# HANDOUT 3.4.1

## GERMANY - HOLOCAUST EDUCATION REPORT

### Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries

**Germany**

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, culture, research, schooling, universities etc. are the responsibility of each the so-called 16 *Länder* [federal states] (Bayern, Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, Sachsen, etc.). Through curricula, the corresponding ministries arrange at what age, in which context, and to what extent the Holocaust is taught. They do not establish lesson plans. The students are taught about this complex topic in line with the teaching profiles of the respective school types and with due regard to the stage of their psychological development.

   In all 16 *Länder* (states) the Holocaust is a mandatory, binding subject.

   To coordinate and to standardize this field of education in a certain way among the 16 states there exists a "Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs." This Standing Conference in different declarations and resolutions emphasized repeatedly the importance of the topic and reaffirmed the need to communicate a fundamental knowledge and insights on the National Socialist reign of violence generally and the Shoah in particular (see On the Treatment of the Holocaust at School).

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

   The Holocaust is a mandatory subject in all the 16 *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany.

3. **How is the Holocaust defined?**

   There is no official definition, no general consensus about the use of the term "Holocaust". This term has been known in Germany since 1980 and quite frequently used, meaning the Nazi murder of the European Jews. The central "Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe" – this is (literally translated) the official name – is for example often called "Holocaust monument" in the public. Others, however, avoid the term because of its religious connotations. They feel that the terms "National Socialist murder of the European Jews" or "genocide against the European Jews" is more precise when speaking about a crime without any religious sense.

   Some people think that "Holocaust" should be used for all mass crimes committed by the Nazis on the basis of their racist ideology.

   Curricula, textbooks, etc. use different terms, among them "mass murder of Jews", "genocide", annihilation", "extermination of the European Jews".

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

   The Holocaust is taught as a part of the subject "History". It is dealt with as a major topic of German and European history in the twentieth century. This is done in a way which clarifies the historical context: rise of the National Socialist movement in a specific historic situation, establishment of a dictatorship in Germany and the abolition of the rule of law, Nazi ideology, antisemitism in Germany, Nazi crimes against other groups, and the Nazi criminal war of aggression.

   It is taught not only in history lessons but also in other subject matters, in particular civics, German literature, religious instruction (both Catholic and Protestant), and others make an important contribution to teaching the topic (see 7).

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

   The Nazi persecution of the Jews can be studied first at the age of 12 (6th graders), but it is not a mandatory topic yet at this age.

   At the age of about 14/15 years all students study and learn the history of the twentieth century and the period of National Socialism. The Holocaust is taught in this context. The topic is taught and studied again on the upper level (18 years) with students who pass the Abitur exam (prerequisite for university).

**6. How many hours are allocated to teaching and learning about the Holocaust?**

Altogether about 16 – 20 lessons are scheduled for the period of National Socialism. It is the responsibility of the individual teacher to decide how many lessons to allocate to the Holocaust. It is taught again on the upper school level with about the same number of lessons.

**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.**

The Holocaust is a mandatory part of history lessons and civics. It is frequently taught in classes on (German) literature and religion, or ethics. Aspects of Holocaust history might also occur in classes on biology (racism), art (pieces of art produced during the Holocaust period or by artists dealing with this topic afterwards), and music (e.g., music composed in Theresienstadt).

Diverse approaches are integrated in long-term educational projects. (Some of these projects are presented on the multilingual Website, http://www.holocaust-education.de).

In history lessons the Holocaust is dealt with as a major topic of German and European history in the twentieth century.

In civics, students study the political, ideological, and psycho-social conditions which made the Holocaust possible and the planning and organization of the genocide. Another important topic is the way Germany dealt and deals with this part of its history.

Since the Holocaust is a major topic in postwar German literature (novels, plays, poems, essays), it is addressed in classes on contemporary literature, starting in 6th grade. This can also include literature translated from other languages (e.g., writings by Primo Levi, Imre Kertesz). It can be combined with media studies dealing with feature films.

Classes on religion deal with the attitudes of the churches towards the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the theological efforts to create a new Christian approach to Judaism, and the ethical challenges for every human being which are involved in the history of the Holocaust.

**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?**

a) Courses on the Holocaust or courses which include Holocaust history are offered at German universities (most frequently at departments for history, political science, pedagogy, literature). As with any other topic, the students are free to choose these courses or others. The post-university training of young teachers can include programs on how to deal with the Holocaust in diverse subjects.

b) The amount of teacher-training sessions differs from federal state to federal state. Courses on the Holocaust and study trips for teachers to historical sites are offered by teacher-training centers, state agencies for political education, associations (e.g. the trade-union for teachers, foundations of political parties), and by memorials. Teachers are entitled to take part in such courses as part of an in-service training, but they can also choose other topics.

c) Most of the institutions mentioned under (b) get funds from the federal government or a federal state. They can apply to foundations for additional funds if they plan major projects like international seminars or study trips abroad.

**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?**

January 27 is the national Memorial Day for the Victims of the Nazi Crimes. It is marked by special parliamentary sessions, also in the federal states. Some states prepare for this event by competitions for young people to develop commemorative projects.

There was no opposition to the introduction of the Memorial Day. But not every citizen is aware of its existence. It should be mentioned here that many groups, including school groups, commemorate the victims of the Holocaust by diverse ceremonies on 9 November, the anniversary of the so-called Reichskristallnacht (November Pogrom) 1938.

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

In Germany there exist just under 100 memorial museums for victims of the Nazi regime. They are connected to "authentic" sites and deal with the victims, the perpetrators, and the site of the crime. These memorial museums explain the history of concentration camps, gas chambers used for "Euthanasia", prisoner-of-war camps, and Gestapo and other prisons, etc. The memorial museums in Germany work

very closely together and consider themselves as a network. Whereas the individual memorial museum may address the history of only one crime complex of the Nazi regime – depending on the history of the site where it is located – the memorial museums together cover all parts of the crime complex committed by Nazi Germany.

The task of the memorial museums is to explain the history of Nazi persecution and to describe the treatment of the different groups that were persecuted in a manner expressing sympathy for the victims. Memorial museums also engage in social tasks toward the survivors and their relatives and friends. Memorial museums in Germany serve as evidence of the crimes committed and work to provide information about who was responsible for these atrocities. Hence, memorial museums are also places of critical self-reflection in German society. For research on the Nazi past, educational work, and gaining public attention it is very helpful not to have one large Holocaust museum which dominates the whole subject. The different approaches that memorial museums take to address the same subject and the friendly competition over the best methods of addressing Nazi crimes have led to a very thorough knowledge and wide range of experience in the development of memorial museums in Germany during the last two decades.

Memorial museums are financially supported and run by different state agencies. The large memorial museums on the site of former concentration camps are paid for by the federal government and/or the states, some are run by cities, some by counties, others by private action groups – with the support of public finances. All memorial museums have different advisory boards. Associations of survivors also serve as members on these bodies as public official representatives of national agencies and delegates from different groups which are important in civil society. The structure of these different advisory committees provides a platform on which the survivor groups, civil action groups, and the public agencies can to work together toward the common goal of dealing with the various expectations placed on memorial museums.

The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe was inaugurated in May 2005. In addition to the huge monument in the center of Berlin, a "Site of Information" in the basement of the memorial provides information about the Holocaust by documentation and also about the broad network of memorial museums. It is not a German Holocaust Museum.

The House of the Wannsee Conference shows a new permanent exhibition about the Holocaust, opened in January 2006, and provides seminars on diverse Holocaust-related topics for students and adults.

Museums of contemporary history also show temporary exhibits about the Holocaust and the Nazi period. The German Historical Museum in Berlin presented such an exhibition in 2002, which was the most successful of all its displays; the Holocaust is also part of its permanent exhibition which has been open to the public since June 2006.

**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.**

Over the last decade each year at least three million people have visited the nearly 100 memorial museums in Germany. There is a wide range of visitors to the diverse memorial museums. Institutions known worldwide, such as Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, or Sachsenhausen, have several hundred thousand visitors each year. Smaller institutions of regional importance have 5,000 or more visitors a year. These smaller institutions are of special importance for the local city or state because they show in detail how close the history is to the lives of the visitors today.

The average age of the visitors differs from memorial museum to memorial museum and it is impossible to give an exact account. Generally, school classes make up the majority of visitors, in particular of guided groups. But adult visitors are by no means overlooked in the educational work.

Most important for the visits of school groups are the teachers. In Germany the 16 states have different curricula. More or less all of them recommend a visit to a memorial museum. The teachers are responsible for suggesting and preparing such a visit. Many teachers take this very seriously. The Nazi dictatorship is an important issue in German society today. Visits to a memorial museum are often motivated by discussions in society.

There are many guides published in German which give overviews of memorial museums on different levels: particular institutions, memorials in a certain region, or a nationwide overview. For younger visitors and for the organization of a tour to a memorial museum it is also important that basic information be available on the Internet – also in foreign languages, e.g. http://www.gedenkstaettenforum.de.

**12. What are the three major textbooks used in teaching the Holocaust in your country? How many pages do your school text books allocate to the Holocaust, and on which aspects do they focus?**

Due to its federal structure, Germany has a large and diverse textbook market. The following list consists only of textbooks which were approved for the lower level of secondary schools, and which are used in more than one federal state. The list does not include textbooks which are used singularly by only one German state, or only in a particular type of school. It is therefore impossible to determine with precision how many pages are dedicated to the issue of the Holocaust. However, it can be stated that the space allocated to the presentation of National Socialism and the Holocaust has steadily increased during the last two decades. Furthermore, German teachers use not only history textbooks, but also additional teaching materials dealing with the issue of National Socialism and the Holocaust, e.g., CD-ROMs and other media. Free offers of media information (films and other media) by local and regional media services on this subject, embracing well over a hundred different titles, are to be mentioned as well.

**Source**

Germany: Holocaust education report. (2006). Retrieved from http://holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/holocaust_education_report-germany.pdf

## Holocaust Education in Germany

Outbreaks of xenophobic violence in Germany, arson attacks on Holocaust memorials, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and, above all, the sight of "skinhead" youths bedecked with rightwing insignia have caused some observers to question whether the Holocaust is studied in Germany after all. On the other hand, the many candlelight vigils and demonstrations against neo-Nazism in December 1992 and in January 1993, many of them attended by hundreds of thousands of German citizens, show that the German people, and not just their political leaders, are aware of the past. It is estimated that a total of more than three million people took to the streets in protests against xenophobia and neo-Nazism.

World War II and Hitler's dictatorship have, in fact, figured prominently in the curriculum of (West) German schools since the early 195Os. From the 1960s onwards, special emphasis has been placed upon conveying the horrors of the Holocaust. Outside the school curriculum, World War II, the Holocaust, and Jewish issues are often featured in the print media, on television, and in the world of the arts. This *Focus* looks at how the Holocaust is taught in schools in Germany. What follows is a presentation of the basic principles of Holocaust teaching in West Germany. They were also introduced in Eastern Germany following unification in 1990.

**The German Education System**

Education in Germany is the responsibility of the federal states *(Länder)*. Education policy is coordinated on a national level by a standing conference of state *(Land)* ministers of education and cultural affairs. It is this body that has issued specific guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust which have been in force in the western German states since 1960.

What is taught in classrooms in Germany is determined by (a) state government syllabus directives issued in accordance with the national guidelines mentioned above and (b) by state government-approved textbooks that are produced by independent textbook publishers. The syllabus directives do not establish lesson plans. Instead, they determine the topics to be covered for every given grade and subject, and the teaching objectives to be achieved.

**The Continuing Relevance of the Holocaust**

For Germans, the Holocaust is not an event that happened in a faraway place in some distant past, but is part and parcel of their recent history. The memory of the Nazi dictatorship -- of which the Holocaust is an integral part -- and its traumatic legacies have been shaping German policies since the end of World War II. The rebuilding of political institutions in western Germany and postwar political education were largely determined by a serious effort to try to understand the horrors of the Nazi dictatorship and by searching for safeguards in order to prevent history from repeating itself. Consequently, teaching about Nazi dictatorship and the Holocaust at schools is not limited to a niche in the history syllabus like the "French and the Indian Wars." Instead, it is discussed again and again in different ways, in a number of subjects, and at different points in time.

The treatment of the Nazi period in all its aspects -- Hitler's rise to power; his establishment of a dictatorship in Germany; the abolition of the rule of law; the persecution of all kinds of political opponents; the racially motivated persecution of the Jews, culminating in the Holocaust; the reticence and opposition of German citizens; and, Germany's instigation of World War II -- is compulsory teaching matter at all types of

schools in Germany and at all levels of education. The Holocaust is treated as the most important aspect of the period of Nazi rule.

**The Principles of Holocaust Teaching**

The Holocaust is treated in various school subjects in different ways.

In history classes, the Nazi period is dealt with in the context of twentieth-century German, or world, history. Students who pass the *Abitur* exam, the prerequisite for university study at the age of eighteen or nineteen, receive a formal historical presentation of German history in the twentieth century twice -- during their final two years before graduation and at ninth or tenth grade level.

In civic studies and current affairs classes, the lessons from the Holocaust are related to the teaching about Germany's political institutions and about the values that govern political life in a democratic society. When current affairs are discussed -- such as anti-Semitic incidents and rightwing extremism in Germany and elsewhere; ethnic cleansing in Bosnia; and, the Middle East conflict -- teachers will emphasize the importance of tolerance and the rule of law as lessons to be learned from the Holocaust.

In religion or ethics classes, the Holocaust is discussed with reference to the guilt and responsibility of those Germans who did not risk their lives to fight National Socialism or to protect Jews. Since the notion of interreligious tolerance and the knowledge of other world religions are subjects of religious studies courses at German public schools, the teacher will often arrange a meeting with members of the organized Jewish community, a visit to the local synagogue, or to a Holocaust memorial or museum.

Postwar German literature, above all in the 1950s and 1960s, is preoccupied with coming to terms with the Nazi era and the Holocaust. The fate of the Holocaust victims and what Germans did or did not do during the Third Reich often become subjects of German literature classes, when the works, novels, short stories, and plays of authors such as Alfred Andersch, Ilse Aichinger, Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Rolf Hochhuth, Marie-Luise Kaschnitz, Siegfried Lenz, and others are discussed in the context of teaching about contemporary German literature.

A visit to a Holocaust memorial or a Holocaust museum at the site of a former concentration camp is a standard feature of school excursions. In fact, the largest category of visitors at former concentration camps is often German high-school students led by their teachers.

The objective of teaching about the Holocaust is not limited to educating students about historical facts. Instead, the primary political and educational objective for confronting young Germans with their country's darkest past and their ancestors' guilt is, above all, to make them understand the consequences of Hitler's dictatorship, the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and to make them appreciate the values and institutions that protect freedom and democracy.

The following quotations from government education documents serve as illustrations of the philosophy of Holocaust education in Germany today. The syllabus directive issued by the education ministry of the Land North Rhine-Westfalia for the treatment of the Holocaust in ninth grade *Realschule* history classes emphasizes the importance of democratic institutions and ideas. The directive entitled, "From Anti-human Ideas to the Extermination of Human Lives," reads in part as follows:

Students should learn to recognize:

- the destruction of a democratic government based upon the rule of law.
- the enforcement of the Führer's principles.
- total regimentation of the population through propaganda.
- discrimination and terror, and the anti-human ideas of the prerogative of an Aryan race form the basis from which Hitler could unleash a world war and embark upon the systematic destruction of human lives.

According to a document prepared by the North Rhine-Westfalia ministry of education, directives for Holocaust teaching in *Hauptschulen* stipulate among other things that:

Teaching must seek to counter obliviousness to the past and critically examine tendencies toward a "normalization" of German historical awareness. The examination of the causes of the success of National Socialism in Germany must therefore be a focal point in teaching.

Teaching is to be devised in such a way that students realize the present and future significance of remembering National Socialism. Therefore, teaching of these topics had to address the questions associated with the responsibility of later generations, and the present manifestations of neo-Fascism and neo-antisemitism.

Teaching must, in particular, convey the perspective of the victims and give students the opportunity to learn about everyday life under National Socialism in a vivid and tangible way.

**Evaluating Holocaust Education**

The German government has in the past established bilateral textbook commissions in cooperation with education specialists from a number of foreign countries (including the U.S. and Israel). These joint commissions examine the school textbooks of both countries with reference to the treatment of the other country, and issue recommendations. The German-Israeli textbook commission, whose findings were published in 1985, has had a considerable influence on the treatment of Jewish life and Jewish history, including the Holocaust, in school textbooks in Germany. Recently, the Israeli education expert, Chaim Schatzker, who has examined German textbooks since the early 1960s, stated that although he was not entirely satisfied with everything he had read, the treatment of antisemitism as part of German history was adequate in general, and exemplary in some textbooks. He also noted that the Holocaust is treated extensively and in an uncompromising way in all textbooks. He added that the large majority of textbooks addressed the issue of responsibility and co-responsibility of German citizens during the Third Reich seriously and in detail.

Teaching social values and imparting the knowledge of the achievements and crimes that human beings are capable of are essential for nourishing a commitment to tolerance and democracy in young people. Holocaust education alone, however, like any ethics teaching, is not enough to eliminate the crime and intolerance that are bred by social dislocation. If the teaching of ethics were a panacea, there would be no thefts, no homicides, and no bias-related crimes -- because all perpetrators were once taught not to steal, not to kill, and not to hate a fellow citizen of a different color or creed.

**Source:**

Wehrmann, G. (n.d.). Holocaust education in Germany. Retrieved from http://www.iearn.org/hgp/aeti/aeti-1998-no-frames/holocaust-ed-in-germany.htm