Scottish primary schools whom we followed into secondary to examine their values and attitudes before and after learning about the Holocaust; we compared these with pupils who did not study the Holocaust. We also compared methodologies and resources used by the teachers to attempt to determine their impact.

Whilst there are some worrying signs of increases in anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe (Bergmann and Wetzel, 2003; Evening News, 2004; Community Security Trust (CST), 2007), it is important not to overstate the level of it; Further, we must recognise that education on its own cannot be a panacea for racism in general and anti-Semitism in particular, although there has been some evidence that learning about the Holocaust can have a positive impact on the outlook of young people. (Carrington and Short, 1997; Brown and Davies, 1998; Maitles and Cowan, 1999; Cowan and Maitles, 2007). While the Holocaust has been taught in Scottish primary and secondary schools for many years (Maitles and Cowan, 1999; Cowan and Maitles, 2000 and 2005), the introduction of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001 has made its teaching more mainstream and easier. This is because the announcement of the UK Holocaust Memorial Day was accompanied by the commissioning of curricular materials for teaching Holocaust history to primary pupils aged 10-11 years, (LTS, 2000) which were later distributed to every primary school in Scotland for preparation for the first commemorative event. The Home Office and the Scottish Executive also distributed a resource to every Scottish secondary school (DfEE, 2000). Both resources make links with contemporary manifestation of racism, prejudice and discrimination. The Scottish Executive have continued to fund Holocaust curricular materials (LTS 2002a, Morley and Nunn, 2005).

These initiatives show the commitment of the Scottish Executive to promoting the educational objective of Holocaust Memorial Day, to 'educate subsequent generations about the Holocaust and the continued relevance of the lessons that are learnt from it' (Home Office, 1999) and to encouraging Holocaust education in schools. However, we must remain aware that while education policy might stress positive issues such as understanding, empathy and tolerance, there can be a countervailing impact of other policy areas, such as economic and housing policies, holding of terrorist suspects and scaremongering (for example about numbers of refugees). This can lead to opposite effects than the education policy agenda.

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The content of the above curricular resources share a strong focus on the areas of knowledge and understanding relevant to the development of active and responsible citizenship. Currently a national priority, 'Values and Citizenship' involves teaching pupils 'duties and responsibilities of citizenship in democratic society' and 'respect for self and one another' (Standards in Scotland's schools Act, 2000). Further, the Education for Citizenship proposals (LTS, 2000b) implemented from August 2003, has added impetus to the development of teaching about the Holocaust in schools. As in England and Wales, the proposal is for education for citizenship to be an entitlement for all pupils at all stages. However, in Scotland, due to the cross curricular scope of 5-14, the existence of Modern Studies in the secondaries, the development of Social Subjects in Environmental Studies in the primaries, and the incorporation of 'responsible citizenship' in the Curriculum for Excellence proposals (Scottish Executive/LTS, 2004), citizenship is not a separate subject but is taught in a cross-curricular approach. Despite some fears that the responsibility of all can become the responsibility of none, the suggestion is that many subjects will have an input into education for citizenship.

While the Holocaust is only mentioned as an example of the kinds of teaching content that could be employed, the desire to develop positive attitudes towards other cultures, faiths and ethnic groups, means that a study of the worst genocide in history can be an important part of a child's development. Teaching about the Holocaust provides a suitable context for attainment in many key areas which are specified in proposals for Education for Citizenship in Scotland, e.g. human rights, the need for mutual respect, tolerance and understanding of a diverse and multicultural Scotland (LTS, 2002b).

School Based Holocaust Education

In responding to pedagogical issues such as Piaget's theories of children's intellectual and moral development that suggest that children are unable to abstract and satisfactorily understand this kind of topic, Short (in Short and Reed, 2004) cites a number of Piaget's critics who have influenced teachers to raise their expectations of children's abilities. The contribution of Holocaust education to citizenship in the primary school includes developing pupils' understanding of justice, stereotyping and discrimination (Short and Carrington, 1991; Maitles and Cowan, 1999; Cowan and Maitles, 2007) and provides opportunities for developing positive values of empathy, awareness of antiracism, and an understanding that the individual can make a difference. A contrasting viewpoint is conveyed by Totten (1999) on the grounds that the Holocaust is inappropriate and too complex for this age group to study, and by Kochan (1989) who objects to its teaching to the 'immature and unsophisticated', claiming that such teaching can have deleterious consequences for pupils. The former viewpoint is challenged by Cowan and Maitles's case study of an educational authority's response to Holocaust Memorial Day in which Holocaust teaching was the norm for the upper primary classes, i.e. 10-12 years and where a variety of appropriate curricular teaching materials and staff development were provided by the local authority (Cowan and Maitles, 2002). The latter viewpoint is challenged by this paper together with its phase 1 study that suggested that teaching the Holocaust has a positive short term impact on pupils' values and attitudes (Cowan and Maitles, 2005). In this paper, which presents some of the findings from three surveys, we

suggest that evidence exists to dispute such theoretical claims and support the teaching of the Holocaust to upper primary pupils.

Previous research in secondary schools (Carrington and Short, 1997; Brown and Davies, 1998; Short et al 1998; Davies, 2000; Hector, 2000; Totten, 2000; Ben-Peretz, 2003; Schweber, 2003;) provides evidence that Holocaust education can make a significant contribution to citizenship in developing pupils' awareness of human rights issues and genocides, the concepts of stereotyping and scapegoating, and general political literacy, such as the exercise of power in local, national and global contexts. Landau (1989) asserts that Holocaust teaching 'perhaps more effectively than any other subject, has the power to sensitise them (pupils) to the dangers of indifference, intolerance, racism and the dehumanisation of others'.

Short asserts that one of the lessons that the Holocaust teaches pupils is that pupil attitudes are 'to some extent, culturally determined', and its teaching should encourage pupils to examine whether any harmful stereotypes may emanate from an aspect of their culture. (2003a). This is supported by Lord Lamont's claim that devolution has led to 'a marked rise in anti-English racism' (*The Sunday Times* 2005). While his solution is anti-racism legislation that protects English people who are racially abused in Scotland, it must be noted that there is no evidence of this. If however, there is any substance in this, the contribution of Holocaust education can be relevant.

Holocaust education is part of the English National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 (S1/2 Scottish equivalent age group) but, as we pointed out (Maitles and Cowan, 1999), although there are plenty of opportunities in the curriculum for teaching about the Holocaust, too often 'Holocaust teaching in Scotland depends on individual school policy, and/or interested teachers' who integrate it into modes of the curriculum. Although the Holocaust is not included specifically in the Scottish curriculum, the '5-14 National Guidelines', there is plenty of scope within this curriculum for teaching it. Traditional curricular areas are Religious and Moral Education, Environmental Studies and Personal and Social Development.

Hence, as a result of curricular developments, governmental and local authority support and research into its teaching, Scottish teachers of the upper primary and lower secondary stages now have more opportunities to teach the Holocaust and greater accessibility to Holocaust teaching resources than before. Finally, there is an additional 20% flexibility time that allows schools to enhance the time for a curricular area where they consider the minimum time insufficient and where school and the local authority have development priorities. This remains unchanged in the revised 'Structure and Balance of the Curriculum' document (SEED, 2000) and indeed is strengthened by the Curriculum for Excellence proposals.

To investigate the value of Holocaust education, the authors devised a longitudinal strategy which examines whether there are 'immediate' and 'lasting' effects on the attitudes and dispositions of pupils that result from its teaching; further, the values of this cohort will be compared to their peers who did not have the opportunity to study the Holocaust in primary school. This will provide empirical evidence of the contribution of Holocaust education in developing attitudes relating to citizenship. Further, we have

examined the teaching strategies of the teachers involved to determine its impact on children's understanding and values.

Sample

This small-scale study involved some 100 pupils in Primary 7 and a total of 238 pupils in Secondary 1. In order to avoid aspects of familiarity, to move beyond the multicultural areas most often used in the studies on this area and to explore issues such as attitudes towards Gypsy Travelers and Jews, we chose a small rural local authority some 30 miles from Glasgow. The school sample was chosen, in collaboration with the local authority, who identified two primary schools in the area that taught the Holocaust as part of the World War Two topic in Primary. One primary is a one streamed school (school A); the other is a larger school that contained pupils from three classes (school B). Both primaries are non-denominational, have mixed socio-economic catchment areas, are predominantly white and have no Jewish pupils. Class sizes were similar in both schools.

Methodology

In consultation with the schools and local authority, a survey was devised which attempted to ascertain changes in some of the values and attitudes outlined as central to national documentation on citizenship (LTS, 2002; Scottish Executive/LTS, 2004).

We issued the survey before and immediately after the lessons on the Holocaust in November 2003 and March 2004, to investigate the immediate effect of Holocaust education on pupils' values and attitudes (Surveys one and two).

We followed this cohort ten months later into the secondary school and issued survey three to compare pupils' attitudes with earlier findings. We also issued this survey to secondary pupils who had not previously studied the Holocaust to compare their attitudes with that of the core group. This fitted in with teachers' forward planning of Holocaust teaching and meant that the impact of the media leading up to national UK Holocaust Memorial Day could not influence the findings. It is worth noting that the number of anti-Semitic incidents reported in the UK during this period rose from 375 (2003) to 532 (2004), (CST 2007).

Interviews were carried out with one class teacher from each of the primary schools to obtain information on the different teaching methodologies and resources that were adopted in their teaching of the Holocaust immediately after the teachers had finished their teaching of the Holocaust. Teachers were given a free choice in teaching the Holocaust and encouraged to teach it as they would normally. Due to the composite situation where a group of pupils had learned about the Holocaust in the previous year, school B was unable to teach 'as normal' using The Holocaust Teaching Pack for Primary Schools (LTS, 2000) and used the video 'Daniel's Story' (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1993) as a core resource.

Results and Discussion

School A integrated the Holocaust into a topic on World War Two; school B taught the Holocaust as a separate topic. School A engaged pupils in written work and pupil self

evaluations while school B based its teaching on discussion work and deliberately did not ask pupils to complete the usual Environmental Studies topic evaluation sheet, with the intention of making it distinctive from other school work.

School A used children's literature to enhance the children's understanding of the Holocaust by reading *Hana's Suitcase* (Levine, 2003) to the whole class. Based on a true story, this book tells of the experiences of two Jewish children from Czechoslovakia in 1939 and has possibilities for thematic discussion of tolerance and war. The teacher coordinator in school B designed worksheets to support and enhance the learning from 'Daniel's Story' as there were no accompanying school materials for this resource. This video is narrated by 'Daniel', a German Jewish boy of about seven years of age, and tells of his experiences of the rising anti-Semitism in Germany. While the characters in this narrative are fictitious the events and experiences are based on actual historical events. Short supports the use of literature in this way, stating that it can 'foster historical insight, knowledge and understanding' if used effectively (1997, p179).

All teachers (from both schools) included Anne Frank in their teaching: school A's teaching was largely based on this while school B made reference to it. The principal resource used by school A was a listening skill programme (Dring, 1992) and other resources, e.g. the videos 'Dear Kitty' (Anne Frank House, 1987) and 'Anne Frank Remembered' (Blair, 1995), were used to supplement this teaching.

Time spent on each topic varied from two hours a week for ten weeks (school A) to four hours a week for three weeks (school B). This totals to school A allocating 8 hours more to this topic than school B. The sample of teachers included two teachers with a vast experience of teaching the Holocaust, while additional teachers had not previously taught the Holocaust. The main teaching approach adopted by both schools was whole class teaching.

Resources used as stimulus for discussions were the quotations '*When one burns books, in the end one will also burn people*' (Heine 1821) and '*All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.*' (Burke, 18th century, in the Quotation Page 2007). One class used the internet to investigate the lives of specific survivors and helpers of the oppressed. The link between attitudes towards Jews during the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland today was made explicit in these discussions. School A had only touched upon the current situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

Impact on pupils' values related to various minority and ethnic groups

Table 1: Survey 3 Results - School A v School B:
I think that there are too many ... in Scotland.

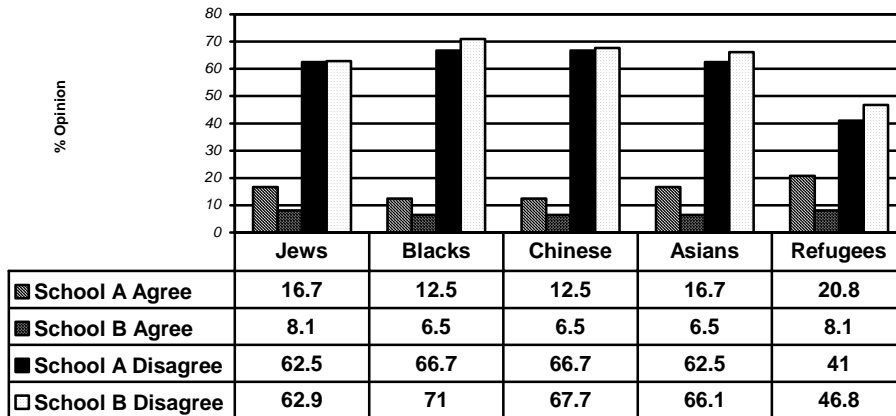
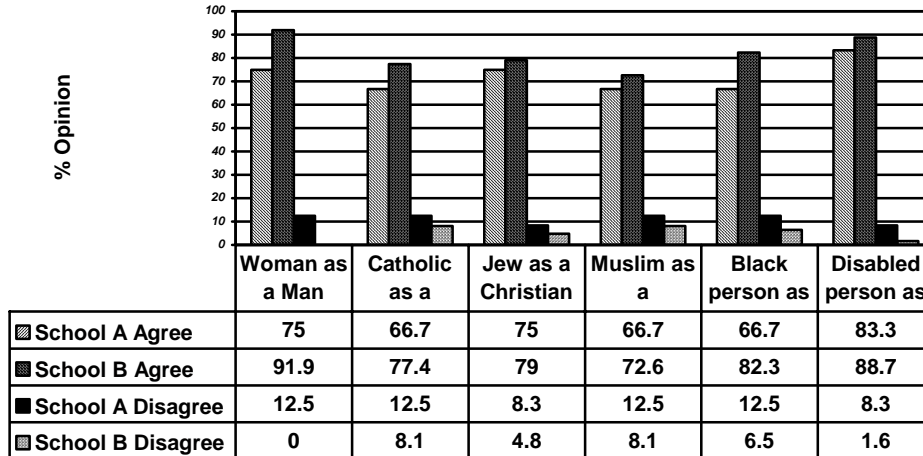


Table 2: Survey 3 Results - School A v School B :
I think that I would be just as likely to vote for a ... as a ... for the Scottish Parliament.



Tables 1 and 2 show that school B has more positive attitudes towards minority and ethnic groups. Table 1 shows that the differential between these schools in agreement of the statement ranges from 6%-12% with school B consistently being more positive. The differential between these schools in disagreement of the statement is closer, ranging from 0.4%- 5.8%. In Table 2 the positive attitudes (conveyed by the agreed statements) show that school B is consistently more positive with a higher differential ranging from 4%-16%.

In both schools, pupils' attitudes to Jews is disappointing in that a small number of pupils agreed with the statement in Table 1 despite their learning about the Holocaust and that a greater number of pupils would be more likely to vote for a disabled person as they would an able bodied person than they would a Jew as a Christian. In Scotland, a country with a population of 5,000,000, there are approximately 5,000 Jews. One possible explanation may lie in pupils' understanding of the genocide of the Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. This may be perceived as something that has happened a long time ago in history, and is not relevant to Scotland today. It may also be that pupils do not perceive Jews as victims in today's society.

Another explanation may be found in Short's implication (2003b) that successful Holocaust teaching is dependent on pupils' perceptions of Jews and Judaism and of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Foster and Mercier (in Davies, 2000) also claim that pupils with some background of the beliefs and practices of Judaism are in a better position to understand the Holocaust than those without such knowledge. Interview data showed that school A had introduced Judaism in P.3 but did not study another aspect of this religion until after their teaching of the Holocaust in P.7; school B had studied Judaism the previous year as the RME topic for an entire term.

It is worth noting that the most positive change of attitudes in Table 1 (towards refugees) is a current issue that was likely to have been discussed in and outside the classroom. It is unlikely that the other groups of peoples would have aroused a similar interest. Furthermore while school B had made explicit links between attitudes towards Jews during the Holocaust and asylum seekers in Scotland today, no such link was made between anti-Semitism during the Holocaust and contemporary anti-Semitism today.

Impact on pupils' understanding of Anti-Semitism and Genocide

Table 3: Core Sample V Others:
Do you know what anti-semitism is?

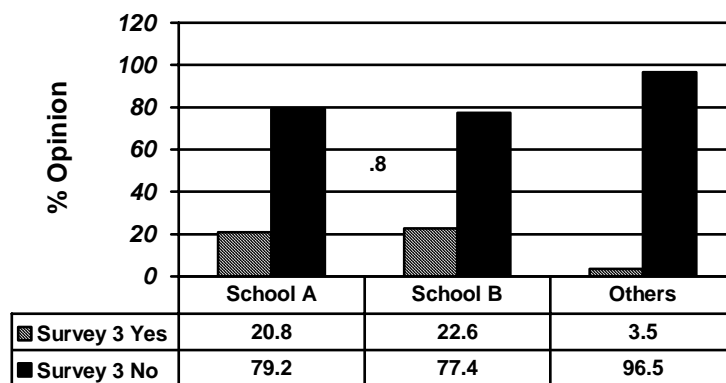


Table 3 shows that schools A and B respectively and thus the core sample (those pupils who learned about the Holocaust in primary) showed greater perceived knowledge of anti-Semitism than the 'others'. However the general low awareness of the term 'anti-Semitism' by both schools and the similarities of their responses are very significant. School B's responses are particularly disappointing as it had shown a 35% gain over school A in survey 2. The use of flashcards displayed in the classroom with key terms relating to the pupils' study of the Holocaust, which included 'anti-Semitism', and regular use of these to check pupil understanding did not therefore have a long-term impact on pupils.

These findings support previous research by Schweber (2004) and Short and Reed (2004) in that teaching about the Holocaust emphasizes racism *rather* than anti-Semitism. Schweber found that in order to make Jewish people during the Holocaust seem normal to pupils, the history of anti-Semitism was 'overlooked or bypassed' by teachers.

While a detailed information of the history of anti-Semitism is not appropriate for primary pupils, its meaning and some awareness of the historical context of European anti-Semitism might address pupils' lack of understanding of contemporary anti-Semitism. This is of particular relevance to pupils as one of the conclusions of the report of the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into anti-Semitism in the UK (2006, in The Parliamentary Committee Against anti-Semitism, 2007) was that there is a new awareness of the need to explain to school children the history of anti-Semitism.

**Table 4: Core Sample V Others:
Do you know what genocide is?**

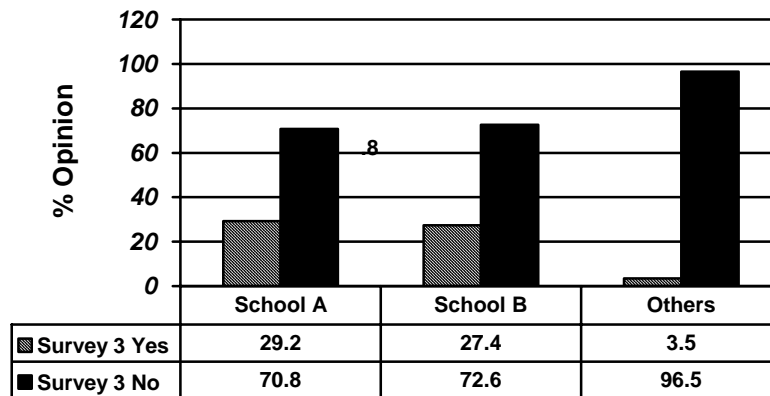


Table 4 shows a very low awareness of the meaning of genocide by the 'others'. Though it can be argued that 27-29% is a low percentage of core pupils who consider they understand the meaning of genocide, the findings suggest that teaching the Holocaust is a contributory factor to pupils' understanding. Interview data showed that school B had included a lot of content on the contemporary nature of the Holocaust, making relevant links with human rights issues and discussing the current situation of refugees and

asylum seekers in Scotland, while school A had only touched upon it. Yet it yielded lower results than school A.

The results of Tables 3 and 4 may have implications for genocide denial i.e. denying that a genocide has taken place. Holocaust denial is a form of genocide denial and is a political movement which denies basic facts of the Holocaust, agreed to by credible historians around the world. One rationale for teaching the Holocaust in schools is to develop pupils' knowledge of the Holocaust so that they can 'combat denial'. (Short and Reed, 2004). The lack of perceived knowledge of the meanings of anti-Semitism and genocide suggest that this too is a more complex issue.

Difference in attitudes of active citizenship

Table 5 shows a difference between the core sample and the 'others', with the core sample having a smaller number agreeing with this statement and a larger number disagreeing with this statement. This suggests that the core sample have a greater understanding of individual responsibility for racism than the 'others'. Table 6 shows that this positive difference is largely made by school A who convey a potentially strong involvement in opposing racism, with almost twice as many of these pupils disagreeing with the statement. School A were also more positive than school B in agreeing with the statement 'I think it is important that I defend people's human rights'. Findings of 66.7% of school A, 54.8% of school B and 46.9% of the 'others' further show a more positive attitude towards aspects of active citizenship by the core sample.

Table 5: Core Sample V Others:
I think that racism has nothing to do with me

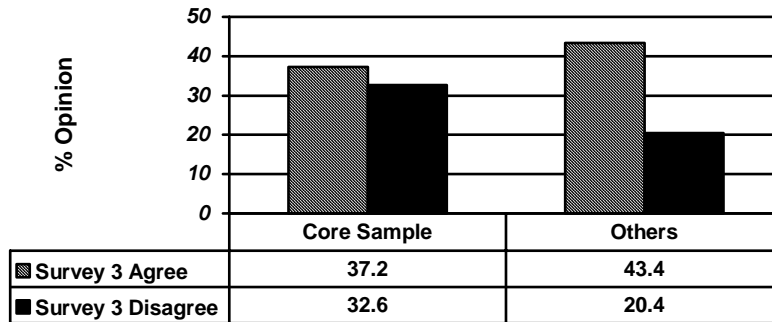
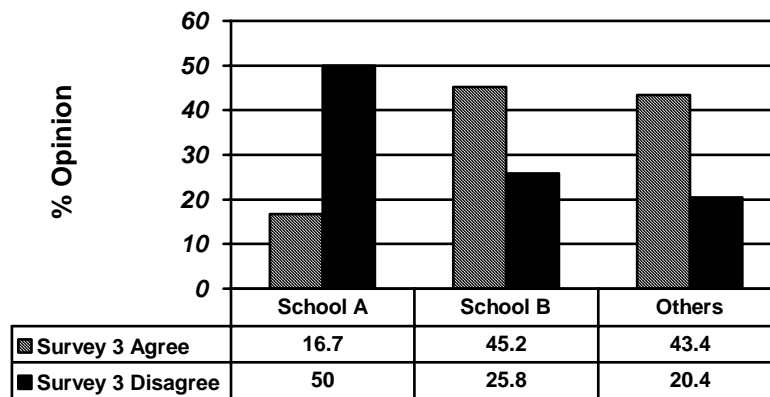


Table 6: School A v School B v Others:
I think that racism has nothing to do
with me



Conclusions

The results of this study are similar to other research examining values and attitudes in that they are not clear-cut but complex. Results suggest that both teaching methodologies are effective in different ways as pupils from both schools have more positive values than their peers who had not studied the Holocaust. While unknown factors may also have contributed to these gains, the contribution of Holocaust education, at the very least, must be considered a factor. Also, pupils from school A have more positive values in one aspect of this study while pupils from school B have more positive values in another aspect of this study.

Limitations of this research are the inability to track pupil responses to preserve anonymity and time constraints which did not allow all teachers to be interviewed. Furthermore, teacher data was reliant on recollections and it is possible that some important information was missed in the interviews.

Data shows that pupils from school B are more positive in terms of their attitudes towards various minority and ethnic groups. While their positive advantage was not large it was consistent over all the indices in the 'Too Many in Scotland' and 'Voting Attitudes' statements. This suggests that the teaching methodologies in school B had a greater impact on pupils' values related to minority and ethnic groups than those of school A.

Pupils' perceived knowledge of the term 'anti-Semitism' yielded similar results for both schools. The frequent teaching of this term had yielded short-term gains which had not been maintained. Both schools had a low awareness of the meaning of 'anti-Semitism' although they had a stronger perceived understanding of it than pupils who had not learnt about the Holocaust. School A fared marginally better than school B in perceived knowledge of 'genocide' and the core sample showed a greater understanding of

'genocide' than of 'anti-Semitism'. It should be noted that while we are focusing on teaching methodologies, we did not consider pupils' attainment and abilities and this may be an important factor in understanding the Holocaust in general and 'anti-Semitism' and 'genocide' in particular. The findings suggest that teaching the Holocaust is a contributory factor to pupils' understanding of the meaning of 'genocide'.

In addition, the findings suggest that the teaching methodologies in school A had a greater impact on pupils' values on active citizenship than those of school B. Pupils from school A were more disposed to this by indicating a significantly greater understanding of individual responsibility than school B. The core sample was also more disposed to active citizenship than the 'others'.

In conclusion, this study's findings are that introducing Holocaust education in the upper primary stages contributes positively to citizenship targets that are central to the understanding of contemporary anti-Semitism and that a range of teaching methodologies can be used to achieve this. It follows that that this study recommends that the Holocaust be included in citizenship education and anti-racist programmes in the primary school but notes that Holocaust education is vast and complex and that its teaching in the primary context can at best be a meaningful introduction to the Holocaust to be consolidated and built upon in the secondary.

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