

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION WHY TEACHING THIS GENERATION ABOUT PAST GENOCIDES REMAINS IMPORTANT

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INSIDE

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“It was like a killing factory”

The impact on pupils of their Holocaust learning experience underscores the importance of the Vision Schools Programme

The systematic mass murder of millions of innocent people who perished at the hands of Nazis in purpose-built concentration and death camps may not be the easiest of subjects to teach to children.

But the lessons learned from the Holocaust are so far-reaching that it is a subject all schools should be aiming to teach across the curriculum in order to reap the proven benefits for its pupils, which include opening young minds, promoting tolerance and creating responsible citizens.

It is for this reason that the University of the West of Scotland, in partnership with the Holocaust Educational Trust, launched its Vision Schools programme to accredit schools that have demonstrated commitment and good practice in Holocaust education.

The aim of the Vision Schools Programme is to promote excellence in Holocaust teaching by identifying and accrediting schools that illustrate sustainability, innovation and good practice in this area; encouraging the sharing

“The size of the crematorium was something I hadn’t expected, it was like a killing factory. Objects left in one of the barracks really showed me that the people who were murdered were just normal individuals like me”

BISHOPBRIGGS ACADEMY PUPIL

of good practice of school-based Holocaust education; and promoting the importance of Continued Professional Learning in Holocaust education for Scottish teachers.

The official launch of Vision Schools in June this year followed a successful pilot phase at a number of schools in Glasgow, South Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire and Dundee which ran from 2015 to 2017.

Dr Paula Cowan, Reader in Education at the University’s School of Education, who is Director of Vision Schools, wanted to develop an initiative similar to University College London’s Beacon Schools Programme which helps secondary schools in England develop confidence, proficiency and excellence in Holocaust teaching and learning.

Paula, who has worked in Holocaust education and research in Scotland for nearly 20 years, said: “When my colleagues from the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust came up to Scotland, they were always impressed by the innovative things they saw and how refreshing it was to see the way in which we teach Holocaust education in our primary and secondary schools.

“I felt it was time to introduce something similar to Beacon Schools



to reward and recognise good practice in Scotland.”

Three schools - Bishopbriggs Academy in East Dunbartonshire, Grove Academy in Dundee and St Thomas’ Primary School in Glasgow - have so far been awarded Level 1 Vision Schools status after demonstrating sustainability, commitment and good practice in Holocaust education.

Schools across Scotland are now being invited to lodge expressions of interest in becoming a Vision School, with the formal application process opening next May.

“From my point of view, it’s important to have this because Holocaust education is of huge value in primary and secondary schools, and it has a significant contribution in terms of a child’s personal development,” explained Paula.

“I have come across a number of teachers who are so committed to

it and see the value for their school and pupils.

“As an educator, I appreciate the sensitivities involved, so Vision Schools is about getting a network together to support Holocaust education in Scotland.

“There’s a lot of innovative practice going on and a real feel for the value of Holocaust education.

“In some schools, it has become part of their culture, and this approach has so many benefits.”

Grove Academy is one school where Holocaust education has become part of its culture, and it has been leading the way in this field for at least the past decade.

Under the guidance of Gerry Dillon, Principal Teacher of RMPE, the school has formed strong working relationships with the Anne Frank Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust.

“When people think about the

Holocaust they invariably think about death camps,” explained Gerry.

“But it’s not just about that. It’s a story of persecution, stereotypes, and hatred which progressively led to the murder of all those people. The key thing in our school is that we have sustainable and appropriate Holocaust education.”

The “sustainable and appropriate” way of teaching Holocaust education at Grove Academy begins in S1 and continues through to S6, and this approach helped it earn the Vision Schools title.

Gerry said: “When we applied to become a Vision School, we had evidence from all year groups and across different departments.

“For example, part of the core RMPE curriculum in S1 is about hated groups, which looks at the different groups of people who are persecuted and victimised.

“S2 have been working with



the Anne Frank Trust and the pupils are being offered the opportunity to train as Anne Frank guides for the History For Today exhibition. The impact on the pupils as a result of this project has been phenomenal and it has led to them becoming far more confident.

“S6 pupils take part in the Lessons From Auschwitz Project, run by the Holocaust Educational Trust.”

Gerry has gone on study visits offered by the Holocaust Educational Trust, and he passes his learning on to not only colleagues in his school but any teachers wishing to expand and develop Holocaust education.

Gerry believes passionately that it is a subject which should be a part of the core curriculum because its lessons are so far-reaching. “Holocaust education first and foremost makes a pupil aware and makes them stop and consider the past,” he said.

“The Holocaust was an event - the persecution and murder of six million Jews - and studying it opens our minds about all those other groups that are persecuted.

“What were the stages that led to this event? Looking at this gives

pupils the chance to reflect and look at their own actions and speak up about discrimination and racism.”

At Bishopbriggs Academy, a variety of projects and exceptional commitment to teaching Holocaust education led to it becoming a Vision School.

Senior pupils have the opportunity to travel to Poland to visit Auschwitz and other areas associated with the Holocaust, while the school also hosted a national Holocaust Memorial Day event.

In addition to this, Bishopbriggs Academy took part in a unique partnership with the local Low Moss Prison to carry out a shared learning experience with the prisoners who had been learning about the Holocaust.

The school is also setting up a Holocaust ambassadors group which will be open to pupils from S1-S6.

Jillian McGee, history teacher at Bishopbriggs Academy, believes that, given the current climate, there has never been a more relevant time to teach children about the lessons of the Holocaust. She said: “In second year we have a rotation between history, modern studies, and geography. We talk about current inequalities around the

world, and genocide, and also talk about bullying at the school.

“We want to make pupils realise that it starts off with simple things and they can see where the lessons of the Holocaust are relevant to everyday life.

“Throughout our discussions, pupils have been making reference to what is going on in the US, and comparing how it started with the events leading up to the Holocaust.

“They have a good background knowledge of how the Holocaust came to be and they can tie it in with current affairs.”

She added that the school has a commitment to building on what it has already achieved and expanding its Holocaust education.

“As a school, all teachers recognise the importance of Holocaust education, and are aware that we are a Vision School. It is not just taught in history classrooms, but in modern studies, RE, English, and art. We are going to start a working group soon to get more departments on board.”

FURTHER READING

For further information, email visionschools@uws.ac.uk or visit www.uws.ac.uk/visionschoolsscotland

Learning about the past
can change the future

