TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST TO NON-TRADITIONAL AUDIENCES: THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

Richard Freedman was born in Johannesburg, South Africa where he completed his primary and secondary schooling and went on to major in Drama, History, English and Social Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He completed postgraduate studies in Education at the University of Cape Town and has also pursued studies in Psychology through the University of South Africa (UNISA).

He taught History and English in Cape Town high schools and was appointed principal of Herzlia Weizmann School in 1990, a position he held until 2005. He served as chairman of the Association of Principals of Jewish Day Schools of Southern Africa and also served on the Executive committee of the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (Western Cape).

Outside of formal education he has been a member of Rotary International, board member of Mothers to Mothers (an NGO which serves to provide counselling, mentoring and support to pregnant mothers living with HIV), board member of Union International de la Marionette (SA) and several Jewish communal organisations including the outreach arm of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape) MaAfrika Tikkun.

He has had the opportunity to attend several international programmes, including the Harvard Principals' Institute; Yad Vashem International School for Holocaust Studies; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Educators Fellows programme and March of the Living.

In 2006 he was appointed director of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre and in 2007 National Director of The South African Holocaust Foundation. He continues to hold both positions.

He lives with his partner of 16 years, Daniel, in Cape Town.

ABSTRACT

The South African Holocaust Foundation, through its three centres in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, is dedicated to using the prism of the Holocaust and antisemitism to address the deep-seated issues at the basis of South Africa's fragmented society.

The challenge is that teachers themselves have to address their own attitudes and histories before they are able to bring awareness to the learners. In addition the teachers have a lack of content and methodological knowledge and do not understand the reason for the inclusion of the Holocaust, as a case study of Human rights abuse, into the National Schools curriculum.

Our ultimate aim is to support the development of a Human Rights culture and contribute towards the building of a society that is compassionate, caring and embracing of diversity - a society in which the tenets of the South African Bill of Human Rights are experienced and lived in a meaningful way.

This article explores some of these aspirations and challenges and the way in which the South African Holocaust Foundation has responded.

The manipulation of the education system was a key component in the apartheid regime's process of creating a racial state. Schools reflected the broader South African society in that they were divided along racial lines defined in terms of colour into four separate Departments of Education—one for those classified as whites; one for blacks; one for Indians and one for coloureds. But it did not end there; whichever group you were defined as belonging to impacted upon the quality of the education you received and the resources which the State allotted to your education. Those classified as white enjoyed first world resources, while the majority of the population—those classified as black—received third world facilities in overcrowded conditions, taught by under-qualified and poorly trained teachers. The content of the curriculum, which differed according to the racial classification, was carefully designed to perpetuate the divisions in society and the expectations and aspirations of pupils. (The legacy of all of this is with us still, 14 years after apartheid was removed from the statute books).

It is no wonder therefore that one of the key tasks confronting the first democratically elected South African government in 1994 was to dismantle both nearly 50 years of apartheid education and the nearly 300 years of colonial education which had gone before it. This was an enormous challenge which was informed and underpinned by the new South Africa's constitution and Bill of Rights. The resultant curriculum is one which has human rights at its core.

In the overview to the National Curriculum statement it contains the following:

'The National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (General) seeks to promote human rights, social justice and environmental justice as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In particular, the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (General) is sensitive to issues of diversity.

The kind of learner that is envisaged is one who will be imbued with the values and act in the interests of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity and social justice as promoted in the Constitution.'

The curriculum designers felt that the inclusion of the Holocaust as a case study of human rights abuse was very important, given that the curriculum was to be based on the Constitution and Bill of Rights. This in turn was directly influenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which had arisen out World War II and the knowledge of the Holocaust.

High school education in South Africa is divided into two phases: grades 7-9 General Education and Training and Grades 10-12 Further Education and training. Grade 9 is a possible exit point from the education system. From grade 10 learners are required to make a narrower subject choice selection. There is thus no guarantee that learners will study History. It is for this reason that the Curriculum designers included the Holocaust in grade 9. From 2007 teachers were required to teach the Holocaust in all schools across the country. The other area of study that is also included in this exit year is that of apartheid for, after all, the learners' parents and grandparents lived through apartheid, but they did not.

Most of the currently serving teachers received their professional education and entered teaching when education was an integral part of the apartheid project and organised in racially and ethnically divided sub-systems. The current generation of teachers is the first to experience the new non-racial, democratic transformation of the education system. Since 1994 they have had to cope with the rationalization of the teaching community into a single national system, the introduction of new curricula, which emphasise greater professional autonomy and require teachers to have new knowledge and applied competences (including the use of new technologies) and radical change in the demographic, cultural and linguistic composition of the classrooms. Those who are teaching bring with them the baggage of apartheid.

The first Holocaust Centre in South Africa was established in Cape Town in 1999 as a not for profit educational Trust. Its establishment was prompted by an 18-month tour of South Africa and Namibia of *The Anne Frank in the World* exhibition in 1993/1994. A number of special panels about South Africa's own history of Human Rights abuse were developed as part of the exhibition. The exhibition was attended by thousands of South Africans of all ages but especially by high school learners and their teachers. The response of these teachers was extraordinary. 'Emerging out of a society where possession of a pigmented skin was a sign of degradation and stigma, the knowledge of the existence of antisemitism gave a perspective that racism was not only dependent on skin colour, and that even white people could be victims of stereotyping, discrimination and persecution. It was clearly demonstrated that there was a role in the new South Africa for Holocaust education that would raise the issues of race prejudice and the abuse of power when taken to its extremes.'

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The Centre has teaching facilities and also a permanent exhibition. The designers knew that they could not create an exhibition on the Holocaust without acknowledging South Africa's recent emergence from a racial state and its own history of gross human rights abuses. Thus the exhibition examines the history of racism and antisemitism and makes direct reference both textually and visually to South Africa's own history.

From the start the education team at the Centre worked closely with the local Department of Education and based on the developing new school curriculum developed programmes and classroom support materials in line with its human rights focus. These materials, entitled *The Holocaust: Lessons for Humanity*, now form the basis of our teacher training programmes across the country and are used in many schools in all regions.

Apartheid left a legacy of high numbers of unqualified and under-qualified teachers. The President's Education Initiative research project (1999) on South African education indicates that the majority of teachers have not yet been sufficiently equipped to meet the education needs of a growing democracy in a 21st century global environment. The report concluded that the most critical challenge for teacher education in South Africa was the limited conceptual knowledge of many teachers. This includes poor grasp of their subjects as evidenced by a range of factual errors made in content and concepts during lessons. This in turn contributes to low levels of learner achievement. This has been borne out through our experience in teacher training.

The report makes the following points: 'South Africa has the second most developed economy in Africa, with a highly evolved economic infrastructure, but it also has huge social inequalities. The most profound and enduring effects of these apartheid inequalities are to be found in education, including poor infrastructure and facilities for poor people, a lack of proper amenities, and inadequate training for teachers, the persistence of poverty and unemployment, the debilitating effects of illness and premature death, (especially as a result of HIV and AIDS).'

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Our ultimate aim is to support the development of a Human Rights culture and contribute towards the building of a society that is compassionate, caring and embracing of diversity—a society in which the tenets of the South African Bill of Human Rights are experienced and lived in a meaningful way.

To meet this aim, we strive to:

- provide accurate content knowledge of the Holocaust to participants;
- facilitate the making of connections between the Human Rights atrocities committed during the Holocaust and present realities and in so doing, to encourage commitment to the protection of Human Rights.
- develop social awareness and engagement in schools through facilitating the identification by the participants of strategies to prevent and resist prejudice and promote Human Rights.

Our educators' programme is designed to provide support to educators in achieving this goal in their classrooms and to support a Human Rights culture.

There are some anomalies in the South African political and educational arena which pose particular challenges to the teaching of the Holocaust in the South African context. Firstly, the teachers have little or no knowledge of the Holocaust. It is a history far removed from them both in time and space. For the majority of South Africans, any European history is approached with a degree of scepticism as it is often viewed through the devastating impact of colonialism. (In apartheid South Africa whites were described as Europeans and everyone else as non-white).

South Africa has eleven official languages. Most teachers are required to teach in the language of instruction which is often their second or third language. The same can be said of the learners. Thus, although there is generally an aspiration to speak English as a lingua franca more and more, it is being understood that if pupils are not taught in their mother tongue they are placed at a tremendous disadvantage. The Cape Town Holocaust Centre has responded to this by publishing material at this stage in two of the official languages other than English. The facilitation of workshops is more of a challenge. Usually they are conducted in English but where possible we make use of mother tongue speakers to augment the discussion. One of the Departments of Education has seconded a mother tongue Xhosa-speaking teacher to the Centre who works exclusively in disadvantaged schools where most of the teachers and learners are Xhosa speakers. She team-teaches and is involved in teacher in-service development.

South Africa is a vast country with a population of some 46 million. Most schools will have no access to the permanent exhibitions that the South African Holocaust Foundation has established and there are still many schools without electricity or equipment for audio-visual teaching.

We have responded by making available low tech classroom posters and a portable exhibition based on the posters. Eventually all nine provinces will own copies of these resources which can then be used for teacher training and can be sent into schools (with the assistance of the Claims Conference).

The South African Holocaust Foundation may be viewed as the major resource in the country for Holocaust education but it is not the only source and neither should it be. Yet there is cause for concern if the locus of control for teacher education and resource materials falls outside of the Foundation. There has been a frenzy of textbook writing and all of those which are devoted to Social Sciences in Grade 9 and History in Grade 11 cover the Holocaust. In some there is merely a footnote to World War II as it was in the old curriculum. Others have gone into more detail but there is little or no control over the accuracy of information which appears in the textbooks. On occasion we are approached by publishers and editors to review the content before it goes to print. We are often most concerned about the trivialisation and the historical inaccuracies. As a non-governmental not for profit organisation we have no control over an individual teacher's decision to use inappropriate material.

It is through the relationship with the Departments of Education that we can hope to influence the way in which the Holocaust is taught. It is the Department of Education which has endorsed and, to a varying extent, supported the in-service training workshops which are being conducted by the Foundation across the country. The only way we can reach the teachers is through the workshops we conduct ourselves and through a Fellowship programme for senior educators which we established in 2008.

Another challenge which we face is the impact of the Israel/Palestinian crisis. Although there has over the years been relatively little antisemitism in South Africa, and the South African government endorses and supports a two state solution, Israel is viewed with suspicion and there is both official and popular support for the plight of the Palestinian people. This has its roots in both the support of the PLO for the apartheid struggle and also the fact that Israel supplied arms and military intelligence to the apartheid government. There is also a relatively large Muslim population (about 2 million) which until the second Intifada enjoyed a cordial relationship with South Africa's small and largely Zionist Jewish population (about 85 000). Until we are able to unpack the relevance of the inclusion of the Holocaust into the curriculum, it is viewed by some as having a Zionist agenda. The question is often posed: 'How can you teach this history of Holocaust without condemning the State of Israel for what it is doing to the Palestinian People?' If we are not careful in our responses the whole programme can be derailed and the focus shift to the Middle East. We stress that the Foundation condemns all human rights abuses, no matter who the perpetrators. We also point out that the situation is complex and has a long history which is too detailed to deal with in the seminars and training, where we focus on historical sources and looking at the questions which relate to contemporary issues in South African society.

The South African Holocaust Foundation, through its three centres in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, is dedicated to using the prism of the Holocaust and antisemitism to address the deep-seated issues at the basis of South Africa's fragmented society.

At the core of the Foundation's classroom support material is the examination of the Holocaust in order to confront issues facing contemporary society. For example, in the pages which document the flight of Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe in the 1930's, the questions directed at the learners include the following: Should governments help refugees from countries where there are severe human rights violations? And how are refugees in South Africa viewed and treated? Unfortunately questions like these do not in themselves lead to changes in attitude. This largely depends on the effective facilitation of the educator in the classroom. The challenge is that teachers themselves have to address their own attitudes before they are able to bring awareness to the learners. At a teacher training workshop in March 2008 which was conducted for the Gauteng Department of Education by facilitators from the South African Holocaust Foundation and the Apartheid Museum, participants were required to examine the key theme of 'Choice and Responsibility' while teaching apartheid and the Holocaust.

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This is done through examination of sources and by engaging with set case studies. Each group was given an appropriate and real situation that educators might confront in their work environment. They were asked to reflect on a controversial situation where someone's human rights were abused, identify what they should do in the situation, explore possible problems that might arise, and decide how to deal with these problems.

The groups presented their issue to the forum as a whole. In theoretical situations where the educators did not feel personally threatened, they tended to answer the questions well and come up with positive suggestions.

However, there were two instances where the groups concerned and the wider audience allowed their own personal feelings to intervene.

In a situation discussing xenophobia, where the problem of the case study was that one of their colleagues had complained that foreigners came to South Africa and took South African jobs, a substantial number of participants agreed that this was the case. It was as if all barriers had come down as the participants raged about foreigners in South Africa. There was a great deal of rage among the participants, and feelings of prejudice were largely evident. It is clear that many of the educators had bought into the values and moral lessons of history only insofar as they did not affect them personally.

To help the learners develop their own moral compasses the educator has to develop the ability to retain neutrality in the classroom. The Holocaust, as a case study of human rights abuse, because it is so removed from the experience of both educator and learner, has the possibility of bringing to the surface personal attitudes and prejudices such as xenophobia which otherwise remain repressed. Only when these issues are exposed can they begin to be addressed.

Whilst the inclusion of Holocaust History has presented enormous challenges, it is clear that through effective teacher training and classroom teaching the study in South African schools of this particular area of history has the very real possibility of helping our emergent democracy to becoming a more caring and just society, respecting diversity and healing the injustices of our past. Now, more than ever, the value of the inclusion of the study of the Holocaust into South Africa's schools curriculum has assumed an urgency and relevance.

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