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## “I WONDER WHERE I WILL BE TOMORROW”. USING FILMED TESTIMONY TO DEVELOP HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLOCAUST WITH BRITISH PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

### Introduction

The *Centre for Holocaust Education at University College London (UCL)* is a research led organisation jointly funded by the Department for Education and the Pears Foundation. It was established in 2008 with three primary goals: to conduct research into Holocaust education, to create a programme of research informed Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers in English state education, and to contribute to the field of Holocaust education both nationally and internationally. The research that provides the basis for the CPD is *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools* (Pettigrew et al. 2009) and *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?* (Foster et al. 2015)

This research led approach is unusual in Holocaust education. David Cesarani highlighted the research done by the UCL *Centre for Holocaust Education* as providing an “important but all too rare evidence based approach to Holocaust education” (2016: xxv).

In addition to this, the centre runs a beacon school project where selected schools work as dynamic hubs co-ordinating a network of local schools, helping them to develop confidence, proficiency and excellence in Holocaust

teaching and learning. This case study is a project that grew out of the beacon school relationship between Children’s Support Service (CSS) South Quadrant, Basildon Beacon School, and the UCL *Centre for Holocaust Education*.

### “Cold Spots”

The Department for Education has used the term “cold spot” as a metaphor for an area where its policies are not having as much impact as it would wish (Her Majesty’s Government 2015: 45). We have used this metaphor not only to refer to the geographical distribution of Holocaust education but also when considering different sectors of education.

Two of these “cold spots” are of particular interest to us. Some 28.5% of the secondary students surveyed in *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?* (Foster et al. 2016: 77) said they first encountered the Holocaust in primary school even though the Holocaust does not appear in the primary phases of the national curriculum in England. Though we can postulate that this involves reading about Anne Frank or a novel set during the Second World War there is a clear need for research to clarify what is being taught about the Holocaust in primary schools and how to support teachers’ needs.

The second “cold spot” is the provision of Holocaust education material designed for secondary school students with special educational needs and disability (SEND); the government defines a child with SEND as having “a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her” (Department for Education 2015: 15). There is little research into Holocaust education within SEND, and as yet there appears to be little emphasis on creating quality Holocaust education material designed for those pupils. Our scheme has been designed with both these “cold spots” in mind.

### Macro and Micro Agendas

Schools in England are accountable to government for including a range of directed national agendas in their curriculum; we refer to these as the

“macro agendas”. These agendas are expected to be delivered across the whole curriculum rather than as discrete subjects. This is reinforced as some of the agendas overlap. These agendas have also been mediated by subject disciplines and there have been wide ranging discussions about how different subjects should respond to these.

The macro agendas are:

- Citizenship – must be at the heart of good education, provides the knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare students to play a full and active part in society.
- Social, moral, spiritual and cultural education (SMSC) – is emphasised in school inspections. There are a wide range of issues in this agenda, including students’ ability to reflect on their cultural influences, experiences and belief systems, to be confident discussing moral issues, and to respect diverse views while accepting a respect for the law.
- British values – schools should promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- Global learning – sets out to develop a richer, more interesting curriculum using real world contexts to engage students. It should help pupils make sense of the world in which they live and understand their role within a global society. Explicit in the pedagogy of global learning is a cooperative learning approach.
- Diversity – the *Equality Act 2010* states that all schools in England, Wales and Scotland must demonstrate that they are working towards good relations between people and groups of all kinds. Schools should do this by helping their students develop an understanding of a range of religions or cultures. This theme should be inherent within all the agendas described above.

It should be noted in England, Holocaust education is not an expectation within the school accountability process. However the current History National Curriculum for 11– to 14 year-olds does make teaching “the Holocaust”

mandatory under the theme of “Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day” (Department for Education 2013). It is no more prescriptive than this.

Schools also need to address their own local “micro” agendas, the most important being to meet the educational needs of their students. Over the last three decades this has been expressed in terms of differentiation. This is often assumed to mean changing the materials used in teaching, either asking more complex questions for “gifted and talented” students or, sadly all too often, asking easier questions or using easier sources for students who struggle to keep up. However, we argue that all students have the right to access complex issues. This scheme enables students to successfully develop an understanding of a range of issues in completely different ways and with complexity, commensurate with their needs.

### Creating the Resource

If our scheme is to appeal to teachers and schools there is a clear need to address the micro and macro agendas outlined above. However, other factors influenced its construction. The first was an absolute commitment to Miriam Kleinman and her family to respect her personal history. She fled to the United Kingdom from antisemitic persecution in Nazi-occupied Belgium. Her family were real people, in a real situation, faced with life changing choices. Consequently, building an accurate body of knowledge about her family and their life in Belgium was central to our planning.

A second factor was a commitment to having the students work as historians, to experience the complexity of the material and the inconsistencies we faced as we researched Miriam’s life; put simply, the students will be “doing real history”. They will learn to develop hypotheses, test them against the evidence and then amend or reject them accordingly. The scheme’s pedagogy must not instil an ethos whereby students are frightened of “getting it wrong”. For example, instructions encourage students to place materials “where you think they should go” rather than “in the right order”.

Students are encouraged to explore other areas of the story that intrigue them.

Enabling the students to explore different aspects of the story realises our idea that “we don’t want to know what they cannot do, we want to know what they can do” and coincides with ideas related to divergent assessment practices. By engaging in their own research, the students develop the skills and concepts used by historians. They learn to analyse sources and develop an understanding of aspects of life in pre-war Belgium.

### The Scheme

The scheme is made up of several phases that build the students’ knowledge and deepen their experience of working at “real history”. Learners are provided with a framework that enables them to develop and construct their own narrative.

Initial stimulus material: as an introduction, students are given a photograph of Miriam’s shawl from when she was a baby. This artefact generates a student-led analysis based on what they can see and “what does it mean?” They repeat the activity with a photograph of her as a baby being held by her mother but with a British soldier in the background. Then students view the first video clip, in which Miriam introduces herself as the baby in the photographs. She asks the students if they would like to hear her story.

The second phase focuses on the family. Here, students construct a family tree with overlapping information including family photographs and documents. Information is released to the students in stages requiring them to keep reassessing their ideas and accept that constructing a historical narrative is often done using fragmented information.

For the next phase of the scheme students are asked: “How do you think Miriam’s parents, Moritz and Rachel, travelled between Ostend and Folkestone?” Students hypothesise how such a journey might have been made in May 1940 and then search online to assess their ideas. They are provided with additional documents to assist in this process.

Students are now shown the second part of the video testimony in which Miriam recounts her story. They compile new information, evaluate and amend their construction, and identify any anomalies between their

narrative and Miriam's testimony. They may also consider their initial questions. They are able to see which of these can now be answered and whether new questions arise.

When constructing the narrative, students will have collected a lot of information about Miriam's family and the economic and political situation in Europe during the interwar years. What they have not done is to confront the question of why the family left Belgium in such a hurry in May 1940. Miriam answers this in the third film clip, where she simply comments that it was "because we were Jewish". This is the critical point where the students realise that this single issue was forcing Miriam's family to flee.

The scheme finishes with the students collectively developing an interactive timeline of the events. They follow whatever theme appeals to them and are encouraged to be as creative as they can. This activity allows all students to contribute in a way that is commensurate with their needs, interests and most importantly enables them to reflect on what they have learned.

### How we Used Video Testimony

The report by the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission, *Britain's Promise to Remember*, highlighted the need for an "urgent programme to record and preserve the testimony of British Holocaust survivors and liberators" (2015: 15). Within 12 months a second report on Holocaust education was published, this time by the House of Commons Education Select Committee (2016). Curating survivor testimony was central to the vision of Holocaust education in both reports. This approach is not without its critics. Cesarani, in his book *Final Solution*, is severely critical of the way that testimony is used. He says:

"The use of survivor testimony regularly trumps the dissemination of scholarship. Survivors may only be able to illuminate a tiny corner of the sprawling historical tragedy from their own experience, but they were there so their every word is highly charged". (2016: xxvi)

He is further concerned about the use of testimony given that it is now

reliant upon childhood memories. Similarly, Darius Jackson argues that it is a mistake to engage in “the curating of memory rather than using the memories to change the accepted historical narratives” (2016: 81).

With this in mind, Miriam’s testimony was filmed by a team from UCL. The video was about 30 minutes long. The first three clips were specifically designed for the scheme, however, Miriam’s testimony was not edited or scripted. The rest of the footage has been archived for future publication.

Following Cesarani’s lead, instead of treating Miriam’s testimony as something to be preserved or taken at face value, the scheme uses it in three different ways:

First, to trigger students’ curiosity; a short film introducing her is shown, which concludes with her asking “do you want to know my story?” This whets the students’ appetite for the scheme as they see a real person, rather than a statistic or a historic figure.

Second, as an evaluation tool. Having constructed their narrative, students watch a further clip of the testimony, in which Miriam outlines her story. This enables students to assess for themselves the accuracy of their construction.

Finally, we use the testimony for a dialogue about its veracity. This is a sensitive issue. Unlike in a court, where challenging witness accounts is an essential part of the legal process, here we have an elderly lady who has volunteered her account. This presents an ethical dilemma. In his biography of Marianne Ellenbogen née Strauss, *The Past in Hiding* (2000), Mark Roseman found that discrepancies between documentary evidence and oral testimony occur when the documents were written with a partial understanding of the events they purport to describe or where there has been reinterpretation by later observers. The third discrepancy is where the memory is incorrect or has changed over time. Roseman outlines a number of discrepancies between the oral account and other sources. However, as they do not undermine the fundamentals of the oral account, he goes so far as to describe the discrepancies as trivial. He is explicit that the documents should not be looked upon as reassuringly accurate and the oral accounts as in some way flawed. Roseman concludes that where there are other sources it is not disrespectful to

the survivors to compare accounts, as there is no “wish to or an expectation of challenging the fundamental veracity of their testimony. On the contrary, it helps to illuminate the very process of memory” (2016: 332).

Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman consider the veracity of oral history in their paper *Reliability and validity on oral history: the case for memory*. The study concludes that, within oral history, memories “cannot be disturbed or dislodged” and that it “was virtually impossible to change, to enhance, or to stimulate new memories by any method” (1994: 124). They further conclude that: “We think, therefore, that we have a subset of memory [...] called autobiographical memory, which is so permanent and so largely immutable that it is best described as archival” (Ibid.). They define archival memory as “recollections that are rehearsed, readily available for recall, and selected for preservation over the lifetime of an individual. They are memories which have been selected much as one makes a scrapbook of photographs, pasting in some and discarding others” and that archival memories are “likely to be unique happenings” (Ibid.).

An example of these tensions came up in our research and its inclusion in the scheme enables students to explore this issue. Early in our research, Miriam had said that her family had arrived in England aboard a cattle boat that had docked in Greenwich. Greenwich is on the south bank of the River Thames, downstream from the Tower of London and not a major docklands. However, in neighbouring Deptford there was a wharf that had been used for landing livestock. This formed the basis of our initial research.

We were unable to find a record of any ship docking in Greenwich carrying Belgian refugees in May 1940. This didn’t lead us to doubt her testimony, but it did highlight the difficulties in using oral history. We knew Miriam and her family had fled Belgium and settled in the UK, so they had to have travelled here at some point. To ensure our narrative was accurate we now had to look beyond Miriam’s testimony for information and evidence.

Our next step was to meet Miriam, to explain that it was proving difficult to substantiate aspects of her testimony. She provided us with lots of documents she had subsequently located. It was one of these, her father’s Belgian



identity card, which provided the answer. Clearly stamped on this card was an entry visa for Folkestone dated 18 May 1940, the day after the British Consul had given him a visa in Ostend. Folkestone is a coastal port in southern Kent with a long history of cross channel trade and it would be a more logical destination for ships leaving Ostend. Armed with this new piece of information, we were able to ascertain that Miriam and her family had travelled to the UK aboard the *SS Ville de Liège*, a Belgian ship that had left Ostend with a cargo of Belgian state archives and 207 refugees. The docks had been attacked by the Luftwaffe while it was loading and to avoid being sunk the ship had sailed before all the archives were loaded, which meant there was room for the refugees, including Miriam and her family. They disembarked at Folkestone the following day.

It is clear that Miriam's memories are unique, but as she was only 10 months old in May 1940, they are clearly not her own. Her archival memories must have been formulated by the archival memories of third parties, specifically members of her family who travelled with her.

Further evidence of this came when we gave a talk on the scheme to Miriam's surviving family and friends. This gathering included descendants of other family members who had been on the *SS Ville de Liège*. A number of contradictory archival memories were presented in the discussions about their ancestors' flight from Belgium.

With Miriam's permission, we kept her earlier account of arriving in Greenwich in the video testimony to enable students to gain first-hand experience of the discrepancies within oral history.

### Piloting and Evaluation

The scheme has been piloted with cohorts representative of both the "cold spots" identified above. These were carried out in south-east Essex, UK. In each case, the schools were supported with CPD resources, "in running" visits and a final evaluation visit from Tony Cole.

The observations and evaluation identified the following common strands:

- The scheme had enthused and motivated students. In every case, the

school reported how successfully the scheme had engaged all students but most noticeably those who normally experienced difficulties accessing the curriculum and those described as “hard to reach”. From this, micro agendas were being achieved.

- In all cases students had developed a personal concern for Miriam’s family. The use of video testimony helped to develop a concern for people students had never met. This was emphasised in teachers’ feedback. One teacher said her students had “really connected with the human element” throughout the whole scheme.
- The scheme encouraged independent learning and students commented on how they had enjoyed the challenges this presented. One student said: “It was hard, but not so hard it put you off. It was like a puzzle.”
- Colleagues said how well the scheme addressed macro agendas.
- All schools reported how effective the use of video testimony had been as an assessment tool as it had allowed students to assess their own work.
- In all cases, students were confidently using the language and methodology of a historian.

Using the evaluation, amendments were made to the scheme and the accompanying CPD. For a cohort of “hard to reach” students who had struggled when asked to “place photographs in the right order” a change in the wording to “place them where you think they should be” had an immediate positive impact and the students willingly engaged.

## Conclusion

Early indicators suggest that the “I wonder where I will be tomorrow” scheme has met the key principles and agendas identified by the authors. Key to this has been the unique use of video testimony.

The scheme has used video testimony to humanise a complex narrative, which in itself became a motivation for its target users. It has enabled students to take ownership of “real people” making “real choices” in the context of “real events”.

Video testimony has not been used as a didactic pedagogical tool, indeed

quite the opposite. It has been used to enable students to assess the historical narrative that they themselves have constructed. At the same time, it has highlighted to those students some of the real issues faced by historians when dealing with oral history.

In the words of a year 6 student: “Doing the research was really interesting and it made us all think. We had to think about what was true and what wasn’t.”

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