Why Connect Holocaust Education to Human Rights Education?

The reflections of the past are vital to view contemporary matters in a more differentiated way, within the horizontal (contemporary) and vertical (historic) dimensions.

Three main goals for Holocaust Education can be described as:
(1) history teaching/historical learning
(2) commemoration
(3) sensitizing students in the present and for the future.¹

Although the subject matter here concerns educating about a particular historical event, the Holocaust, that was unprecedented and unique in its form, the ethical and moral implications of this tragedy are universal and thus important to grapple with at all times and all over the world. Many teachers and students today think that teaching about the Holocaust should incorporate both historical facts and issues relating to ethics and human values.² Recent research studies point out the necessity of linking the two fields.³ While general guidelines on why to teach about the Holocaust have been developed by the Education Working Group of the ITF, there is a need for a guiding methodological tool that helps to answer the ‘how can one teach from and about the Holocaust’ and about its universal lessons, which would connect the contemporary context and human rights, often raised by teachers.⁴ Historical knowledge, and understanding historical processes and contexts, must serve as a basis for Holocaust and Human Rights Education. Without a careful study of this subject matter, the significance of this historical event as well as the significance of human rights will not provide adequately students with a foundation about why it is important to uphold human rights or learn about the Holocaust. At the same time, human rights can serve as a frame of reference to analyze victims, bystanders, perpetrators, collaborators, and rescuers from an educational perspective.

The projects in this Toolkit have combined the following five approaches:
(1) historical teaching
(2) commemoration and developing empathy with the victims, critically reflecting on the role of bystanders and perpetrators
(3) connecting the knowledge of the Holocaust with the knowledge of human rights
(4) deriving lessons for contemporary world
(5) “empowering” to respect human rights and to engage for the realization of human rights.

Keep in Mind When Using This Toolkit:

Teaching history of the Holocaust aims for teaching about the Holocaust as an important event in history, integrating historical knowledge about this particular event and what led to it into the general historical narrative that is taught and discussed in schools.

Commemorating and developing empathy with the victims aims at preserving and respecting the memory of the victims, by rescuing their individual identities and developing empathy for them. Creating empathy includes an emotional component, but this approach should not manipulate students’ emotions. It is the

² FRA, Excursion to the past – teaching for the future, Vienna 2010.
³ FRA, Discover the past for the future. A study on the role of historical sites and museums in Holocaust education and Human Rights Education in the EU, Vienna 2010. Available at the FRA Website: www.fra.europa.eu.
⁴ For Guidance on ‘Why to teach about the Holocaust’ please see http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/education/guidelines-for-teaching/why-teach-about-the-holocaust.html. In a research study undertaken in 2009 by the Holocaust Education Development Program (HEDP) of the Institute of Education (IOE), University of London in the United Kingdom, a number of findings related to the aims of teachers when teaching about this history were specified. For example, “Making a study of the Holocaust relevant in the context of twenty-first century classrooms, appeared, for many teachers, to be a key concern.” For more information about this study and the work of the HEDP/IOE, see: www.HEDP.org.uk.
responsibility of the teachers to carefully assess the resources and methodology employed in their classrooms. Education should go beyond emotional attachment and be guided by questions such as ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’

Connecting the knowledge of the Holocaust with the knowledge of human rights aims at involving the learners in an ‘empowerment process’, while developing an understanding of our common responsibility to work toward building an environment respecting human rights for all in every community and in society at large as well as building on a basis of knowledge of the Holocaust. In the values and awareness model, the main focus is to transmit basic knowledge of human rights and to promote its integration into public values. This approach focuses on developing critical thinking skills and the ability to apply a human rights framework to the analysis of the Holocaust. This model has been applied e. g. in the following projects in the Toolkit: “Minorities in Cologne – Porz”; “Perverted justice shown in a German fairy tale and caricatures in the Nazi propaganda paper ‘Der Stürmer’”; “A multinational exchange of result and thereby comparison of different historical examples of violation of human rights, Swedish high school students learning about the other’s 20th century history and the present day situation in human rights compliance”; “Hungarian students and teachers visiting Holocaust-related authentic sites, and gaining insight into the role of the Hungarian population in the murder of Jewish people”.5 In the transformational model, using action oriented participatory and integrative methodology, Human Rights Education is directed towards empowering the individual both to recognize human rights abuses and ensure their prevention. This model has been applied in the following projects in the Toolkit: “Human Rights and the Holocaust”, “Human Rights Violation, The Role and Dilemmas of Bystanders before (and at the time of) the Holocaust”6.

Providing human rights lessons for the present and future aims at providing students with insights and lessons which could serve as a basis for better understanding the present and for taking human rights related action both in the present and the future. The encouraging element that
- human rights improve the protection of human beings;
- they are legally binding and know international, regional and national institutions and mechanisms for its implementation which has seen significant progress over the last sixty years;
- they protect human dignity;
- they overcome national particularization with an universal concept;
- they define a framework of rights and corresponding duties;
can foster taking action to uphold human rights.

When Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education are combined, it is crucial that the educational process, the access to it, the methods, the teaching and learning materials, the assessment of the learning process, are respecting human rights. E. g. offensive, racist or discriminatory language, statements or acts must be noticed, explicitly discussed and a teacher has to take a clear position against it.

5 For more information on models in Human Rights Education, please see FRA, Discover the past for the future. A study on the role of historical sites and museums in Holocaust education and Human Rights Education in the EU, Vienna 2010. Available at the FRA Website: www.fra.europa.eu.
6 For more information on models in the Holocaust and Human Rights Education, please see FRA, Discover the past for the future. A study on the role of historical sites and museums in Holocaust education and Human Rights Education in the EU, Vienna 2010. Available at the FRA Website: www.fra.europa.eu.