

Holocaust Studies in Austrian Elementary and Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This article presents arguments in support of teaching about the Holocaust and Nazism in Austria at an early age. To accomplish this, Austrian and German elementary school textbooks were analyzed for the amount of content dealing with the Holocaust and Jews; the results showed that since 1980 the amount of content on the Holocaust increased in Germany, and to a lesser extent in Austria. The article reviews some of the criticism in Europe of the term *Holocaust Education* and explores some of arguments about why that is. The author argues that moral education and teaching of Human Rights are important components of, but ought not be the main goal of teaching about the Holocaust. The role of Austria after World War II, and exploration of the so called *victim myth*, prevalent until the 1990s are important to understanding history and to how history textbooks were created. After a discussion of how the Holocaust can be taught to elementary and early secondary school aged children, some suggestions are made about approaches to teaching the Holocaust to students in these age groups.

Keywords

National Socialism, holocaust education, human rights, victim myth, didactics of history, history textbooks, schooling

Introduction

Holocaust Education is included in most history curricula of the western world (Carrier, 2013), but this era is still controversial in Austria and Germany. *Hitler centrism* is one of the challenges for the didactics of history, because it implies that only one person committed these crimes and cruelties. While it is clear that in Austria and Germany students already have some *prior knowledge* of Adolf Hitler and World War II, in Austria neither

politicians nor society want to be associated with this “dark chapter,” therefore the Hitler-cult (and *centrism*) is very *comfortable* for Austrians.

History textbooks are an instrument that can create identities and deny unpleasant incidents in a nation’s past. One very important goal for researchers is to provide

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guidance about how the Holocaust and National Socialism can be taught at the different grades in a sustainable way. This article presents guidance for teaching this topic at elementary and secondary levels. Conclusions at the end of the article present suggestions about what should be derived from *Holocaust Education*.

Teaching About the Holocaust in Elementary Schools

The teaching of complex topics like the *Holocaust* at an early age generates feelings of uncertainty. What is the right age to confront children with such burdensome content? Weninger (1949) wrote that students at a primary level are not able to *understand* that *difficult* issue. But according to Konevic (2007, p.11) he had no evidence for such a statement. In the following, the author will not provide a *simple* answer to that question; instead, some ways to deal with this challenge will be explored. While it is possible to live in the United States of America without finding evidence of the history of National Socialism, that is definitely not conceivable in Austria, or Germany. If Austrian elementary students live in urban areas they are most likely confronted with monuments, memorial plaques or media reports which relate to this “dark past” of Austrian history (as it is often referred to) in everyday life.

In Austrian elementary schools the topics, National Socialism and World War II, are presented on the occasion of the Austrian National Day, October 26th. Because of the decreasing importance of holiday culture in Austria, related textbook representations have

been progressively reduced over the last years, therefore resulting in a reduction of the representation of the history of National Socialism. Students are provided textbooks that contain unreflected data, facts, and pictures which are mostly not contextualized (Langer & Windischbauer, 2010, p. 47).

In 2014 Mittnik analyzed all approved Austrian textbooks on societal learning/civic education for elementary schools. Following the method of Mayring, categories were built and a content analysis was conducted (Mayring, 1990, p. 14). The categories were:

- *Words*: the number of words which are used to present this topic in the textbook.
- *Figures*: figures that contribute to the textbook narrative.
- *Hitler*: how often the name ‘Hitler’ was mentioned.
- *Jews*: how often the term ‘Jew’ was mentioned.
- *National Socialism (NS)*: how often the item ‘National Socialism’ was mentioned.
- *Holocaust*: how often the item ‘Holocaust’ was mentioned.
- *Suffering*: the suffering of Austrians mentioned in the text.
- *Perpetrators*: Austrians were represented as perpetrators.

None of the books analyzed included the terms *Jew* or *Holocaust*. In one of the textbooks the topic did not appear at all. The number of words of text ranged between 39 and 194. In only one book, were Austrians presented as perpetrators.

Textbook	Words	Figures	Hitler	Jews	NS	Holocaust	Suffering	Perpetrators
Dem Leben auf der Spur	39	o	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ideenbuch	o	o	No	No	No	No	No	No
Meine bunte Welt	143	Photo (2)	Yes (1)	No	No	No	Yes	No
Schatzkiste	77	Photo (1) Painting (1)	No	No	Yes (1)	No	No	No
Tipi	194	Photo (1)	Yes (1)	No	Yes (3)	No	No	Yes

Fig. 1: Frequency analysis in Austrian elementary school textbooks (Mittnick 2014)

In the analyses of contingency (“Kontingenzanalyse“) the text templates of comparable issues in the analyzed textbooks were combined and interpreted (Mayring, 1990, p. 15).

In the textbooks, *Ideenbuch* and *Schatzkiste*, the topic World War II did not appear. Based on these text templates following contingences were built:

- Mentioning of Adolf Hitler 1939 (in 2 of 3)
- Duration of war 1939 to 1945 (in 3 of 3)
- Austria was occupied by the German Reich (in 3 of 3)
- Austria is going to be part of the German Reich (in 3 of 3), even if the correct designation of *Deutsches Reich* is used only once.

Academia is divided whether the Holocaust should be taught to 9 or 10 year old children. In 2004 Beck and Heyl, two German researchers in this field, started a debate on teaching the Holocaust at elementary level. Some of these arguments are presented in Figure 2.

In contrast to the positions of Heyl, in 2005 the German president, Horst Köhler, demanded that anti-Semitism should be fought by age-appropriate lessons about the Holocaust in elementary schools. In Austria, however, it is still taboo to talk about this time period with children. Even for Austrian historians this topic seems to be too complex or too difficult; only one conference was held in Austria in 2010 relating to holocaust education. (Kühberger & Windischbauer, 2010).

Although von Reeken noted that contemporary history is an era which seems to be extremely real for students, it is not represented in the curricula. Yet for Austria’s and Germany’s recent history, the Holocaust is *the* dominating historical topic because of the relevance to present times. (von Reeken, 2007).

Becher conducted interviews with students from elementary schools in Switzerland and found that a massive *Hitler-centrism* existed in the beliefs of children in that country. (Becher, 2013). Hanfland demonstrated in her study that elementary

school aged children have prior knowledge about National Socialism, also with an extended and unreflected *Hitler-centrism* (Hanfland, 2008). Mittnik found in 2014 that these non-reflected notions existed in Austrian elementary schools as well (Mittnik, 2015) This is shown in Figure 3. In that study 142 students of six different Viennese elementary schools were asked what they knew about World War II, using a written questionnaire. As can be

seen from the results, the students significantly focussed on the person of Adolf Hitler.

These findings underline the necessity of discussing that history with students. Even if we agree with Enzenbach, that this topic is too complex or too difficult to talk about with younger students. we have to talk about with our students about this issue in order to avoid potential fears initiated from this historical content (Enzenbach, 2013, p. 137).

Arguments in favor (Beck)	Arguments against (Heyl)
Introducing the topic at the beginning of secondary school is too late due to external influences.	Students may be overtaxed or even traumatized.
Implementing this topic is coherent with the curriculum.	The topic may potentially destroy the children's positive worldview.
Frequently, the students' prior knowledge about the topic is flawed – teachers can fix that.	Since children may not have any prior knowledge about the topic, it is not necessary to talk about it in order to protect them.

Fig. 2: Teaching the Holocaust at elementary level? (Heyl, 1996) (Beck, 1998)

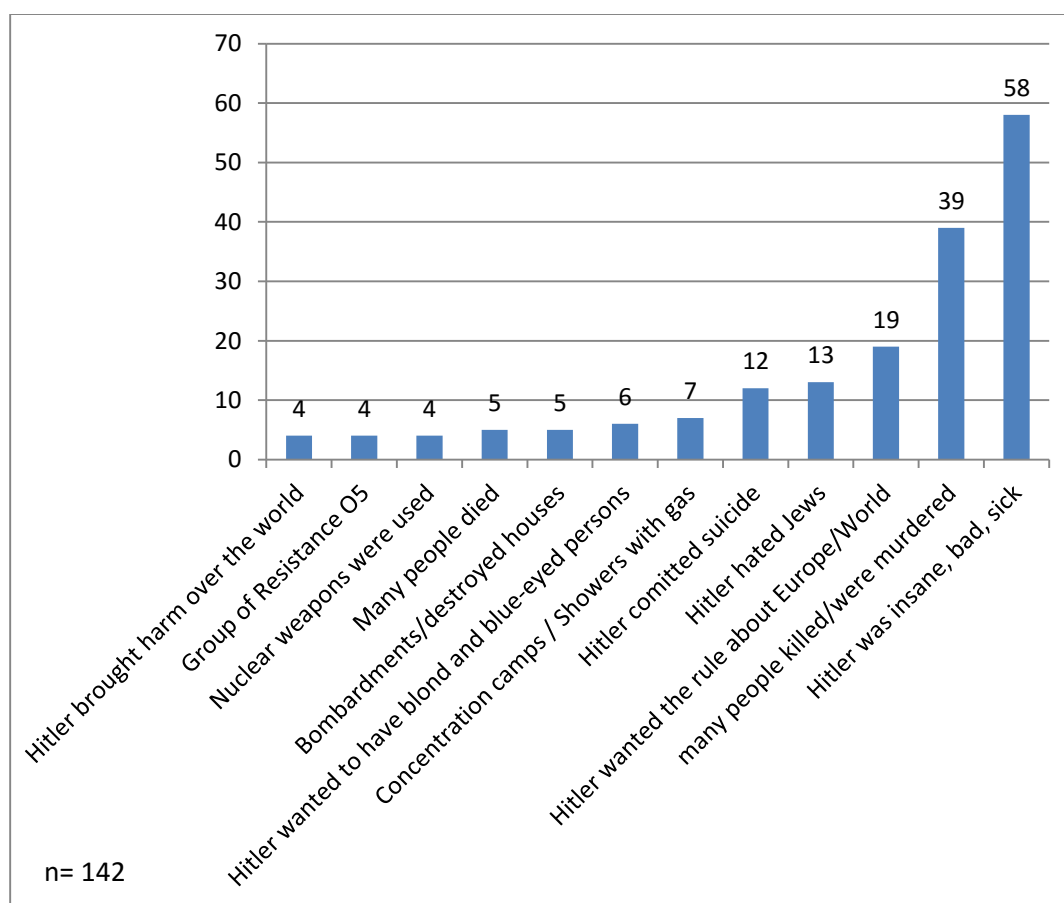


Fig. 3: Notions of elementary school students, Vienna (Mittnik, 2015)

Historians who were mentioned before demonstrated that the issue “Holocaust” is relevant to elementary school aged students, but in Austrian and in German academic communities, it is not discussed seriously. One reason could be that the easiest way to escape unpleasant discussions is to mention the topic and avoid an in-depth treatment (Friedländer, 1994).

In particular, based on the fact that National Socialism should be taught differently in a multi-ethnic society like in Austria, this view is still not really accepted. In many Islamic immigrant families anti-Semitism exists on a to a large extent; in some cases there are also sympathies for the National Socialist regime. Mansour classified three different manifestations of Anti-Semitism in Islamic families. First, conspiracy theories are very popular among young Turks. Jews are presented as rich, reckless and part of the worldwide neoliberal finance system. The Turkish government led by Recep Erdogan, especially, reinforces these prejudices. Second, young Arabs link the Middle-East conflict to Jews. Mansour describes this as an *anti-Zionistic Anti-Semitism*. Third, the *Islamic argued Anti-Semitism*- radical groups of Muslims, like the Salafists, present the Jews as their “biological” enemy, based on controversial passages of the Koran (Mansour, 2014, p. 49). The didactics of history should be encouraged to take this problem seriously (Alavi, 1998).

Criticism of the Term *Holocaust Education*

The term *Holocaust Education* is not accepted in the German-speaking scientific community. In 1995 Claussen wrote that the term *Holocaust*, should not be used because it is not part of the everyday language in Austria or Germany and, as a loanword, not useful in a perpetrator nation. Kühner, Langer and Sigel defined the term Holocaust Education as a

pedagogical-didactic discourse about the teaching about the genocide of the European Jews (Kühner, Langer, & Sigel, 2008, p. 78). Genocide should also be part of the German language and Claussen noted that this term was used already in the Middle-Ages to ridicule Jews (Claussen, 1995, p. 21). In addition singular focus on Jews is a denial of other victim groups such as homosexuals or Romani people. At the beginning of the Nazi-terror (in Germany in 1933, in Austria in 1938) political opponents were persecuted. The largest victim group in the Austrian concentration camp, Mauthausen, were the Russians (Marsalek, 1995, p. 144). Two German historians listed the murdered people during the period of the National Socialism, Benz (Benz, 1996) and Pohl (Pohl, 2003). Even if the Jews had the largest number of victims, it is not appropriate or even professional to deny other victim groups.

The publication *Guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust* (USHMM, 2015) by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington D.C. suggested a ten-point checklist to be considered in teaching about the Holocaust. However, these suggestions are very general and do not really offer any support for teachers. Together with the *Teacher Guidelines* (IHRA, 2015) by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) they seem to be the most important resources for teaching about the Holocaust in English speaking countries.

The US-historian Lindquist tried to create a checklist of the most important elements of sustainable Holocaust Education, to help teachers to focus on the central meaning.

- 1) Situating the Holocaust as a central event in world history
- 2) Defining patterns of human behavior
- 3) Viewing Holocaust education as a motor for social and educational change

of the set of civic values democratic societies are built on.

- 4) Examining the Holocaust as a catalyst for fostering intellectual and personal growth in both students and teachers due to the subject's complexity and the high level of response the topic creates
- 5) Situating the Holocaust as a primary focus of contemporary education (Lindquist D. , 2008, p. 5).

The Council of Europe (COE) (Lecomte, 2001) and e UNESCO (UNESCO, 1974) tried to formulate central guidelines for teaching about Holocaust. In most cases, the concepts of Holocaust Education followed three dominant principles:

- To counter contemporary racist and anti-Semitic sentiment, students have to learn about the cruelties of the Nazis
- Learning about the Holocaust will make students aware of the significance of Human Rights
- Learning about the Holocaust should have value for students' lives.

The American view on the Holocaust was described by Deckert-Peaceman as *The Americanization of the Holocaust*. The following points can be seen as a link to it:

- Correlation between the Nazi cruelties and a general moral education
- Focus on the teaching of values and tolerance, without mentioning genocide
- Prevention of anti-Semitic and extreme right-wing tendencies in society (Deckert-Peaceman, 2002)

Many textbook narratives suggest a link between Human Rights Education and Holocaust Education. The belief is that if students are confronted with the history of the Holocaust, human rights will be more relevant for them. However, even the point that Holocaust education should have value for the students' lives has been challenged. According

to Bloxham, knowing about the genocide could be very important for a better understanding of history, but it may have no value for an individual student (Bloxham, 2009).

In the German-speaking academic community there are also counter-theses which reject the relationship between teaching about the Holocaust and an efficient Human Rights education. One is, "The History of the Holocaust is not suitable for a sustainable treatment of contemporary racism and xenophobia" (Ehmann, 2000), The second is that the increasing moralization of the Holocaust in education is more preaching than teaching. " (Salmons, 2003).

Learning About the Crimes of the National Socialists: Obligation in a Perpetrator Nation?

In Austria or Germany it may be argued that teaching about the holocaust is a *moral obligation*, and even a *pedagogical duty* to prepare students of all age groups to reach a fundamental understanding on this time period because of its high societal significance. However, it is acceptable not to work within the two aforementioned areas, and there are no alternative concepts or guidelines in German-speaking academia.

In 1943 the allied forces' *Treaty of Moscow*, included the passage 'Austria was the first victim of Nazi-Germany' was included but in the same treaty you ist also says that Austrians (were also) perpetrators and that a new Austria had to bring these persons to justice after the end of World War II (Verosta, 1947, p. 52).

However, it was not possible to deal with the war crimes of the Austrian society after World War II.. This political agenda of the government In a very famous speech in August 1945, Leopold Figl, the first Austrian chancellor stated "Seven years did the Austrian nation suffer from the Hitler-barbarianism. Seven years were the Austrian people enslaved and oppressed, here was no freedom of speech,

no possibility to commit to an idea; brutal terror and power forced the people to be subjects of the regime. But the deep belief in nation of Austria was a drive for a patriotic resistance carried by all parts of society. In the factories and offices, at the frontline and at home, the people attempted to sabotage the Hitler-state. We true Austrians were in one front with the soldiers of the Allies” (Pohn-Weidinger, 2013, p. 71) .

But the De-Nazification was not thorough in Austria at all (Botz, 1996). In the same era, our History Textbooks told generations of Austrians that a huge number of Austrians had joined the resistance and had fought against the Nazi-regime. For example, text passages as the following often appear in Austrian history textbooks of the 1980s that mention Austrian suffering, but fail to mention cruelties committed by Austrians: “*The failure of Stauffenberg’s attempted assassination also meant for our country that the (Austrian) suffering had not come to an end.*” (Scheucher, 1982, p. 32). The textbooks obviously had the purpose of helping to form a new Austrian identity

To underscore Austria’s involvement in this era, some facts help: 10% of all commanders of concentrations camps were Austrian, 14% of all SS-members and 20% of the KZ-guards were Austrian, but Austrians accounted for only 8% of the population of the *Third Reich* was only. Additionally, two out of five death camps (Treblinka, Sobibor) were commanded by Austrians (Steininger, 2008), and some of the most brutal perpetrators were Austrians, including Adolf Eichmann, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Odilo Globocnik and August Eigruber.

Even if it can be argued that Austria was not a sovereign state between 1938 and 1945, the people of this country as it existed before 1938, had a responsibility for their crimes and for their role in the genocide. Whereas in Germany there were a proceedings at different courts all over the country where the NS-

perpetrators were judged. The Nuremberg Trials between 1945 and 1949 sentenced more than 60.000 people (Erdmann, 1999, p. 106). In total, preliminary proceedings were initiated in Germany against 172,294 people between 1945 and 2005 (Eichmüller, 2008, p. 624); In Austria only 17% of the accused were sentenced (Hanisch, 1994, p. 423).

Prior to 1986 very few people openly discussed the role of Austrians in the NS-regime. However, in 1986 Kurt Waldheim, an Austrians People Party (ÖVP) candidate for the Austrian presidency was accused by the popular Austrian news journal, *profil*, of having been a member of the SS and of the Wehrmacht (Kontanko, 1986). The opposition party, the Social Democrats (SPÖ), used that fact to talk about Austrian collective memory. For the first time in Austria, 40 years after the ending of World War II, this election opened a broad discussion about the cruelties committed during that period by Austrians. Also in the United States of America This issue was also very controversial in the United States of America. The *New York Times* published an article, accusing Waldheim of having been a member of the SA (Tagliabue, 1986). Though Kurt Waldheim was elected president of Austria, the USA set him on the “Watchlist”, making it impossible for him to enter the United States. No politician from a Western state came to his inauguration; Waldheim was completely isolated (Gehler, 1996, p. 41). The election of Waldheim to Austrian president brought the discussion about Austrians past “to the middle of Austrians society” (Gehler & Sickinger, 1996, p. 632). The ensuing discussions gave rise to the first serious controversy about Austria’s part in the *Third Reich* more than 40 years after the end of the war (Uhl, 2001). It was no longer possible to maintain the position that Austria was the “first victim of the German Reich.” It has taken years for this change of perspective about Austria’s past to find its way into Austrian history textbooks.

Modern Austria is one of the richest countries in the world, but there are still problems with democracy or the principle of equality. In 2014 a survey documented that 29% of Austrians want to have a strong political leader (‘Führer’) who could rule without a parliament and 56% of Austrians do not want to discuss National Socialism and World War II (Rathkolb & Ogris, 2014). The didactics of history are neither able to solve this problem, nor is it the job of the profession to find the reasons, but these facts highlight the importance of creating new perspectives of teaching this topic. These realities underscore the importance beginning academically supported Holocaust Education at an early age to educate a society that does not sympathize with authoritarianism or the Nazi Regime.

Curricular Aspects of Teaching the History of National Socialism

Though teaching about the Holocaust is not required in Austrian elementary schools, in lower secondary (10 to 14-year-old students) it is. Each history teacher has to teach the topic. In contrast to the United States, Austrian curricula are uniform nationwide. The history curriculum for lower secondary, comparable to the American Middle School, prescribes following mandatory content:

- National Socialism as an example of a totalitarian regime
- Ideology, propaganda, mobilization of the youth, persecution, organized mass murder, resistance
- Jewish life before and after the Holocaust
- World War II
- Commemorative cultures (BMBF, 2015)

As in Germany, a national uniform curriculum does not exist in the United States. There are states New Jersey, for example, where the topic is mandated in the curriculum, but in other states there is no requirement for teachers to address it. In the curriculum of

New Jersey it says: “Every board of education shall include instruction on the Holocaust and genocides in an appropriate place in the curriculum of all elementary and secondary school pupils. The instruction shall enable pupils to identify and analyze applicable theories concerning human nature and behavior: to understand that genocide is a consequence of prejudice and discrimination: and to understand that issues of moral dilemma and conscience have a profound impact on life. The instruction shall further emphasize the personal responsibility that each citizen bears to fight racism and hatred whenever and wherever it happens” (N.J.S., 2015).

Learning About the Holocaust and Teaching About Human Rights.

In the Austrian academic community it is disputed if curricula are the appropriate instruments to modify or improve teaching. In Austria’s lower secondary, unqualified teachers frequently have to teach History because of a lack of teachers. If they are not interested in history, they do not use the textbooks for what they have been designed - as a teaching support. In such a scenario, students have to learn the textbooks contents, chapter for chapter, without reflection.. In the higher grades(age 18) the questions for the final exams in History have been analyzed and most of them are aligned with the contents of the textbook. At this point it is important to note that teachers in Austria are able to write their own exam questions for their own students. So, in theory, they can emphasize their own interests. Questions about National Socialism were formulated very often, but, predominantly, textbook narratives dominate exams (Mittnik, 2014).

The Basis of Teaching: History Textbooks

So it seems that History textbooks could be the instrument to change lessons. They are

constructions of history and designers of public knowledge- and they are a political issue. Knowledge and values have been defined by historians in order to be passed on to future generations (Lässig, 2010). In Austria, textbooks for students are the most important teaching support for History lessons, because every student gets his own textbook for each subject every year, with costs borne by the state.

In Austria there is an *Approbation Committee* for all textbooks. This committee decides if a textbook can get access to the market. The members, predominantly teachers of the subject, define what content must be included in textbooks. If content which is favoured by the commission is missing, the book will not be approved. So, teachers paid by the Federal Ministry of Education, not researchers, determine the most important issues and central methodological basic approaches.. This situation was improved in 2010 when new guidelines which defined a high academic standard was commissioned by the Ministry (Krammer & Kühberger, 2011).

An important issue for this commission to deal with was the topic of Austrian resistance against the Nazi-regime. In most

Austrian history textbooks prior to 1990 almost as many pages were devoted to resistance as to the genocide of Jews. This could give students the impression that resistance against fascism was as important as the cruelties of the Nazi regime. In fact, very few people were active in the Austrian resistance movement, but hundreds of thousands were perpetrators. The proportion of pages devoted to “resistance” and “genocide” in contemporary textbooks in Germany has changed very clearly. In Austria the numbers of pages devoted to genocide and resistance is almost the same as in the textbooks of the early 1980s, while in Germany it has changed considerably. This is shown in Figure 4.

The quantitative inquiry of textbooks (Fig. 4) shows the comparison of the topics genocide and resistance in Austrian (henceforth abbreviated as A 1 to A5 for the books of the early 1980s and G1 to G5 for the German books). A 6 to A 10 are current Austrian books, G6 to G10 are the current German books. The numbers in the cells represent the amount of pages in the corresponding books (Mittnik, 2015, p. 82).

German Books	Resistance	Genocide on Jews	Austrian Books	Resistance	Genocide on Jews
	Pages	Pages		Pages	Pages
G1	4	4	A1	2	4
G2	3	5	A2	2	1
G3	1	5	A3	4	5
G4	5	3	A4	3	2
G5	4	6	A5		1
Average	3.4	4.6	Average	1.4	2.6
G6	4	13	A6	2	3
G7	3	7	A7	2	6
G8	4	14	A8	2	8
G9	4	4	A9	4	4
G10	4	8	A10	3	5
Average	3.8	9.2	Average	2.6	5.2

Fig. 4: Quantitative inquiry of textbook pages relating to the issues Resistance and Genocide on Jews (Mittnik, 2015, p. 91)

It is remarkable that already in the books of the 1980s these issues are higher represented in German books than in the Austrians. The German history textbooks try to offer a lot of more information.

Teaching about the Holocaust in Lower Secondary Grades

In Austria, Krammer (nes) made five suggestions for teaching the Holocaust in history lessons. These are:

- Provide information about the past and differentiate between factual judgement and value judgement
- Avoid emotional approaches to learning
- Intensive guided discussion by teachers to develop “correct” attitudes are counterproductive
- An “overdose” of a topic is problematic and counterproductive. Teachers should strike a balance
- Narrations of NS-history must be re-organized in history lessons (Krammer, nes)

Though simple, these suggestions represent important principles to be considered when teaching the history of National Socialism. The following concepts by Lücke and Brüning are also under-represented. Accordingly, History lessons which include that content should be:

- Planned: To develop historical knowledge, it is necessary to provide history lessons that structure the prior concepts of students
- Students-orientated: Learning about that era should contribute to a historical identity, despite increasing sociocultural diversity.
- Productive: To counteract increasing NS and Holocaust-lethargy, action-orientated learning is suggested (Lücke & Brüning, 2013).

These two examples demonstrate the problem in the German-speaking academic community. Respectable historians attempting to establish minimum standards for teaching the Holocaust, are so unspecific that they are not very helpful for History lessons. In Austria and Germany, National Socialism is extremely sensitive; so no historian wants to create teaching guidelines that would not be accepted in academia. Von Borries concluded that especially on this important issue history lessons often do not engage students in a deep intellectual or emotional discussion. The consequence is superficial processing in this field (Von Borries, 2005, p. 113).

Henke-Bockschatz identified three goals for History lessons about National Socialism which could serve as guidance for the production of new textbooks. Textbooks should enable students to:

- Acquire knowledge about the rise of the NSDAP and the followers of the NS-regime
- Understand which acts of cruelty people at that time have committed and create empathy for the victims
- Fight against a renewal of similar contemporary political movements and ideologies and resist them (Henke-Bockschatz, 2004)
- Pingel asked questions about teaching the history of the National Socialism in all grades. The questions represent important considerations for educators but he provides no answers. How can emotional overload be avoided?
- What explicit lesson preparation do teachers need to speak about gas chambers?
- Who should dominate the view of the past: perpetrators or victims?
- How can students be taught, that the system was enabled by the large number of bystanders in the society?

- Is it possible to talk about other victim groups, without relativizing the suffering of Jews?
- Can the National Socialism be compared to other genocides in history without calling the singularity of the Holocaust into question?
- Can Jews be portrayed as people, not only as victims? Good textbooks should also present the pre-Holocaust life of Jews, i.e., they were part of Austrian or German society. (Pingel, 2002)

The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Union provided a “toolkit” to offer didactic approaches to teaching the Holocaust. The European perspective that FRA suggested emphasized:

- Raising awareness of the ideological background of the National Socialist discrimination and extermination policy
- Centrality of the Personalization of History
 - Victims
 - Perpetrators and Accomplices to murder
 - Bystanders
- Escalation of Discrimination and Persecution
- Human rights as a frame of reference for the analysis, reflection, discussion and the educational process
- Interdisciplinary Approach
- Age-appropriate Approach (FRA, 2009).

Glanz provided 10 instructionally oriented suggestions for teaching the Holocaust from an American standpoint (Glanz, 1999). Lindquist also criticized aspects of American Holocaust Education. He and suggested five basic instructional approaches for teachers, to teach this topic (Lindquist D. H., 2006) (Lindquist D. H., 2008).

Which issues are seen as particularly important varies with the nation, though there

are similarities, and differences in suggested didactic approaches. In Austria or Germany the view of the perpetrators and comprehension why such tragedies could happen should be essential; in the United States or Great Britain the link to a Human Rights Education in order to avoid these historical mistakes appears to be crucial. However, it seems impossible to frame didactical approaches which will be valid in all societies worldwide. A new national process should be initiated to define the central principles for teaching the Holocaust. To start this discussion a preliminary proposal is offered below.

Conclusions

What are appropriate steps to narrow adequate teaching of the National Socialism in Austria?

To start with the elementary schools, The following are guidelines about how the teaching of Holocaust Education might be presented, successfully, in elementary schools:

- *Individual cases*: Show students the individual suffering, without dwelling on cruelties. Talk or read about children of their own age, who lived at that time and be prepared to talk with students about death and murder. Develop connections to the present, as with stories about exile and refuge.
- *Anti-Semitism*: The increasing number of anti-Semitic criminal acts in Austria and Germany demonstrates the importance of this issue. Combat student prejudices by explaining the nature and purposes of stereotypes. Point out that we import Arab-informed anti-Semitism because of immigration.
- *Austrians as perpetrators*: Explain the historical truth that previous generations committed many war crimes, without speaking about them in detail, we have to emphasize societal responsibility. Dispell the myth that

most of Austrians were involved in resistance movements.

- *Contemporary significance*: Explain the approach of Austrian society towards events of the past as many issues are important today, including the use of language, the awareness of public space and, the importance of an efficient judiciary and democracy. Also, children need education in Human Rights.

In order to achieve the goal of a more reflective learning experience about National Socialism for elementary school aged students, three general principles are relevant. Firstly, students should develop empathy for the victims of that time and should be able to understand the suffering of people in the present. Secondly, and probably most important, is to develop interest for era in elementary schools. Many students by the time they are 14 have the impression that they have a broad knowledge of the Holocaust and that the topic is boring (Lücke & Brüning, 2013, p. 167). It is necessary to dispel these impressions by creating interest among students. Thirdly, it is essential to present this topic to students in a way that helps them to recognize the significance for Austrian society. Students should learn about their own national history, even if it is sometimes unpleasant, and it can be done without moralizing or shocking them with pictures of cruelties,

In order to achieve the goal of a more reflective learning experience about National Socialism for lower secondary school aged students, the following general principles are relevant:

- *Prior knowledge*: Build on the prior knowledge of students. Determine what gaps in knowledge exist and which issues students are already familiar with. If for instance, students make comments like “Hitler built the highways” or “Not everything was bad back then” or “He had the right solutions for Jews,” teachers should discuss such statements

seriously and present concepts that work against these prejudices. If students are apprehensive or afraid and they start to cry when teachers talk about National Socialism, teachers should recognize that they are not able to extend their knowledge because of affective factors.

- *Limit focus*: Teachers should focus on 8-10 topics dealing with this part of history, including the genocide of the European Jews, and the youth movements of the NSDAP, It is necessary to limit the content in order to avoid superficiality, provide focus, and in depth discussion Teachers should also plan to allocate sufficient time as it is not possible to achieve even a brief overview of the history of National Socialism in four to six periods.

- *Nazi support*: Teachers should attempt to explain why Austrians predominantly supported the Nazis. Even if there are no satisfactory answers the question should be discussed with students. The explanation that unemployment was extremely high and that Austrians and Germans were unsatisfied with the political situation cannot stand unchallenged, for example, there are no “Führers” in contemporary Greece or Spain, where more than 50% of the young people are unemployed?

- *Contemporary historical connections*: Create connections to contemporary historical events. Define the NS-history not as part of the past but as part of our time. Visit memorials or monuments related to National Socialism with students. Talk about single persons in the past and create common biographies to current persons. Discuss the Middle-East conflict with students. Anti-Semitism is often based on criticism of the state of Israel.

- *Hitler-centrism*: Do not argue in history lessons that *Hitler* committed

these cruelties. Adolf Hitler was the leader of a political movement. It is absolutely necessary to speak about the perpetrators who were part of the society. By focusing on *Hitler* it is easy to forget that these crimes were committed by persons who survived the war, living, in very many cases, a normal life, without any conviction.

Summary

The article shows some scientific insights of the discussion, at what age the teaching about the Holocaust should begin. The early historical learning seems to be important to encourage empathy and an early understanding of Human Rights. The analysis of Austrian elementary textbooks make clear that the content of World War II and the National Socialism is mentioned in nearly all textbooks, but the presentation can be defined as superficial. In transition to the lower secondary the claims in historical learning should be increased. Even if the high importance of the History of the National Socialism for Austria is undoubted, there are only a few amount of didactical approaches how to teach about the Holocaust. After presenting them a catalogue of didactical principles was created to suggest how, in future textbooks could present that topic in a professional way.

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