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More Open to Diversity?: The Longer Term Citizenship Impact of Learning about the Holocaust

Henry Maitles¹ and Paula Cowan²

¹University of Strathclyde, ²University of the West of Scotland (UK)

Abstract

This is the third stage of a longitudinal study that investigates the learning of the Holocaust on pupils' citizenship values. We firstly compared primary pupils' values before and after their learning of the Holocaust; and secondly tracked these pupils into secondary to compare their attitudes with their peers who had not studied the Holocaust in primary school. It involves 200 pupils from a predominantly white rural community in the West of Scotland with very few ethnic minority pupils. The core group are now aged 15-16 years and this study continues to investigate their citizenship values using a values survey. This study is of interest to those involved in citizenship education, Holocaust education, antiracist and values education.

Introduction

There are some worrying signs of increases in anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe (Bergmann and Wetzel, 2003; Evening News, 2004; UK Community Security Trust (CST) 2007a and 2008; FRA, 2007 and 2008), with the CST reporting that in 2006 there was the highest ever total of 594 incidents in Britain, of which 16 were reported in Scotland and in 2007 the second highest ever, 547. Further, there are some disturbing changes in the pattern of anti-Semitic activities in that there has been a greatly increased number of violent assaults and a large increase in damages and desecration to property (CST 2007a and 2008) with 2007 showing the highest ever number of violent assaults; indeed, these violent assaults make up an increasing proportion of anti-Semitic incidents in the UK, from 13 per cent of the total in 2002, up to 21 per cent in 2007. It is important not to overstate the level of this and it does not equate to the racism faced by some other ethnic minorities. It can be difficult on occasion to define anti-Semitism beyond a generalized racism against Jewish people. Whilst there are some worrying cases of continued neo-Nazi violence (CST, 2007a), there is debate of a new form of anti-Semitism in which acts of anti-Jewish hostility are related to events in the Middle East. In an attempt to clarify what we mean by it, the following working definition offered by the European Union Monitoring Committee on Racism, and Xenophobia (EUMC), now the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is adopted in this article: 'Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed towards Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, towards Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.' (CST 2007b).

We must recognise that education on its own cannot be a panacea for challenging racism in general and anti-Semitism in particular although there has been some evidence that learning about the Holocaust can have a positive impact on the outlook of young people

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(Carrington and Short, 1997; Brown and Davies, 1998; Maitles and Cowan, 1999; Cowan and Maitles, 2007). While the Holocaust has been taught in Scottish primary and secondary schools for many years (Maitles and Cowan, 1999; Cowan and Maitles, 2002 and 2005), the introduction of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001 has made its teaching more mainstream and easier. This is because the announcement of UK Holocaust Memorial Day was accompanied by the commissioning of curricular materials for teaching Holocaust history to primary pupils aged 10-11 years, (LTS, 2000) which were later distributed to every primary school in Scotland for preparation for the first commemorative event. The Home Office and the Scottish Executive (from 2007, known as the Scottish Government) also distributed a resource to every Scottish secondary school (DfEE, 2000). Both resources make links with contemporary manifestation of racism, prejudice and discrimination. The Scottish Executive has continued to fund Holocaust curricular materials (LTS 2002a, Morley and Nunn, 2005). And, 2005 saw the first organised visits of Scottish pupils and teachers to Auschwitz with over 250 pupils and 100 teachers participating in Lessons from Auschwitz programme in 2007.

These initiatives show the commitment of the Scottish Executive to promoting the educational objective of Holocaust Memorial Day, to 'educate subsequent generations about the Holocaust and the continued relevance of the lessons that are learnt from it' (Home Office, 1999) and to encouraging Holocaust education in schools. However, we must remain aware that while education policy might stress positive issues such as understanding, empathy and tolerance, there can be a countervailing impact of other policy areas, such as economic and housing policies, holding of terrorist suspects and scaremongering (for example about numbers of refugees and immigrants). This can lead to opposite effects than the education policy agenda.

The content of the above curricular resources share a strong focus on the areas of knowledge and understanding relevant to the development of active and responsible citizenship. Currently a national priority, 'Values and Citizenship' involves teaching pupils 'duties and responsibilities of citizenship in democratic society' and 'respect for self and one another' (Standards in Scotland's schools Act, 2000). Further, the Education for Citizenship proposals (LTS, 2000b) implemented from August 2003, has added impetus to the development of teaching about the Holocaust in schools. As in England and Wales, the proposal is for education for citizenship to be an entitlement for all pupils at all stages. However, in Scotland, due to the cross curricular scope of 5-14, the existence of Modern Studies in the secondaries, the development of Social Subjects in Environmental Studies in the primaries, and the incorporation of 'responsible citizenship' in the new curriculum entitled a Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive/LTS, 2004), citizenship is not a separate subject but is taught in a cross-curricular approach. Despite some fears that the responsibility of all can become the responsibility of none, the suggestion is that many subjects will have an input into education for citizenship.

While the Holocaust is only mentioned as an example of the kinds of teaching content that could be employed, the desire to develop positive attitudes towards other cultures, faiths and ethnic groups, means that a study of the worst genocide in history can be an important part of a child's development. Teaching about the Holocaust provides a suitable context for attainment in many key areas which are specified in proposals for

Education for Citizenship in Scotland, eg. human rights, the need for mutual respect, tolerance and understanding of a diverse and multicultural Scotland (LTS, 2002b).

School Based Holocaust Education

In responding to pedagogical issues such as Piaget's theories of children's intellectual and moral development that suggest that children are unable to abstract and satisfactorily understand this kind of topic, Short (in Short and Reed, 2004) cites a number of Piaget's critics who have influenced teachers to raise their expectations of children's abilities. The contribution of Holocaust education in the primary school includes developing pupils' understanding of justice, stereotyping and discrimination (Short and Carrington, 1991; Maitles and Cowan, 1999; Short, 2003b; Cowan and Maitles, 2007) and provides opportunities for developing positive values of empathy, awareness of antiracism, and an understanding that the individual can make a difference.

A contrasting viewpoint is conveyed by Totten (1999) on the grounds that the Holocaust is inappropriate and too complex for this age group to study, and by Kochan (1989) who objects to its teaching to the 'immature and unsophisticated' claiming that such teaching can have deleterious consequences for pupils. The former viewpoint is challenged by Cowan and Maitles's case study of an educational authority's response to Holocaust Memorial Day in which Holocaust teaching was the norm for the upper primary classes, i.e. 10-12 years and where a variety of appropriate curricular teaching materials and staff development were provided by the local authority (Cowan and Maitles, 2002). The latter viewpoint is challenged by this paper together with its phase 1 study that suggested that teaching the Holocaust has a positive short term impact on pupils' values and attitudes (Cowan and Maitles, 2005). In this paper, which presents some of the findings from three surveys, we investigate the longer term impact of teaching the Holocaust .

Previous research in secondary schools (Carrington and Short, 1997; Brown and Davies, 1998; Short et al 1998; Davies, 2000; Hector, 2000; Totten, 2000; Ben-Peretz, 2003; Schweber, 2003;) provides evidence that Holocaust education can make a significant contribution to citizenship in developing pupils' awareness of human rights issues and genocides, the concepts of stereotyping and scapegoating, and general political literacy, such as the exercise of power in local, national and global contexts. Landau (1989) asserts that Holocaust teaching 'perhaps more effectively than any other subject, has the power to sensitise them (pupils) to the dangers of indifference, intolerance, racism and the dehumanisation of others'. Short asserts that one of the lessons that the Holocaust teaches pupils is that pupil attitudes are, 'to some extent, culturally determined' and its teaching should encourage pupils to examine whether any harmful stereotypes may emanate from an aspect of their culture. (Short, 2003a).

Holocaust education is part of the English National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 (S1/2 Scottish equivalent age group) and there are current debates as to its effectiveness. In particular, Russell (2007) suggests that history teachers are inconsistent in their methodologies as some teach it as history while others focus on the social and moral perspectives without applying historical inquiry. In Scotland, as we pointed out (Maitles and Cowan, 1999), although there are plenty of opportunities in the curriculum for teaching about the Holocaust, too often 'Holocaust teaching in Scotland depends on individual school policy, and/or interested teachers' who integrate it into modes of the

curriculum. Although the Holocaust is not included specifically in the Scottish curriculum, the '5-14 National Guidelines', there is plenty of scope within this curriculum for teaching it. Traditional curricular areas are Religious and Moral Education (or Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies- RMPS), Environmental Studies, History, Modern Studies and Personal and Social Development.

There is a further issue relating to the whole nature of the raising of controversial issues in schools. In primary schools there is a perceived lack of teacher subject knowledge (Historical Association, 2007). Paradoxically, in secondary schools the IEA study of political consciousness in 28 European countries (Torny-Purta et al, 2001) found that in many countries teachers are afraid to tackle controversial issues because, almost by definition, the discussion becomes multi-disciplinary and they are uncomfortable in that zone. However, in analyzing how high school students understood the place of classroom discussion, Hahn (1998) found that students in Netherlands did not try to persuade each other, even when discussing highly controversial issues that they felt strongly about, whereas in German and US state schools and English private schools there was strong argument and persuasion. Interestingly, she found that there was virtually no discussion on political issues in the state sector in England even in social science classes where she gathered that 'the primary purpose was to prepare for examinations'. There are other general issues involved affecting both school sectors which mitigate against the discussion of controversial issues. Firstly, there are teacher worries about their skills to handle open-ended discussions which they might not be able to control or direct. For example, there has been a report of one school whose history department "avoided selecting the Holocaust as a topic for GCSE coursework for fear of confronting anti-Semitic sentiment and Holocaust denial among some Muslim pupils" (Historical Association, 2007,p.15); secondly, there are structural constraints in schools from the lack of tradition in discussion to the physical layout of classrooms; thirdly, there are worries about what parents might think about controversial discussion, and the influence of the mass media and politicians to what might be perceived as influencing pupils one way or another.

Smith (2003) raises a further question: can a concept of citizenship 'based on equal rights and a shared sense of belonging...moderate, transcend or displace identity politics and concepts of nationality?' And, as if this isn't problematic enough, there is the point of limitations to compromise and consensus. Learning in this area suggests to pupils that there is not always a compromise available no matter how hard we try and it is this inability that leads to the kind of violent scenes we see on our TV screens and, sometimes, on our streets. This itself is a valuable lesson and can be extrapolated to other conflicts (such as the war in Iraq) across the world. The role of the teacher in this becomes crucial. As Agostinone-Wilson (2005), Ashton and Watson (1998), Stradling (1984) suggest, the teacher needs to be confident enough and have the honesty and confidence to suggest to pupils that they are not just independent observers but have a point of view, which also can and should be challenged. Whilst this is an area of some discussion in Britain, Wrigley (2003) points out that in Germany, teachers are encouraged to allow discussion around controversial issues, present a wide range of views and be open about their own standpoint whilst allowing for all views to be challenged. In the very slim curriculum guidelines in Denmark, teachers are encouraged not to 'overplan' so that, in discussion with their pupils, issues deemed relevant for

discussion can be included. Indeed, it is crucial, according to Ashton and Watson (1998), that teachers understand their pro-active role, where necessary, otherwise backward ideas can dominate the discussion. Further, teachers have to gently point out that these issues being discussed have not yet been resolved and are open-ended in terms of outcome. Pupils have little problem with this and are not as dogmatic as adults when it comes to changing attitudes and political understanding.

As a result of curricular developments, governmental and local authority support and research into its teaching, Scottish teachers of the upper primary and lower secondary stages now have more opportunities to teach the Holocaust and greater accessibility to Holocaust teaching resources than before. Finally, there is an additional 20% flexibility time that allows schools to enhance the time for a curricular area where they consider the minimum time insufficient and where school and the local authority have development priorities. This is strengthened by the Curriculum for Excellence proposals.

To investigate the value of Holocaust education, the authors had devised a longitudinal strategy which examined whether there are 'immediate' and 'lasting' effects on the attitudes and dispositions of pupils that result from its teaching; further, the values of this cohort was compared to their peers who did not have the opportunity to study the Holocaust in primary school. This provided empirical evidence of the contribution of Holocaust education in developing attitudes relating to citizenship (Maitles and Cowan, 2006; Cowan and Maitles, 2007). Overall, it involved some 100 pupils in Primary 7 and a total of 238 pupils in Secondary 1. In order to avoid aspects of familiarity, to move beyond the multicultural areas most often used in the studies on this area and to explore issues such as attitudes towards Gypsy Travellers and Jews, we chose a small rural local authority some 30 miles from Glasgow. The school sample was chosen, in collaboration with the local authority, who identified two primary schools in the area that taught the Holocaust as part of the World War Two topic in Primary. One primary is a one streamed school (school A); the other is a larger school that contained pupils from three classes (school B). Both primaries are non-denominational, have mixed socio-economic catchment areas, are predominantly white and have no Jewish pupils. Class sizes were similar in both schools.

Methodology

In consultation with the schools and local authority, a survey was devised which attempted to ascertain changes in some of the values and attitudes outlined as central to national documentation on citizenship (LTS, 2002b; Scottish Executive/LTS, 2004). We followed this cohort ten months later into the secondary school and issued a further survey to compare pupils' attitudes with earlier findings. We also issued this survey to secondary pupils who had not previously studied the Holocaust to compare their attitudes with that of the core group. This fitted in with teachers' forward planning of Holocaust teaching and meant that the impact of the media leading up to national Holocaust Memorial Day could not influence the findings.

Our conclusions to this part of the study (Cowan and Maitles, 2007) was that there was both a short term and long term improvement in the citizenship values of pupils who had studied the Holocaust, compared to those who had not. The core sample had stronger

positive values and were in the main more tolerant. Further, they were more disposed to active citizenship by their understanding of individual responsibility towards racism. We returned to the same school 3 years on, with the pupils now in S4 to attempt to ascertain whether these differences were still evident and to examine gender differences, which had not been prevalent in the earlier surveys.

Results

Table 1 shows the pupils' responses to questions relating to racist comments.

Table 1: Survey 4 Results - Core Sample v Others: I think that it is ok to make racist comments about ... people.

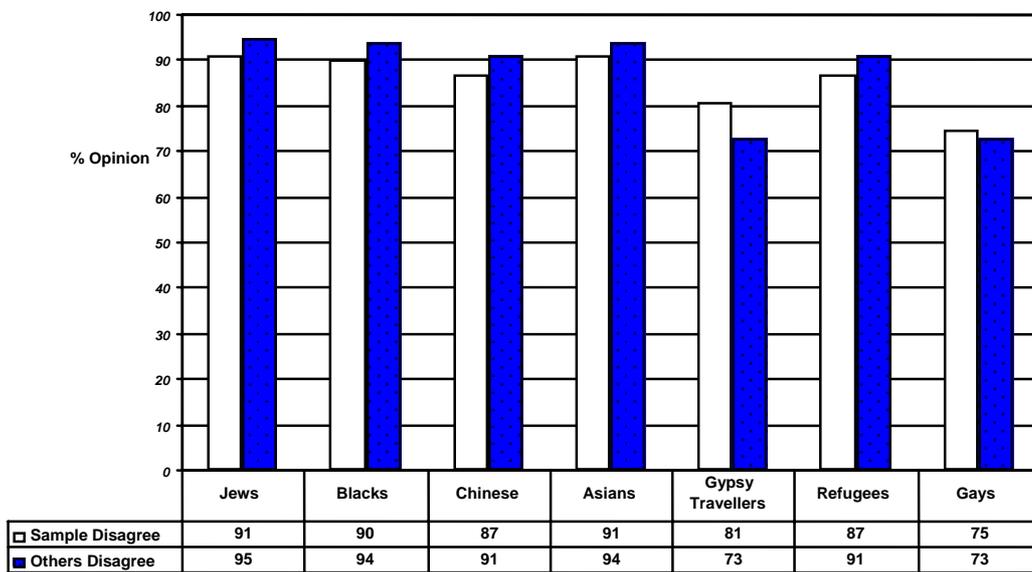


Table 2 however unpicks this with regard to gender:

Table 2: Survey 4 Results- Boys v Girls: I think it is ok to make racist comments about..... people

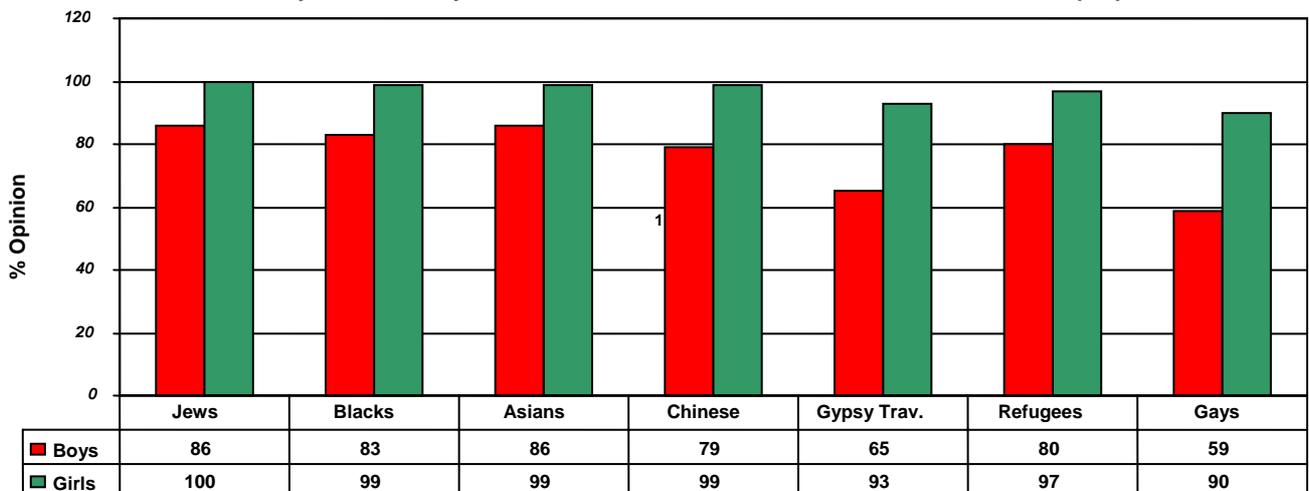
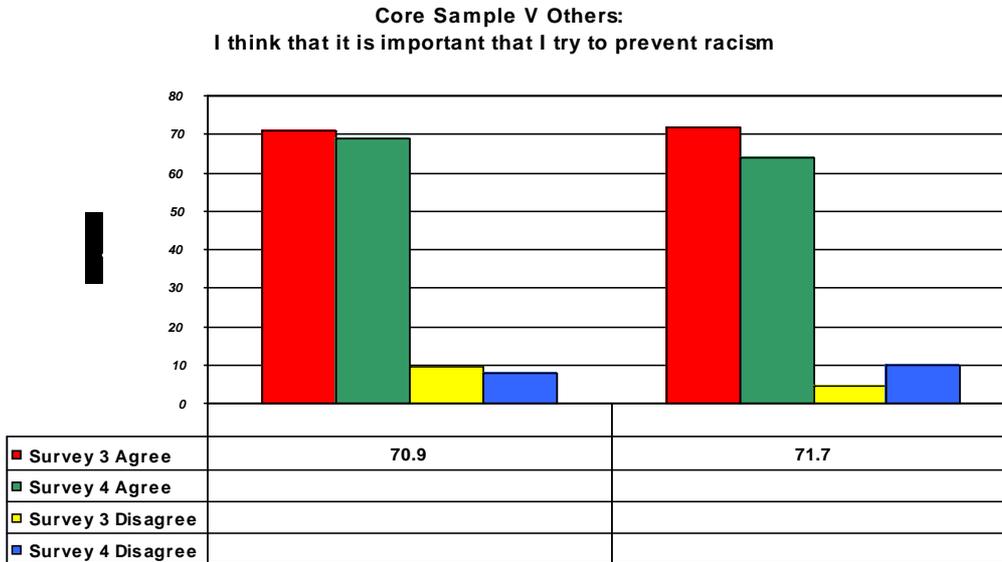


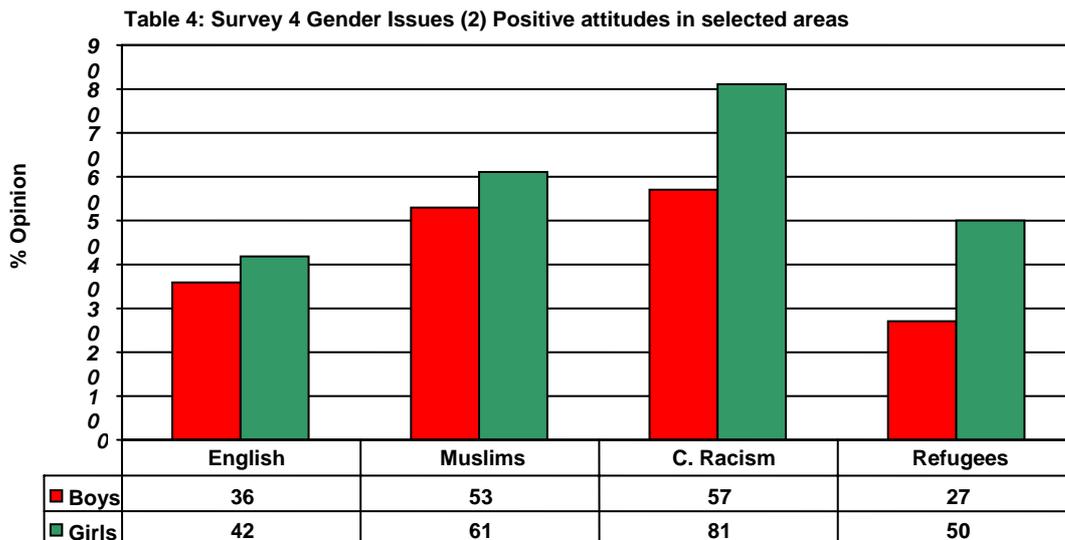
Table 3 attempts to examine a disposition towards actively opposing racism:

Table 3:



This suggests that our core sample have maintained their positive attitude towards this, whilst for the others it has fallen back slightly. However it should be noted that even for them it was only 10% who felt that racism had nothing to do with them. From a group of pupils 14-15, this is quite heartening.

Further examination of the gender issues can be seen in Table 4.



In all areas of our survey, we found that girls at this age were significantly more positive than boys. Whether it was in terms of voting for English people or Muslims or challenging racism or attitudes to refugees, young women were more disposed to better values and attitudes.

Conclusions

By the time the pupils get to 4th year, the 'better' attitudes held by our core group in S1 have in some cases, not only fallen but their positive attitudes are marginally behind their peers. This is in part because of areas of the curriculum they have studied between S1 and S4 highlighting positive values. Indeed, in RMPS in S1 they examined the Holocaust as part of a unit on inhumanity and human rights. While it is therefore inconclusive as to the positive impact of Holocaust teaching in the primary, the evidence suggests that it has greater short term benefits than longer term ones.

Overall, there are some generally welcome attitudes relating to attitudes towards minorities. Yet there is now a major issue relating to gender differences in S4 in relation to all areas we examined; this is new and was not significant in our previous surveys in P7 and S1. In S4, boys are shown to be less tolerant, less open to diversity and less willing to challenge racism than girls. This has implications for teaching citizenship in schools as it follows that its teaching would benefit from schools / teachers taking this issue into account when deciding upon suitable resources and teaching approaches for pupils.

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