SHIFTING PARADIGMS IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULAR DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Within the scholarly community, a paradigmatic shift has taken place in relation to the study of the Holocaust: rather than viewing the Holocaust as an isolated or sui generis event, it has become increasingly integrated into the broader study of genocide or human rights. Though a plethora of materials exist on the Holocaust at the secondary level, too often these materials are not congruent with the reality of teaching in today's schools; even more important, there is a paucity of materials that link the Holocaust to the general topic of genocide. In the future, there will be a greater need to develop curricula that firmly place the Holocaust within genocide studies.

Within the scholarly community, a paradigmatic shift has taken place in relation to the study of the Holocaust: rather than viewing the Holocaust as an isolated or sui generis event, it has become increasingly integrated into the broader study of genocide or human rights. However, as often happens, what starts at the scholarly/ university level is only now trickling down to the secondary school level, meaning that the paradigmatic shift is still in the process of "becoming" within the curricula of American schools. Though a plethora of materials exist on the Holocaust at the secondary level, too often these materials are not congruent with the reality of teaching in today's schools; even more important, there is a paucity of materials that link the Holocaust to the general topic of genocide. In the future, there will be a greater need to develop curricula that firmly place the Holocaust within genocide studies. The curricula will need to adhere to the most recent trends in best practices and contemporary scholarship and be cost effective, as well as, student and teacher friendly.

In the aftermath of World War II, historians tended to view the Holocaust as an aberration, a unique event in history. However, with the passage of time, greater objectivity, and additional research, a growing number of scholars have softened their viewpoint about the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Though it may be true that the Holocaust represents the most extreme example of genocide, being that the goal, as stated by Yehuda Bauer, was 'total and global genocide' (Bauer, 2001, p. g. 48-49), it certainly did not stand-alone. The Holocaust was only one of many genocides that occurred during the modern era and should be viewed at the end of a continuum rather than being a completely unique and isolated event. During the twentieth century, genocides also occurred in Armenia, Indonesia, East Timor, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Iraq, Bosnia, and Rwanda, not to mention the millions killed under the totalitarian regimes of Mao and Stalin. It is for this reason that Alfred Leslie Rowse, an English historian, once quipped: "This filthy twentieth century. I hate its guts" (January, 2007, p. 134). If genocides of the twentieth century are combined with those in the nineteenth century, when native populations were exterminated worldwide, virtually every continent, nation, religion, and racial group has, in some

way, been touched by genocide. During the modern era, far from being viewed as an aberration, Holocaust-like events might be better viewed as the norm.

In recent years, the reclassification of the Holocaust as but 'one out of many', which began at the university level, has slowly trickled down to the secondary level of education. The language of the more recent legislative mandates and educational standards reflects this shifting paradigm. In the 90's, the majority of legislative mandates and standards passed by Boards of Education required that educators teach solely about the Holocaust. However, an examination of mandates and guidelines passed during the last five years reveals a change in focus and language. Four states including Maryland, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois either expanded the educational language of their mandates or created new mandates. Three of the four states, Maryland, Kentucky and Illinois, now require not just the teaching of the Holocaust, but other genocides as well. Indiana was the only recent state to pass a mandate where the mandate focused solely on Holocaust education (http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/states/).

Changes in Illinois's mandate may be seen as typical of the paradigmatic shift that has taken place in state mandates. The first Illinois mandate, passed in 1990, required that "Every public elementary school and high school…include in its curriculum a unit of instruction studying the events of Nazi atrocities of 1933-1946. This period in world history is known as the Holocaust…" However, the expanded mandate, entitled the Illinois and Genocide Mandate, passed in 2005, required that along with the Holocaust:

> "…curriculum shall include an additional unit of instruction studying other acts of genocide across the globe. This unit shall include, but not be limited to, the Armenian Genocide, the Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, and more recent atrocities in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Sudan."

Undoubtedly, future state mandates and educational guidelines also will place the Holocaust firmly within the context of genocide studies, rather than the study of the Holocaust being an end onto itself.

Because of the long-standing research on the Holocaust, a plethora of Holocaust curricular guides geared to the secondary elementary level of education is available in the marketplace. However, few of these guides address the topic within the collective, in ways that are conducive and financially viable for teachers and schools, and that adhere to the most recent trends in curricula design that have emerged over the past ten years. First, the majority of secondary school curricular guides do not place the Holocaust within the context of genocide studies. For example, one of the most utilized and comprehensive school curricula, which was created by Facing History and Ourselves, focuses on only two genocidesthe Holocaust and the Armenian genocides. Information about other genocides may be found on their website, but, for students and teachers, connections between and among genocides are implicit rather than explicit.

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Also, the majority of Holocaust curricular guides simply are not geared to the real world of teaching. The Holocaust curricula are too lengthy to be covered within the school-year time frame. Based upon state-wide and national studies, on average, teachers at the high school level spend, at most, one to two weeks, teaching a unit of study on the Holocaust (SRI-National Study of Secondary Teaching Practices in Holocaust Education: Final Report, August 2004; Ellison, Jeffrey and Pisapia, John, "The State of Holocaust Education in Illinois," 2006, Sept. 7. IDEA, a journal of Social Issues, Volume 11. No.1, from http://www.ideajournal.com/articles.php?id=41). Since a large percentage of high school teachers show films such as "Schindler's List," the actual teaching time devoted to the Holocaust at the secondary level probably averages closer to 5-6 days. Most of the available Holocaust curricula require teachers to devote not days, but weeks or months, to the teaching of the Holocaust. It is unrealistic to expect teachers who have the responsibility to teach survey courses on American or European histories, especially those at the AP level, to spend weeks or months focusing on one topic for such an extended period of time.

Moreover, the majority of Holocaust curricular guides is specialized and involves costly training. Universities and colleges must do a better job preparing students to teach about genocide studies because teacher emphasis about these subjects in the classroom is directly correlated with teacher preparation (Ellison, 2002). Because of insufficient training, too often, organizations and museums have made

a "business" out of teaching the Shoah. They create curricular guides, distribute the guides, and then charge for expensive seminars about how to use the guides, reinforcing the cynical notion: "There is no business like Shoah business". The reality is, if genocide was properly taught at the university level, and, if the curricular materials were more teacher-friendly, there would be little need for such specialized and costly training, especially important because of the economic constraints felt by many public schools today. Why should the teaching of the genocide require more training and be more costly than teaching any other subject in history?

Finally, and most important, the design of the majority of curricular guides is not congruent with the curricula mapping designs used in schools today. Too often, the guides or resource books are content driven as opposed to process oriented. They value coverage of material over understanding of the material. They view the teaching of the particular genocide as an end unto itself rather than serving as the means to approach more meaningful philosophical and behavior essential questions.

A new design for genocide curriculum is required that is grounded in the real needs of educators and best teaching practices. How would it be done? Experts in the field of genocide study would write a series of case studies. Each case study would be short, readable and concise (no more than 40 pages), so teachers could cover the material within the allotted one or two weeks. The studies would not be laden with footnotes, rather annotated bibliographies would be placed at the back of each study for students interested in locating additional research sources. The studies would be available in paperback or published on the Internet in order to make them affordable and available to the largest possible number of educators. For schools that offer electives on the Holocaust or genocide, or for teachers who have more time to address the subject, CD's and workbooks could be created to accompany each text.

Case studies would begin with the 'genocides' that took place in the Americas towards Native peoples beginning with Columbus.[1] It is particularly important to have case studies linking American history to genocide. In many states, the only required history course is that of American history. An examination of the genocidal actions towards the native people in an American history class would assure that all graduates would have some exposure to such an important and weighty topic. Moreover, because of state mandates to teach the Holocaust, oftentimes, the Holocaust is usually studied within the context of America's involvement in World War II (Ellison, Jeffrey and Pisapia, John, "The State of Holocaust Education in Illinois," 2006, Sept. 7. IDEA, a journal of Social Issues, Volume 11. No.1, from http://www.ideajournal.com/articles.php?id=41; taskforce.ushmm.org/teachers/educational_reports/country/usa.pdf). But American history is not the natural home for a study of the Holocaust; it more correctly fits into a course on European history. An examination of genocide within the Americas creates a more natural connection between the topic of genocide and a traditional American history course. Later in the year, important distinctions also could be made between genocide and slavery.

Additional case studies could then be written to address the genocides in the 20th century including those in: Armenia, the Ukraine, Europe during World War II (including separate studies on the Jews, Poles, Gypsies, the disabled, and Russian prisoners of war), Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Iraq. The final study would concern the most recent case of genocide taking place in Darfur. Teachers, administrators, and school districts would then decide which case study to use based on parental concerns, needs of their student body, and the knowledge base of their teachers.[2]

The framework for each case study would be based upon Understanding by Design (UBD), the design used by many progressive public schools today. The purpose of UBD is to prepare students for the world beyond school by requiring students to apply their understanding to issues and problems they will face in the future. As stated by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2008):

> "…learning for understanding requires that curriculum and instruction addresses three different but interrelated academic goals: (1) acquire important information and skills, (2) make meaning of the content, and (3) effectively transfer their learning to new situations both within school and beyond it" (p. 37).

At the heart of UBD is thinking backwards from a stated objective, creating essential questions, emphasizing enduring understanding, and aligning assessments with the stated objects.

In UBD, the goal for the unit is critical, otherwise, to quote Lewis Carroll, "if you don't know where you are going, any road will lead you there." Oftentimes, the goal of genocide education has been focused upon the oft-repeated phrase

"There is no business like Shoah business".

"never again," That is, through an understanding of past genocide, future genocide might be prevented. However noble the goal of 'never again' is as a goal for a unit of study on genocide, should this be the most important goal of genocide education at the secondary level? The causes for each case of genocide, whether fundamental or immediate, are complex, hard even for professional scholars in the area to grasp. Given that students are spending less than one or two weeks on genocide study, can we really expect students to grasp the complex issues involved in genocidal actions? Moreover, even assuming that the most accelerated students do grasp all the motivations, issues, methodology, and lessons surrounding a particular genocide, what are they to do with that understanding? Students at the high school level have limited means to effect major social and political change.

Would not a more meaningful and pragmatic goal be for students to transfer their understanding of genocide to their own classrooms, schools, and lives? Would it not be more beneficial if instead of focusing on the problems "over there", students used the lessons of genocide to explore the issues "over here", that is, in their own schools and their own communities—issues about bullying, harassment, and isolation? Would it not be more meaningful if genocide study resulted in changes in students behavior: by encouraging students to become more humane, accepting of differences, and less prone to seek violence as a method of settling differences, in short, to encourage students to become upstanders, not bystanders, in their own communities? Though teachers could certainly highlight important factual information about a given genocide, and the need for action to prevent future genocide, within this curricular design, the most important goal of genocide studies would be about doing acts of kindness within their own communities. The goals for teaching genocide would be a change in cognition and behavior.

A school principal expressed this idea most eloquently in a letter he sent a letter to his teachers on the first day of school:

> "Dear Teacher:
> I am a survivor of a concentration camp.
> My eyes saw what no man should witness:
> Gas chambers built by learned engineers.
> Children poisoned by educated physicians.
> Infants killed by trained nurses.
> Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.
> So I am suspicious of education.
> My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.
> Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane" (Facing History and Ourselves, 1994, p. XV).

Imagine a unit on genocide study, whose objective was to change student thinking and behavior on a local, rather than a global level. Imagine that, as a hook, students were given the reading from Christopher Browning's book on Reserve Police Battalion 101 where German soldiers were given the opportunity by their Captain to avoid participation in mass shootings without there being any repercussions, but only a handful of soldiers chose not to participate. Students would then be asked why only a handful of "ordinary men" chose to step out, whereas the majority of soldiers decided to be complicit in the mass shooting of thousands of men, women and children (Browning, 1998). To aid students in answering this question, the teacher then would pose essential questions.[3] Examples of essential questions might include:

1. Why do people willingly choose to do evil?
2. How is evil spread?
3. Is evil inherent, or is it learned behavior, and
4. What factors in the modern age might contribute to the spread of genocide?

In our imaginary scenario, students would then be required to read one of the genocide case studies to provide the factual basis upon which to address those essential questions. The particular case study to be chosen would depend upon the power and connection of that case study relative to a school's needs. In the ensuing discussions about the case study, the teacher would accentuate important and enduring understandings tied to the essential questions and goals for the unit. Examples of enduring understandings might include:

1) Each individual has within him or herself the capacity to do good and evil.
2) Evil is spread by good people/bystanders doing nothing.
3) The need for obedience and belonging play important roles in why people choose to do evil. And
4) The nature of the modern age, with its intrinsic compartmentalization, alienation, mass communication, and bureaucracy are important factors in contributing to genocide.

In short, through reading and subsequent discussions, the teacher would require students to make meaning of genocide, rather than focusing on the specific facts surrounding a particular genocide.

Finally, in this imaginary scenario, teachers would create authentic assessments to ascertain student understanding of what it means to become more humane. The assessment would be both cognitive and performance based. Students might be asked to write a paper in which they consider which of the essential questions or enduring understanding is most critical in making people more humane. Or they could be asked which of the enduring

understandings is the most compelling explanation for the spread of evil, or most relevant to their own lives. But, cognitive understanding would only serve as part of the assessment. For the unit to have genuine meaning, behavioral changes would also have to be assessed. To accomplish this task, students could be required to describe an instance of evil that occurred within their own school or community, analyze its causes, and propose changes to be made within the community to combat such actions. Or they could be asked to create institutions within their school community to lessen hate and promote acceptance and tolerance.

In conclusion, in higher education, the study of the Holocaust has become increasingly inculcated into the study of genocide. However, the paradigm shift has outdistanced curricular designs at the secondary level. There is a need to fill this vacuum by creating materials that are cost effective, teacher friendly, and promote the best practices available to educators today. Such a curriculum should aid in the acquisition of knowledge, make meaning of the knowledge and then apply that knowledge to the real world in which we live.

NOTES

[1] It would be beyond the scope of this paper to enter into a debate about whether the mass killing of Indians in the Americas truly meets the criteria for the definition of genocide as defined by the Genocide Convention. However, even if the actions of governments did not meet the formal criteria of genocide, few would argue that many governmental actions were genocidal in nature.

[2] Aligning a genocide to the particular audience does not mean a 'pandering to tastes', rather, it reflects the reality of the public school world, in which such concerns are greater than in the world of academia or higher education.

[3] In no way is this author suggesting that the teacher require students to identify or put themselves in the shoes of the perpetrators or victims in genocide. However, when questions and discussions are framed within the context of choices made by perpetrators and victims, it is impossible for a student, indeed the teacher, not to ponder their own moral stance on those decisions.

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