

**PRECONCEPTIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST AMONG THIRTEEN  
AND FOURTEEN YEAR-OLDS IN ENGLISH SCHOOLS**

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## Abstract

Existing research suggests that when pupils study the Holocaust in their history lessons at the age of thirteen or fourteen, they are likely to arrive with a wide range of ideas, beliefs and understandings about the subject. This study sought to examine whether or not this was the case and if so, the nature of these preconceptions. It focused exclusively on pupils' understandings and conceptions of the Holocaust before they had formally studied the subject in their history lessons. Using complementary methods, the research was conducted on 298 pupils from four different schools in Oxfordshire and London. All pupils completed a spider diagram exercise and a three page questionnaire, with thirty-six pupils participating in either one or two semi-structured interviews involving various open-ended questions and specifically designed tasks.

This study found that almost all pupils who participated in the research had considerable and meaningful knowledge of the subject. Consequently, this thesis highlights trends in pupils' thinking about the Holocaust in a wide range of areas, such as why the Jews were treated in such a manner; who carried out this treatment and why the Nazi killing of the Jews ended. It concludes by highlighting the implications for practice, with specific reference to curriculum planning as well as teaching in the classroom. This study demonstrates that thirteen and fourteen year-olds do arrive in their lessons on the Holocaust with a wide range of preconceptions and that this likely to affect the way that they understand and learn about it.

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented  
in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Signed.....

Michael E. P. Gray

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## Chapter One

### Holocaust Education and Pupil Preconceptions

#### Introduction

Within the English educational system, the Holocaust is a mandatory topic in the History curriculum to be covered by all 11-14 year-olds in state-maintained secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> By the time pupils study the Holocaust in their secondary school history lessons, they have already acquired a number of preconceptions about it; opinions and beliefs, knowledge and understanding, myths and ideas. This research seeks to explore these preconceptions; to discover the trends in pupils' thinking and better understand the intellectual baggage that they bring with them into the classroom when they come to study this important subject. The research ultimately revolves around three key research questions. Firstly, what *knowledge* do thirteen and fourteen year-olds in English schools have about the Holocaust before they study it in history lessons at secondary school? Secondly, what *understanding* do they have about the Holocaust? Thirdly, what are the implications of these preconceptions for curriculum design and teaching?

#### Definitions and Terminology

There are few periods of history which are more controversial, evoke more emotions or cause more discussion than the Holocaust. Even the very word 'Holocaust' is controversial, deriving from Greek origin, meaning 'sacrifice by fire'. The Holocaust was not a sacrifice by fire and it was certainly not a voluntary offering for

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<sup>1</sup> Academies, free schools and public schools are not, however, required to follow the National Curriculum.

the sins of the people as was the case of the priestly sacrifices in ancient Israel. The word *Shoah*, which is a Hebrew term meaning ‘catastrophe’ has often been used instead. The familiarity of the word ‘Holocaust’, however, and its currency in modern society, means that it will, somewhat reluctantly, be used within this thesis.<sup>2</sup>

Debate also exists about how to define the term and in particular, which victims of Nazi terror and aggression should be included in it. Is ‘Holocaust’ an umbrella term for all those killed by the Nazis, in which case it must surely include communists as well as Jews, in addition to Jehovah Witnesses, Roma and Sinti groups, homosexuals and socio-political dissidents? Should it include all those whose deaths were caused by the Nazi regime? If so, should it comprise of those who died on the battlefield? Should it include British prisoners of war who died in Auschwitz, and, if not, why not? Rosebaum defines the Holocaust as ‘the Nazi-engineered Holocaust against the Jews, Gypsies and millions of others’,<sup>3</sup> while Stradling writes:

The term ‘Holocaust’ is used to refer to the annihilation of more than 16 million people by the Third Reich during the period 1933-45. Nearly six million victims were Jews... other victims included Polish, Russian and Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war, the Roma/Gypsy populations, socialists, homosexuals and people with mental and physical disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

While acknowledging the numerous other victims of Nazi persecution and murder, I adopt a narrow interpretation of the term ‘Holocaust’ in this thesis. By so doing, it

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<sup>2</sup> See: Department for Education, *National Curriculum in England*.

<sup>3</sup> Rosenbaum, *Is the Holocaust Unique?*, 45.

<sup>4</sup> Stradling, *Twentieth Century European History*, 31.

actually gives specific recognition and identity to the multiplicity of genocides, which were carried out by the Nazi regime, as opposed to allowing them to be overshadowed by the generic and homogenous usage of a term which is often perceived to be a Jewish tragedy. Consequently, when the word 'Holocaust' is used in this thesis, it is taken to mean the following definition, used by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the research it was thus this definition with which I worked. Although a narrow definition has not been without its critics, the other genocides perpetrated by the Nazis are surely given greater recognition when they are not simply included in an all-encompassing term. The extermination of Roma and Sinti groups has been labelled by Hancock and others as the *porrajmos* and in so doing, this not only gives the genocide a quasi-independent status but it highlights that the causes and events surrounding this genocide, though similar, were different from the plight of the Jews. A brief study of the gypsy camp within Auschwitz II, for example, highlights the variance between the histories of these two people groups during the Second World War.

In addition to the narrow use of the term 'Holocaust', I also purposefully use the term 'antisemitism' without hyphenation or capitalisation as in 'anti-semitism' or 'anti-Semitism'. Although the term itself was actually first coined by the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The Holocaust." *Holocaust Encyclopaedia*.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/?ModuleId=10005143>. Accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

century radical Wilhelm Marr, who established the first organisation in Germany which specifically sought the expulsion of all Jews, its popular usage serves an important semantic purpose in contemporary language. Nevertheless, by capitalising or hyphenating the term, it supports the idea that the Jews are a distinct Semitic racial group. A Semitic people is the idea of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century racial theorists, when in reality there are only Semitic languages, used by a range of ancient and modern speakers from south-western Asia.

### **The History of Holocaust Education**

Perhaps surprisingly, it is only relatively recently that the Holocaust has assumed such an important and significant position within the history curricula of so many of the western nations. In the immediate decades after 1945, any mentioning of the Holocaust was only ever part of a broader study of the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> Carmon writes that ‘prior to 1961, it was difficult to find the Holocaust on the educational agenda of any community (even those in Israel and the Jewish communities throughout North America)’.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of Holocaust consciousness has thus been gradual and according to Pearce has often influenced by television programmes such as ITV’s *The World At War* (1974), NBC’s *Holocaust* (1978), and the made-for-television film *Escape from Sobibor* (1987).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the release of *Schindler’s List* (1993), in the words of Levy and Sznajder, ‘greatly contributed to the universalization of the Holocaust’.<sup>9</sup> Since then other

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<sup>6</sup> See Yablonka, ‘The Development of Holocaust Consciousness’; Fallace, ‘The Origins of Holocaust Education’; Baron, ‘The Holocaust and American Public Memory’.

<sup>7</sup> Carmon, ‘Teaching the Holocaust’, 212.

<sup>8</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness*.

<sup>9</sup> Levy and Sznajder, ‘Memory Unbound’, 98.

major films about the Holocaust have included *The Pianist* (2002), *Defiance* (2008) and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008).

In 1991 the Holocaust became part of the National Curriculum for history, making it statutory for all pupils in English and Welsh state schools to learn about the topic in Key Stage 3.<sup>10</sup> There appears to be little to suggest that the Holocaust will not continue to be an essential and statutory part of the history curriculum in England, with the subject being included in the forthcoming National Curriculum of September 2014.<sup>11</sup>

The presence of the Holocaust in the English educational system has been helped by the important work of the Holocaust Educational Trust which has arranged for thousands of pupils to visit Auschwitz. Similarly valuable has been the work of the Centre for Holocaust Education at the Institute of Education, especially in the fields of research and teacher training. The establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2004 and the subsequent forming of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust have also helped to cement the Holocaust in the psyche and consciousness of many young people as ‘the representation of absolute evil’,<sup>12</sup> an understanding of which, is perceived to be a vital part of all liberal educations.

Within Holocaust education itself, a number of debates have emerged, many of which have revolved around the central theme of the aims and purpose of teaching

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<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed picture of Holocaust education in England see, Hector, ‘Teaching the Holocaust’.

<sup>11</sup> Department for Education, *National Curriculum in England*.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, ‘On the Social Construction’, 9.

about the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> Eckmann, for example, argues that Holocaust education is not ‘above all a duty of memory. In fact, it is first and foremost a duty of history: the duty to transmit and to teach and learn the history’.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, the likes of Short suggest that ‘the historical significance of the Holocaust may not...be the only factor determining its status in the curriculum’.<sup>15</sup> Equally important is to show ‘where racism can lead’ and to demonstrate ‘the perils of turning a blind eye to evil’.<sup>16</sup> This thesis does not intend to engage with this particular debate, although it works on the assumption that the most valuable aspect of Holocaust education is the accurate and effective teaching of the past.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the range of debates and discussions surrounding Holocaust education, it seems that certain lines of enquiry have been ignored by researchers. The principal omission has been any meaningful investigation into what pupils already know about the Holocaust and the preconceptions that they have acquired before their formal study of it in history lessons. Understanding pupils’ prior knowledge is absolutely necessary if we want to answer the question Husbands asks when he writes, ‘how can we create situations where pupils’ perceptions become ladders which permit the development of new learning rather than prisons which confine and limit their own understandings?’<sup>18</sup> Questions such as these need to be answered and are cardinal for educational development, irrespective of whether one is

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<sup>13</sup> For a fuller discussion of this see Schweber, ‘Education’.

<sup>14</sup> Eckmann, ‘Exploring the Relevance’, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Short, ‘Lessons of the Holocaust’, 277.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>17</sup> Salmons, ‘Teaching or Preaching?’

<sup>18</sup> Husbands, *What is History Teaching?*, 83.

teaching about the Holocaust within the curriculum of citizenship, history, religious education or drama. Yet pedagogic tools which deconstruct and tackle misconceptions, as well as building upon pupils' existing knowledge, can only take place within the field of Holocaust education when there is an understanding of the ideas and preconceptions that pupils bring with them into the classroom.

### **The Current Picture of Holocaust Education**

At the commencement of this research it was still compulsory for all maintained schools in England to teach the Holocaust as part of the History Curriculum for Key Stage Three, which typically takes place near the end of year nine as part of a broader study of twentieth century Europe. Over the last few years, however, the government has sought to turn schools into academies, which are not required to follow the National Curriculum. Nevertheless, academies, as well as independent schools are expected to deliver a balanced education which is likely to include a study of the Holocaust. At present, teaching about the Holocaust is not compulsory in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. Due to the differences in the educational systems within the different countries of the UK, my research will be exclusively focusing on pupil preconceptions within English schools.

Some pupils in England also study the Holocaust as part of a GCSE, IGCSE, AS or A level course, typically in the context of German history or the Second World War. Yet the legal requirement to study the Holocaust in Key Stage Three history before some pupils elect not to continue studying the subject beyond the age of 14, means that exploring pupil preconceptions at the age of 13 and 14 is a logical decision. In research by the Institute of Education's (IOE's) Holocaust Education Development

Programme (HEDP),<sup>19</sup> which looked at national trends in Holocaust education, it was noted that ‘it is only in year nine that History becomes the dominant subject for teaching about the Holocaust. Before year nine, if a student has been introduced to the Holocaust during their school career, it is likely to have taken place in a subject other than history’.<sup>20</sup> The HEDP also discovered that the teaching of the Holocaust at Key Stage 3 principally takes place in the discipline of History. Out of 591 respondents, 55% taught the topic in history, 25% in religious education, 7% in English, 3% in citizenship and 3% in personal, social and health education. Modern foreign languages and drama also totalled 1% each.<sup>21</sup>

### **Pupil Preconceptions**

The compulsory nature of Holocaust education in Key Stage Three means that the subject is taught to over one million pupils each year. It is thus imperative that teachers know what sort of popular ideas pupils bring with them into the classroom if they are to deconstruct misconceptions and build on existing knowledge. It would be valuable to know what notions, conceptions and understandings they have acquired through watching films, reading books, using the internet, talking to friends and families in addition to the influence of popular culture. The absence of research both internationally, but especially within England, highlights the importance of producing an empirically-grounded picture of year nine pupils’ ideas about the Holocaust before they study it in their secondary school history lessons. This study therefore, focuses on what knowledge thirteen and fourteen year olds in English schools have about the Holocaust, what understanding they have and the

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<sup>19</sup> Now called the Centre for Holocaust Education (CfHE).

<sup>20</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31.

implications of this knowledge and understanding on curriculum design and teaching.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review: Pupil Preconceptions and the Holocaust

While there has been some research to date on pupils' preconceptions about the past, this chapter argues that empirically-grounded studies on what adolescents know and understand about the Holocaust have been few in number and used small sample sizes. Research has tended to focus instead on what adults or teachers know about the Holocaust and this highlights the need for this particular study.

The three questions which lie at the heart of this research relate to the idea that intellectually, pupils bring something with them into the classroom. This notion is certainly not new. As early as 1690, John Locke wrote:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: -How comes it to be furnished?...Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience.<sup>22</sup>

The ideas of Locke are not too incongruent from the contemporary and empirically-based research on pupil preconceptions in history. Rogers suggested that students enter the classroom with some sort of notion of the past,<sup>23</sup> while Pendry remarked, 'it seems reasonable to assert that teachers should assume that pupils are not a blank sheet- whatever is being studied, it seems likely that they will have, if not knowledge, then ideas, beliefs, attitudes and images in their mind'.<sup>24</sup> Shemilt wrote

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<sup>22</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Rogers, 'Why Teach History?'

<sup>24</sup> Pendry et al., 'Pupil Preconceptions in History', 20.

that ‘the teacher’s effectiveness is often increased by his taking pains to investigate the logic underlying adolescent misconceptions’.<sup>25</sup>

This has been supported by the empirical research of Husbands. When teaching about living and working conditions in Manchester during the industrial revolution, ‘pupils seemed only to back-project their own understandings of family, of entertainment or of housing’.<sup>26</sup> Such a transportation of the present into the past was also demonstrated during a lesson on the “terror in France” in the 1790s when a drawing of the events was ‘against a suburban landscape of neat, semi-detached houses’.<sup>27</sup> The conclusion of Husbands is fascinating when he states that pupils often think of the past as a ‘pre-existent present’.<sup>28</sup> He also remarks that the ‘failure to comprehend the ways in which the past was different from the present – the failure to grasp the nature of historical context – is an important source of pupil understanding’.<sup>29</sup>

Husbands recognised the nature of learning and the centrality of pupil preconceptions when he wrote:

No-one ever comes wholly fresh to thinking about the historical past: we all draw on memories, stories, myths, relics and assumptions of one kind or another in our images of the historical past...Whether our preconceptions are based on ideas of rise or decline, of ‘heritage’ or ‘exploitation’, of progress

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<sup>25</sup> Shemilt, *Evaluation Study*.

<sup>26</sup> Husbands, *What is History Teaching?*, 73.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

or regress, of change or of stability, they shape powerfully the way we think about the past.<sup>30</sup>

The importance of teaching in the light of pupils' existing knowledge and understanding is therefore a very orthodox pedagogic position, as characterised by the work of the National Research Council in their valuable publication, *How Students Learn, History in the Classroom*. In the introduction to this book, Donovan and Bransford emphasise the relevance of what pupils bring with them into the classroom and how that will affect what they do with the material with which they will come into contact:

Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information, or they may learn them for the purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom.<sup>31</sup>

In the light of this, it becomes clear that any syllabus or scheme of work on the Holocaust must begin with an enquiry into what the pupils already know, think and understand about the topic. Totten writes, 'as with any study, it is vitally important to ascertain the knowledge base possessed by students before examination of the subject begins'.<sup>32</sup> He goes on to say that 'experience has taught me that a study of the Holocaust which begins with an examination of what students know, don't know, and want to know ultimately contributes to a more potent and meaningful

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>31</sup> Donovan and Bransford, 'Introduction', 1.

<sup>32</sup> Totten, 'The Start is as Important as the Finish', 70.

understanding of this tragic event'.<sup>33</sup> This is necessary to prevent pupils simply reverting back to their old ideas and also because 'the ideas and experiences of students provides a route to new understandings both about and beyond their experiences'.<sup>34</sup> It is evident therefore that both curriculum design and individual lesson planning must build upon the foundation of pupils' preconceptions.

These preconceptions can potentially be divided into different areas. One of these areas of understanding is emotional or affective. Pupils may know very little about the Holocaust but have an understanding that this was a horrific and traumatic phenomenon. With the exception of Schweber's insightful qualitative study in America,<sup>35</sup> there has been little research into pupils' emotional understandings of the Holocaust, although a recent article by Epstein suggested that teaching about the Holocaust might cause trauma and that its place on the curriculum should be questioned.<sup>36</sup>

Two other areas of pupils' preconceptions are substantive and metaconceptual (or disciplinary). While the first area is typically specific to a topic, for example how much does a pupil understand about conditions in the factories in the early 1800s, the latter can be more generally applied to the study of the past, because the concepts of evidence, change, causation and the like are the very building blocks of "doing history". In his article, 'Putting Principles into Practice', Lee explores some of the conceptual preconceptions which commonly occur. Due to their generalisability and applicability, the disciplinary preconceptions that Lee highlights

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>34</sup> Donovan and Bransford, 'Introduction', 14.

<sup>35</sup> Schweber, "What Happened to their Pets?"

<sup>36</sup> Epstein, 'Inflicting Trauma'.

can also relate to pupils' thinking on the Holocaust. For example, pupils typically see change as caused by events or 'to think of the event as a change'.<sup>37</sup> If children are considering the change in the German attitude towards Jews between 1933-45, pupils may only be able to see the change as events such as the boycott of Jewish shops on April 1, 1933, the Nuremberg Laws or *Kristallnacht*. Lee writes that 'if students see changes as events, the idea of gradual, unintended changes in situations or in the context of actions and events is not available to them'.<sup>38</sup> This means that some pupils 'tend to think of the direction of change as automatically involving progress...This misconception can lead to a condescending attitude towards the past while also making it more difficult to grasp the complexities of change'.<sup>39</sup> The idea of history as a story of progress often works in everyday life. Pupils can see the change from basic mobile phones to mobile devices with full internet access and complex communicative methods. They can grasp the idea that there were once no computers, then very basic computers and now advanced computers. Consequently, they may see the ideas of the past as being characteristic of a backward and less advanced age, thus meaning that a similar genocide or another Holocaust could therefore never happen again. This could also have a negative effect on their ability to empathise, something defined by Lee as 'not just having the inert knowledge that people saw things in the way they did, but also being able to use that knowledge to make sense of what was done'.<sup>40</sup> Without challenging conceptual misconceptions of change and empathic understanding, pupils will struggle to comprehend why

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<sup>37</sup> Lee, 'Putting Principles into Practice', 43.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 47.

Jews appeared willing to enter into the ghettos or to get on the trains which were heading to the East.

Lee's article is one of the most useful to have been written on pupil preconceptions in history. Its breadth of utility is the primary reason for its worth. The whole process of doing history as a discipline hinges and rests upon concepts and methodology. Subsequently the disciplinary preconceptions can be applied to any substantive topic whether it is the Holocaust, Mao's China, the Norman Conquest or the reign of Elizabeth I. All teachers of history should therefore be aware of disciplinary preconceptions and try to advance metaconceptual progression.<sup>41</sup>

The vast importance of disciplinary preconceptions does not, however, lessen the significance or importance of locating pupils' substantive preconceptions. Donovan and Bransford recognised this when they wrote:

While teachers may fully grasp the importance of working with students' prior conceptions, they need to know the typical conceptions of students with respect to the topic about to be taught.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike disciplinary preconceptions, substantive preconceptions will dramatically vary depending on the topic. The ideas and understandings which pupils bring with them regarding Nazi Germany or life in the camps will not be the same as their ideas and understandings of the Vikings or England under Henry VIII. This highlights the importance of carrying out research which specifically explores pupil knowledge, understanding and preconceptions of the Holocaust, rather than pupil preconceptions in history generally.

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<sup>41</sup> For a broader discussion on this see, Lee and Shemilt, 'A Scaffold not a Cage'.

<sup>42</sup> Donovan and Bransford, 'Introduction', 20.

Furthermore, one must bear in mind that ideas and understandings of the Holocaust will vary from child to child. This variance, especially in relation to a topic like the Holocaust, is noted by Donovan and Bransford:

Differences may be larger still when the subject is a social rather than a natural phenomenon because the experiences themselves, as well as norms regarding reflection, expression, and interaction, differ for children from different families, communities and cultures...Being learning-centred, then, involves paying attention to students' backgrounds and cultural values, as well as to their abilities. To build effectively on what learners bring to the classroom, teachers must pay close attention to individual students' starting points and to their progress on learning tasks.<sup>43</sup>

The empirical work of Pendry et al. in the mid-1990s also confirmed the huge variation in preconceptions. Looking at year nine pupils' preconceptions on World War One and World War Two, the findings showed:

The potential complexity and sophistication in the thinking of some pupils, the values and beliefs that pupils may hold about the past, the sorts of misconceptions that they may bring to their lessons, the inconsistency in the thinking of many and the enormous diversity amongst pupils.<sup>44</sup>

Pendry also commented on the fragmentary and potentially disparate nature of preconceptions when she wrote:

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>44</sup> Pendry, et al., 'Pupil Preconceptions in History', 18.

Historical knowledge for some pupils consists in a series of not necessarily related pieces of information- they are not linked in the pupil's mind in any particular frame of reference and thus inconsistencies may well not be evident to the children.<sup>45</sup>

It is of course natural that different children hold different preconceptions and understandings within history. Nevertheless, it also seems probable that there are common areas of ignorance, confusion and uncertainty. In the light of this, an important part of the research will include understanding as specifically as possible what pupils actually mean and thus acquiring clarification from them to ensure that respondents' misconceptions and uncertainties are properly understood.

### **Empirical Studies on Pupil Attitudes and Prejudices towards the Holocaust**

A large amount of the empirical work which has been carried out in the field of Holocaust education has not necessarily explored the knowledge and understanding of children, but has tended to focus more on their attitudes and perceptions.<sup>46</sup> Much of this research has been carried out in Israel,<sup>47</sup> where attitudes and perceptions appear to have been shaped by contemporary geo-political affairs and the popular media to a much greater extent than within the United Kingdom. In addition to this, however, a study by Rutland found extreme hostility towards learning about the Holocaust amongst Muslim students in Australia.<sup>48</sup> Short, who conducted a

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between knowledge, understanding, attitudes and perceptions see Gray, *Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education*, p. 13-16.

<sup>47</sup> Bar-On and Selah, 'The Vicious Circle of Israeli Youngsters' Attitudes'; Grossman, *Present Absentees*; Auron, 'Israeli-Jewish Identity'.

<sup>48</sup> Rutland, 'Creating Effective Holocaust Education'.

comparable study in the UK, found a range of attitudes were held by Muslim students<sup>49</sup> and like Gryglewski,<sup>50</sup> argued that Muslim students ought not to be seen as a monolithic entity. Although my study is researching knowledge and understanding, it cannot simply be detached from attitudes as how one interprets the past can often be determined by pre-existing attitudes towards it. As my research was not a study of a particular ethnicity, I sought to ensure my sample was ethnically representative of national demography.

Carrington and Short have conducted numerous studies on attitudes in the UK and although their empirical research has never focused specifically on Holocaust knowledge, they have suggested that ignorance and misconceptions about Jewish identity and culture does negatively affect a pupil's understanding of the Holocaust.<sup>51</sup>

There are two key reasons why ignorance of Jewish cultures and identities can be very problematic. Both of these reasons are important but they perhaps touch on different aims within Holocaust education. Foster and Mercier in their insightful chapter on 'Jewish Background and Religious Dimension' in *Teaching the Holocaust* highlight both of them.

In some schools there is no teaching on world religions and so any work on the Holocaust may in fact be the first formal introduction to the Jewish people that students receive. If this is the case, it is likely that the Jews will

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<sup>49</sup> Short, 'Reluctant Learners?'.

<sup>50</sup> Gryglewski, 'Teaching about the Holocaust'.

<sup>51</sup> Short and Carrington, 'Antisemitism and the Primary School'; Carrington and Short, 'Probing Children's Prejudices'.

appear from the beginning in the role of victim and there is a danger that this negative image will serve to reinforce stereotypes.<sup>52</sup>

In many senses therefore, ignorance of the Jews, as well as Jewish culture and practices, is going to negatively affect perceptions and attitudes. Yet at the same time it will limit both their substantive understanding and their disciplinary progression; for a pupil cannot understand the significance of certain acts carried out by the Nazis or demonstrate a historical empathy with the Jewish victims, if they do not comprehend the severity of the atrocity carried out against them.<sup>53</sup> Foster and Mercier show this when they write:

Another reason for ensuring that students have a background knowledge of the Jewish religion is that it enables them to understand the significance of many of the key events of the Holocaust. They need to know what a synagogue is and why it is important to the life of the Jewish community if they are going to understand the significance of Kristallnacht. They need to learn about the place and importance of the scriptures and sacred writings of the Jewish tradition if they are to realise the meaning of the burning of Jewish books.<sup>54</sup>

In a range of highly valuable studies on children's perceptions of Jewish culture and identity, Short (1991; 1994) and Short and Carrington (1992) explored pupils' perceptions of Judaism. In 'Teaching the Holocaust: the Relevance of Children's

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<sup>52</sup> Foster and Mercier, 'The Jewish Background and Religious Dimension', 27.

<sup>53</sup> The use of the word 'empathy' here is within the technical register employed by the likes of Lee wherein a pupil has historical empathy. In other words, they can understand or rationalise why a person may have made certain choices given their particular context.

<sup>54</sup> Foster and Mercier, 'The Jewish Background and Religious Dimension', 28.

Perceptions of Jewish Culture and Identity', Short conducted a range of interviews and commenced them by asking the pupils to name as many religions as possible. He then explored the perceptions of seventy-two 12-14 year-olds regarding Judaism and the levels of popular antisemitism they had come across. Short discovered that a quarter of respondents showed confusion between Judaism and Islam, while over 40% of those asked, 'were under the impression that Jews and Christians believe in different gods'.<sup>55</sup> Short also found that 8% of children blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus and a further 17% were not sure. One of the most interesting questions that pupils were asked was, 'if you do change (i.e. you are born Jewish but become a Christian), do you stop being Jewish completely?'.<sup>56</sup> Seventy three per cent of the respondents replied negatively to this question, suggesting that they perceived being Jewish to be more than only a religious affiliation or holding to a set of beliefs. Short sagaciously commented that 'only if children have some purchase on the notion of consanguinity or descent will they be able to understand the true meaning of the Holocaust'.<sup>57</sup> The study also found evidence of some pupils having knowledge and experience of antisemitic comments and jokes. Short concluded:

The Holocaust will not necessarily fill those who learn about it with revulsion. It will have this effect only if Jews are regarded as fundamentally the same as other people and thus no more deserving of an unpleasant fate than anyone else. In the light of this caution it will be essential, before

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<sup>55</sup> Short, 'Teaching the Holocaust', 399.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 400.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

teaching the Holocaust, to expose the mythical quality of any anti-Semitic stereotypes with which children may be familiar.<sup>58</sup>

Short and Carrington (1995) also carried out an important study on pupils' perceptions of Judaism and Jewish identity amongst primary school children. One set of pupils had received a multi-faith religious education and the other had not. In both samples, they concluded that many pupils confused elements of Judaism with other faiths and that multi-faith approaches to religious education can be the cause of this. Yet they also noted that 'children's ignorance of other faiths can arise from sources outside the classroom'.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, 'children may acquire their "knowledge" of different faiths from many disparate sources and not least, one suspects, from their own imagination'.<sup>60</sup> If this is the case, then it highlights the importance of teachers exploring and addressing these ideas in their teaching. Fundamentally therefore, any attempt to discover pupils' preconceptions, misconceptions, knowledge and understanding, must take into consideration that attitudes and perceptions of Jewish culture and identity are going to impact upon the ideas that pupils bring with them into the classroom.

Foster and Mercier stated that 'the students we teach will have picked up a variety of messages from the media, their family, friends and peers and it is likely that they will have heard negative comments and stereotypes'.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>59</sup> Short and Carrington, 'Learning about Judaism', 164.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Foster and Mercier, 'The Jewish Background and Religious Dimension', 26.

In *The Holocaust in the School Curriculum: a European Perspective*, Short, Supple and Klinger make a range of valuable and thought-provoking points about Jewish misconceptions and how that can affect a pupils' knowledge and understanding. They write that it is,

Essential that teachers spend some time, prior to starting work on the Holocaust, exploring and challenging any misconceptions their pupils may have either about Jews or about Judaism. These religious and secular misconceptions are woven into the fabric of western culture and, because the vast majority of schools in Europe are in places where there are few or no Jews, the misconceptions, if not challenged by teachers, will inevitably influence pupils' reactions to the Holocaust.<sup>62</sup>

They go on to say,

It is not just children from Christian (or nominally Christian) backgrounds who are likely to harbour misconceptions about Jews; the attitudes of some Muslim children towards Jews may also be unsympathetic. The politics of the Middle East is the most likely explanation of such lack of sympathy.<sup>63</sup>

Discovering the misconceptions and preconceptions that pupils bring with them into the classroom is the only way in which pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust can be taken forward. Yet so much of the work carried out to date focuses on pupil attitudes rather than substantive understanding, highlighting the need for more empirical studies in this area.

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<sup>62</sup> Short, Supple and Klinger, *The Holocaust in the School Curriculum*, 20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 21.

Interestingly, however, research conducted by Lange in Sweden shows an unusual and unexpected correlation between attitudes and misconceptions. In his survey of teachers' knowledge, he cross-referenced teachers' estimates of the proportion of Jews in 1933 Germany with their levels of antisemitism. Lange comments,

In two cases, the results are surprising: teachers of history overestimate the proportion of Jews in the German population more than teachers in other subjects, and respondents with the lowest score on the antisemitism index over-estimate the proportion of Jews in the German population in the same way to a greater extent than those with higher index scores. At the time of writing, I cannot think of a reasonable explanation for these findings- I would have expected higher values on the antisemitism index to be associated with greater levels of overestimation.<sup>64</sup>

Lange also described any links between estimation of the percentage of Jewish children killed in Europe during World War Two and the scores on the antisemitism index as 'rather weak'.<sup>65</sup> Further evidence to suggest that attitude towards the Holocaust may be less important in establishing misconceptions than many people have previously suggested is again found in Lange's survey when he writes that:

It is somewhat astonishing that respondents who view such teaching as less interesting than teaching on other topics should have a somewhat better level of knowledge than the group who feel it is neither more or less interesting.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Lange, *A Survey of Teachers' Experiences*, 71.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 77.

The findings of Lange do not sit comfortably with the empirically-based conclusions of Carrington and Short or Maitles and Cowan, who suggest that a pedagogically sound Holocaust education does lead to increased understandings of justice, stereotyping, and racism.<sup>67</sup> To a large extent this is a separate debate which is outside the focus of this thesis. What is evident, however, is that if pupils have erroneous perceptions and ideas of Jewish culture and identity, then this is directly connected to their knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. It will also be a limiting factor in helping them to progress in their learning. It further highlights the importance of discovering cultural as well as specifically substantive or historical misconceptions (if one can even make a divide between them) as well as the need for more research to be conducted, which has a greater focus on pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust itself. This study will specifically address the existing need and help to take the field in a direction which is grounded in history.

### **Sources of Holocaust Knowledge**

If pupils' preconceptions are to be properly understood, then some consideration of the sources of their thinking and the influences on their ideas is absolutely necessary. Both generally and with specific reference to the Holocaust, relatively little empirical work has been conducted on the sources of pupils' preconceptions. The study of Pendry et al. on pupils' preconceptions in history is a useful one and does begin to consider the origins of pupils' knowledge and understandings. However, it must be recognised that in this particular piece of research, pupils were asked from where they had acquired their knowledge and understanding and the

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<sup>67</sup> Carrington and Short, 'Holocaust Education, Anti-Racism and Citizenship'; Cowan and Maitles, 'Developing Positive Values'; Cowan and Maitles, 'Values and Attitudes'; Cowan and Maitles, 'Does Addressing Prejudice'; Cowan and Maitles, 'Making the Links'.

accuracy of their responses was never verified. Thus the reliability of their findings is highly questionable. Pupils may be far more aware of memorable experiences like watching films and attending museums, than attending lessons in school, but simply because it is more memorable does not necessarily mean that it has been a greater influence. This is perhaps characterised by Pendry's comment: 'pupils attributed little influence to schooling: what they cited was the influence of the media'.<sup>68</sup> The conclusion from this particular study was that the four most important sources of pupils' knowledge are primary school education, the media, family and family outings.

Barton carried out a qualitative study in the USA in the 1990s on the influences on pupils' preconceptions in history and concluded that they principally came from three sources: visits to museums or places of historical interest, the media and through speaking with family members.<sup>69</sup> Unlike Pendry et al., Barton did not emphasise the role of previous schooling.

One of the only studies to date which begins to explore the sources of pupils' preconceptions on the Holocaust was conducted by McIntyre in his unpublished MA dissertation.<sup>70</sup> Within this study of 26 thirteen and fourteen year-olds in a co-educational south London comprehensive school, pupils were asked 'can you remember how you first heard about the Holocaust?' Pupils were given ten options, the last of which was, 'haven't heard of it', which was the case for 5% of respondents. According to the data gathered, McIntyre found that 56% of pupils believed that they had first heard of the Holocaust in school, with the next highest

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<sup>68</sup> Pendry et al., 'Pupil Preconceptions in History', 20.

<sup>69</sup> Barton, 'My Mom Taught Me'.

<sup>70</sup> McIntyre, *To What Extent and in What Ways...?*

source being friends (10%) and then TV (9%). Interestingly, no pupils thought that they had first heard about the Holocaust through film. It is important that one doesn't read too much into these results. It is highly questionable whether or not pupils can actually recall with exact precision, where they first heard about the Holocaust. In addition to this, McIntyre's sample was very small and has very limited generalisability. Moreover, just because a pupil may not have first encountered the subject through film or literature, does not mean that these are not very important sources of Holocaust preconceptions.

In fact the findings that I published as part of my pilot studies would suggest that films and literature can be important in shaping the ideas that pupils bring with them to the classroom.<sup>71</sup> In a study of 56 pupils, 65% had either read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* or seen the TV dramatisation. Moreover, 54% of pupils had either read the novel or watched the film of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, while 21% had seen *Life Is Beautiful* and 7% had seen the film *Defiance*.<sup>72</sup> Clearly a much bigger sample is needed to assess how representative these figures are and more careful analysis of the data is required to begin to connect these sources of pupils' preconceptions with the specific answers that they provided.

Previous research has generally assumed that pupils were simply influenced because they had read a book or because they said that they had spoken with their family about the Holocaust. My research differs from earlier studies by assessing the levels of influence demonstrated by pupils' answers and by cross-verifying pupils' answers about the Holocaust to the sources that they talked about. This has made

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<sup>71</sup> Gray, 'Understanding Pupil Preconceptions'.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

the findings much more reliable. By using this method, it was possible to assess the extent of the influence and specifically how it influenced pupils' thinking.

### **Empirical Studies on Holocaust Knowledge outside the UK**

Research into Holocaust knowledge around the world has been carried out fairly infrequently, typically been uncoordinated and generally implemented on a small scale. Jedwab remarked that 'there have been relatively few large-scale quantitative studies of knowledge about the Holocaust'.<sup>73</sup>

The only significant multi-national survey was conducted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in their 2005 Seven Nation Comparative Study.<sup>74</sup> The total sample size was 6,998, evenly spread between Poland, Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, the UK and the US. The serious methodological problems with this survey are discussed later in this chapter in conjunction with another AJC survey on British knowledge of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, it can be said that there were only two questions which were on substantive knowledge of the Holocaust and one of these was radically flawed, giving the whole survey very little worth as a barometer of international knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the AJC study concluded that knowledge of the Holocaust was greatest in Sweden.

Coincidentally, it was in Sweden that one of the largest and most significant quantitative studies was conducted with secondary school teachers. In 2008, on behalf of the Living History Forum of Stockholm, Lange published *A Survey of Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions in relation to Teaching about the*

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<sup>73</sup> Jedwab, 'Measuring Holocaust Knowledge', 275.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, *The Holocaust and its Implications*.

*Holocaust.*<sup>75</sup> Although the primary purpose of the research was to look at attitudes and perceptions of the Holocaust in relation to teaching within schools, one section of the survey explored Swedish teachers' knowledge of the Holocaust. Lange's sample size of 10,000 had a 51.2% response rate, making the number of actual respondents total 5,120. These were teachers and so it is not necessarily the case that their level of knowledge truly reflects that of their pupils, let alone pupils in English schools. Nevertheless, Lange's study is one of the few major empirical studies on Holocaust knowledge and it is undoubtedly an interesting and important study in its own right.

The survey in Sweden suggested that some of the Nazi death camps are better known than others. When asked, 'which of the following camps were built primarily in order to murder Jews?', respondents were given a list of seven options and were asked to tick all that applied. With regards to Treblinka, 87.8% answered correctly<sup>76</sup> while only 16.8% did so with regards to Chelmno.<sup>77</sup> In addition to this, over 70% of teachers believed that Dachau and Bergen-Belsen were camps that were built primarily for the murder of the Jews.

Another interesting finding from Lange's study was that 'approximately half the teachers' believed that a person refusing to participate in the implementation of the Holocaust would have been executed, while only 4% answered the correct option that 'nothing special would have happened'.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, only one in fourteen

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<sup>75</sup> Lange, *A Survey of Teachers' Experiences*.

<sup>76</sup> Conversely, 0.9% answered incorrectly and 8.2% answered 'don't know'.

<sup>77</sup> Here 7% answered incorrectly and 76.2% answered 'don't know'.

<sup>78</sup> Lange, *A Survey of Teachers' Experiences*, 70.

history specialists, teaching history in upper secondary schools in Sweden knew the answer.

Lange also found that only 24.3% of respondents correctly knew that mass arrests of the Jews on the basis of their ethnic affiliation took place in 1938. Furthermore, when asked what percentage of the German population comprised of Jews, only 5.7% knew that it was less than 1%. Nearly half of all the teachers answered 'don't know', with 21.8% answering between 1-5% and 17.8% answering 6-15%. The final question on Holocaust knowledge asked about the percentage of Jewish children in Europe who were killed during the Second World War. Only 3.2% answered correctly (81-100%) with over a third of respondents believing it was 21-40% and another third suggesting 41-60%.

Lange's study of Swedish teachers suggests that their knowledge of the Holocaust is very poor. There is no reason to believe that should pupils have sat the same questions, they would have fared any better. Although the fact that Lange's research took place in another country limits the applicability of the study to my own research, it does suggest that if teachers' knowledge of the Holocaust is weak, then pupils' knowledge will probably be at least equally deficient.

In his 2010 article, 'Measuring Holocaust Knowledge and its Impact: A Canadian Case Study', Jedwab suggests that instead of lamenting ignorance of the Holocaust, educators should lower the expectations. He writes:

Of the empirical studies conducted to date, observers have been surprised by just how many people report limited or no awareness of the Holocaust.

Perhaps this is because leaders in the field of Holocaust education set the bar too high when it comes to the desired level of knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

His arguments are perhaps supported by the respondents of Lange's research for out of the 2000 post-survey comments 'no mean portion of these comments expressed critical views about the "detailed testing" knowledge questions'.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, lowering standards and expectations is potentially going to gloss over the problem and perhaps critical findings such as Lange's are more likely to have an effect on policy and practice. Jedwab is right, however, in highlighting the present absence of a 'consensus around a common set of questions to establish benchmarks to help determine what might be considered a satisfactory level of knowledge'.<sup>81</sup> He is also correct in stating that 'ascertaining the level of [Holocaust] knowledge and how it is interpreted are...necessary'.<sup>82</sup>

Jedwab also states, that 'relatively few efforts have been made to measure such [Holocaust] knowledge'.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps somewhat ironically in the light of this comment and the title of the article, Jedwab's case study makes absolutely no attempt to ascertain or measure Holocaust knowledge either. Instead his empirical research considers the relationship between people's knowledge of the Holocaust and their attitudes towards genocide. However, Jedwab's findings are problematic as he makes no enquiries into people's knowledge but simply asks them what they

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<sup>79</sup> Jedwab, 'Measuring Holocaust knowledge', 274.

<sup>80</sup> Lange, *A Survey of Teachers' Experiences*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Jedwab, 'Measuring Holocaust Knowledge', 274.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Jedwab, 'Measuring Holocaust Knowledge', 274.

perceive the strength or weakness of their knowledge to be.<sup>84</sup> The strength of one's own perceived knowledge is dependent upon the expectations of that individual. Someone with low expectations may think that their knowledge is strong while someone with similar levels of knowledge but with significantly higher expectations may believe that their knowledge is weak. Jedwab states the need for a consensus of what is a satisfactory level of knowledge, but until that is established then how can he expect people to measure their own knowledge with any consistency or equality? In the light of this, his findings which relate knowledge to attitudes are of questionable utility.

Although some of the empirical data from international studies of Holocaust knowledge have derived from adults or teachers, Ivanova conducted her 2004 survey on 107 pupils in Kharkov, Ukraine.<sup>85</sup> This study is particularly relevant because it was carried out on school children, although the very different history and educational system of Ukraine would suggest that there may be few points of valid comparison between the findings and what may be expected from amongst children in English schools. Ivanova highlights how the Holocaust was not present on the history syllabus in the days of Communist rule and that even in Ukrainian history textbooks today, there is very little information given about the Holocaust.

The enquiry into pupils' understandings was carried out by simply giving the children (aged 15-17) a blank sheet of paper with the statement: 'Please write about

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<sup>84</sup> It appears that Jedwab recognises the highly problematic methodology which he has employed when he writes 'undoubtedly there are some limits in relying on self-assessed knowledge, especially how accurately it reflects awareness of the specific events that occurred during the Holocaust' (p.286).

<sup>85</sup> Ivanova, 'Ukrainian High School Students' Understanding'.

the Holocaust (the mass extermination of the Jews during the Second World War).<sup>86</sup> What was commendable about this task was that it did not limit the nature of the answers which the pupils could give, but it may have created a daunting task for those who were less able. This was especially the case for some considering that:

Many had not really heard about the Holocaust and according to several students at one of the schools, it had not even been mentioned in their history lessons. It was obvious how difficult it was for the youngsters to write anything on the subject.<sup>87</sup>

Ivanova also found that ‘fewer than ten per cent of the students were able to articulate significant historical knowledge about the Holocaust and six of these were at the Jewish school’.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, very few were able to show any appreciation of historical antisemitism and equally few demonstrated an awareness of the Holocaust as a gradual and evolving phenomenon. Similarly, only 24% of pupils specified that six million Jews were murdered and only four of these pupils were from non-Jewish schools.<sup>89</sup> About 6% of answers focused on Hitler as the cause of the Holocaust with 11% being openly and virulently antisemitic.

Ignorance and antisemitism have also been found in other studies conducted in Eastern Europe. Misco, in a study of 50 teachers in Latvia, found a lack of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

knowledge minimised teaching about the Holocaust.<sup>90</sup> In Romania, Misco suggested that ‘students’ knowledge about the Holocaust is sometimes incomplete, biased or cursory’.<sup>91</sup> In an empirical study of 60 teachers in Poland, Gross noted, that ‘fifty-eight per cent of the teachers stated that students came to school with a general lack of knowledge about Jews’ and that ‘sixty per cent stated that their students arrived with stereotypes or negative attitudes about the Jews’.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to studies in Eastern Europe and the work of Lange in Sweden, empirical work has also been conducted in the USA. Of especial significance is Totten’s 1998 article, ‘The Start is as Important as the Finish’.<sup>93</sup> Although this article does not provide any quantitative data as such, it provides useful methodologies for measuring Holocaust knowledge and pupil preconceptions, as well as providing examples of pupils’ answers. Totten suggests that teachers should commence their studies of the Holocaust by asking pupils to produce a cluster about what they already know.<sup>94</sup> He also recommends that pupils try and define the Holocaust, as well as writing down ‘three to five “crucial questions” they have about the Holocaust’.<sup>95</sup> These methods are very useful and pupils’ answers clearly highlighted a number of misconceptions. For example, Totten records one

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<sup>90</sup> Misco, “Most Learn almost Nothing”, 96.

<sup>91</sup> Misco, “We did also save People”, 62.

<sup>92</sup> Gross, ‘To Teach the Holocaust’, 112.

<sup>93</sup> Totten, ‘The Start is as Important as the Finish’.

<sup>94</sup> Totten writes, ‘to develop a cluster, have students write the term “Holocaust” in the centre of a piece of paper, circle it, and then draw spokes on which to place related terms or ideas. Each time a term is added, they should circle it and draw new spokes for relating it to other terms and concepts.’ (p.70).

<sup>95</sup> Totten, ‘The Start is as Important as the Finish’, 73.

definition of the Holocaust as, ‘The Holocaust was when the Nazis killed 45 million Jews during that time period’.<sup>96</sup> The following two examples demonstrate the misconceptions that the Holocaust was the cause of World War Two and that there were vast numbers of Jews in Nazi Germany who were taking the available jobs in Nazi Germany:

Discrimination against Jews by Germans in which they were forced into concentration camps, tortured, murdered, gassed, and it caused a world war.<sup>97</sup>

The Holocaust was between 1939-1945. It was when Hitler gathered people (mostly Jews) and put them into death camps, or just killed them. Jews were educated people, and when they started taking most of the jobs, that’s when the trouble started. Millions of people died and families were torn apart.<sup>98</sup>

Totten describes some of the other misconceptions which are evident from his students, such as a lack of distinction between concentration camps and death camps, as well as the absence of any knowledge regarding antisemitism or Nazi racism. Totten finally suggests that a questionnaire should be given to students in which the vast majority of questions are multiple choice or have true/false/not sure options. This allows for quantitative data about specific misconceptions and Holocaust knowledge.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 73.

A similar article to Totten's is Glanz's, 'Ten Suggestions for Teaching the Holocaust'.<sup>99</sup> Glanz also conducted his research in the US and draws on his wealth of experience as a practitioner to suggest various methodologies for teaching about the Holocaust. He emphasises the importance of discovering pupil preconceptions and recommends that students record 'what I know', 'what I want to find out' and then 'what I learned'.<sup>100</sup>

Glanz writes:

Once students are conscious of their prior understandings, new information and meanings may replace prior knowledge that may be based on factual errors or misinterpretations. Moreover, students who realise how little they know about the Holocaust may develop higher levels of motivation and eagerness when learning the new content.<sup>101</sup>

Similarly to Totten, Glanz encourages his students to write out questions which they would like answered. This typically demonstrates what a student does not know or else they would not be asking the question.

The methodologies of Totten and Glanz heavily influenced the construction of my pilot studies. In the early versions of the questionnaire, pupils were asked to define the Holocaust and were also given a series of true or false statements. As explained in Chapter 4, these methods were later abandoned, as pupils who were unfamiliar with the term 'Holocaust', could not answer any of the other questions. Moreover,

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<sup>99</sup> Glanz, 'Ten Suggestions for Teaching the Holocaust'.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 551.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 550-551.

by using true or false statements, it encouraged generalisations and did not enable pupils to demonstrate their broader knowledge or understanding on the issue.

Unlike in the articles by Totten and Glanz, some quantifiable data has been gathered on Holocaust knowledge in the US. In ‘Method and Meaning in Holocaust-Knowledge Surveys’, Bischoping discusses a survey which she conducted on 512 students from the University of Michigan as well as a national telephone survey on a further 491 participants.<sup>102</sup> The essence of Bischoping’s article is a critique of the methods used in Holocaust surveys, with direct reference to the AJC survey of 1994 on American Holocaust knowledge. Yet the empirical data which she gathered is useful in demonstrating clear gaps in people’s understandings. Again, like so many of the surveys mentioned, the research was not carried out on school-aged pupils. In the survey, Bischoping showed respondents four cards, each one containing one of the following people or places: Adolf Eichmann, Dachau, the Warsaw Ghetto and Anne Frank. She asked respondents to explain the connection between the Holocaust and the name or place on the card. Bischoping then assessed whether or not the respondent gave a correct answer.<sup>103</sup> The findings suggested that most students (86.1%) can show the connection between Anne Frank and the Holocaust while many are less capable of explaining the Warsaw Ghetto (29.7%), Adolf Eichmann (30.5%) or Dachau (47.3%). In the national sample, respondents were better than the students at providing correct connections between the Holocaust and

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<sup>102</sup> Bischoping, ‘Method and Meaning’.

<sup>103</sup> The problem with Bischoping’s methodology is that it allows for some subjectivity in determining whether or not the respondent has answered correctly.

Adolf Eichmann<sup>104</sup> (35.1%) but less successful in describing the Holocaust's link with the Warsaw Ghetto (23.5%), Dachau (41.1%) and Anne Frank (49.1%).

The methodology that Bischoping used in this research is particularly interesting. The nature of the questioning allows for open-ended responses which a true or false knowledge-survey would prevent. Unlike many other studies, Bischoping's research acknowledges that an incorrect answer does not necessarily mean that the respondent is ignorant about the Holocaust and often their misconceptions simply demonstrate a confused understanding. Bischoping perceptively wrote:

Seven per cent of the national sample thought Anne Frank was a Holocaust survivor. Another 6.2 per cent of the national sample believed her a resistance heroine, possibly mistaking her for Corrie Ten Boom (e.g., "she was a Christian that hid Jewish families from the Germans"). A few identifications of Anne Frank even referred to Eva Braun (e.g., "she was who Hitler loved"). Although these answers show no understanding of who Anne Frank was, they nonetheless suggest some confused awareness about the Holocaust. To apply a "correct" or "incorrect" scoring scheme to them is to equate "incorrect" answers with an absence of knowledge about the Holocaust.<sup>105</sup>

Bischoping's more sophisticated approach to Holocaust knowledge surveys is discussed later in Chapter 4 but her empirical study points to large gaps in understanding which exist within both the national and student population of the US, with the distinct possibility of these being mirrored in the UK. Her advocacy

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<sup>104</sup> Perhaps because some of them remembered the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961.

<sup>105</sup> Bischoping, 'Method and Meaning', 459.

for the use of open-ended questions was very influential in the construction of my questionnaire. Consequently, the questions enabled pupils to demonstrate their preconceptions, even if they were misconceptions or confused ideas and this provided a more holistic and helpful understanding of pupils' thinking.

With such a disparate and uncoordinated collection of empirical data from a range of countries and a range of samples, it is important to avoid generalisations about Holocaust knowledge. There are bound to be different levels of knowledge and understanding from country to country and from one demographic group to another. What these studies demonstrate, however, is that in all places where research has been conducted, there appears to be a distinct absence of clear substantive knowledge on a wide range of issues and themes which directly relate to the Holocaust. While some may argue that the expectations are too high, perhaps the data suggests that a universal consensus on what can be expected of pupils or teachers is required.

Nevertheless, the disparate nature of the existing studies employed a very wide range of methods and thus proved to be very useful in helping to shape my thinking on what was the most appropriate for my own research.

### **Empirical Studies on Holocaust Knowledge in the UK**

Although more research in Holocaust education has been done within the UK than in many other countries, there remains a scarcity of quantitative data about Holocaust knowledge. Undoubtedly there has been some very important research conducted, although the studies which have large samples have not looked at knowledge amongst school children and the survey data on pupil preconceptions and understandings relied upon such small samples that their utility is limited. This

only confirms the necessity of a study of pupil knowledge and understanding which involves larger numbers of children.

*Teaching about the Holocaust: An Empirical Study of National Trends, Perspectives and Practice*, carried out by Pettigrew et al. through the HEDP, is by far the most comprehensive research which has been carried out to date.<sup>106</sup> This study was conducted in relation to teachers in England. Its methodological robustness is characterised not only by the fact that there were over two thousand respondents to the online questionnaire, but that the sample was rich and demographically representative.<sup>107</sup> The purpose of the research, however, was to explore a whole range of issues such as teachers' training and methods for teaching the Holocaust and there were only nine questions which enquired about teachers' substantive knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust itself. Furthermore, these questions were asked of practitioners and not pupils, with 35% of them being subject specialists in history. Their answers therefore, are unlikely to represent the views and preconceptions of pupils for as Lange states in his research on teachers' knowledge in Sweden:

Teachers constitute an “elite”. They are well-educated individuals who have been given - and have accepted - responsibility for a task that is of fundamental importance to society, namely that of conveying and facilitating the acquisition of basic knowledge and values among new generations of the members of society.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>108</sup> Lange, *A Survey of Teachers' Experiences*, 67.

Nevertheless, despite teachers' apparent 'elite' and 'well-educated' status, there were examples of most respondents answering incorrectly to certain substantive questions on the Holocaust. It is possible that the misconceptions popularly held by teachers are transferred to pupils. It would also seem probable that if subject specialists and graduates are not aware of certain areas of substantive knowledge, then neither will their pupils. In any case, this demonstrates the importance of exploring these areas.

In response to the question concerning the percentage of Jews in Germany in 1933, only 186/582 (32%) of history teachers and 7/71 (9.8%) of English teachers answered this question correctly.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, nearly 30% of all respondents were not sure which places (when given a list of six) were killing centres built specifically for killing Jewish people.<sup>110</sup> The report states:

While Treblinka was correctly identified by 73.6 per cent (n430) of history teachers and by high proportions of teachers in other subject areas, Sobibor was recognised by only a little more than half of history teachers (54.5 per cent, n318) (and fewer still of teachers from other subjects), and Chelmno – the first death camp built for the murder of Jewish people – was unknown to more than half of history teachers, to more than 70 per cent of Religious Education teachers, and to more than 80 per cent of teachers in all other subject areas. Of note, only 47.8 per cent (n279) of history teachers, 28.2 per cent (n75) of RE teachers, 15.5 per cent (n11) of English teachers, 18.8

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<sup>109</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 57.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 60.

per cent (n6), and 10.3 per cent (n3) of PSHE teachers successfully identified Chelmno.<sup>111</sup>

Due to the fact that teachers are likely to be one of the main sources of pupils' knowledge, it would appear probable that Chelmno and Sobibor will be less familiar to pupils than say Auschwitz and Treblinka. The findings of the HEDP research are also supported by Lange's work in Sweden which showed the disparity of knowledge about the camp system.

Another major survey on contemporary knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the Holocaust, was conducted in the 2005 American Jewish Committee Report, titled, *The Holocaust and its Implications: A Seven-Nation Comparative Study*.<sup>112</sup> This AJC-commissioned survey, which was carried out by TNS Sofres between March and April 2005, interviewed approximately a thousand people in each country (Germany, Austria, France, Poland, Sweden, UK and USA). David Harris, the Executive Director of the AJC, wrote in his foreword to the report that 'the bad news is that the actual knowledge displayed (in answer to questions about how many Jews died and what were Auschwitz, Dachau and Treblinka) is low and uneven in most countries'.<sup>113</sup> Unlike in the HEDP report, the answers were not supplied by teachers but by a wide range of adults. The methodology involved sample quotas which were stratified by region and community type. In this international study, it is the response of the 978 participants from the United Kingdom, which is of the most relevance. However, out of the twelve questions which were asked of these interviewees, only two of them were about their

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<sup>111</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Smith, *The Holocaust and its Implications*.

<sup>113</sup> Harris, 'Foreword', vi.

substantive knowledge of the Holocaust; the others were all concerned with issues such as attitudes towards Israel, attitudes towards the Jews and whether or not they feel the Holocaust has been exploited.

The first question which was asked was similar to the question in the HEDP research concerning centres built specifically for killing Jewish people. However, unlike the study by the HEDP, the wording of the question and the options available were both problematic and confusing. The question read, ‘from what you know or have heard, what were Auschwitz, Dachau and Treblinka?’ The options available were ‘concentration camps’ (45%), ‘death camps’ (2%), ‘extermination camps’ (2%), ‘camps’ (4%), ‘other’ (21%) and ‘don’t know’ (26%). With 47% of respondents giving an ‘other’ or ‘don’t know’ response, the usefulness of this survey is severely reduced and this is understandable because it seems very unlikely that someone will see a semantic difference between a death camp and an extermination camp. Similarly, death camps, extermination camps and concentration camps are all ‘camps’ (fourth option) and this may explain why so many people answered ‘don’t know’. Furthermore, Treblinka was an extermination camp which had as its only function the destruction of all Jews which arrived there. Dachau, on the other hand, was not used for this purpose, despite the significant death rate at the camp. Dachau and Treblinka therefore are not comparable camps and the different sorts of camps ought to be understood and distinguished. The question asked by the AJC-commissioned research introduces an assumption to the respondent that Dachau and Treblinka were the same sorts of camp when they were not. In the light of this, it is surely unsurprising that 26% answered ‘don’t know’. To add another level of complexity to the question, Auschwitz was not simply one camp. Instead ‘Auschwitz’ was the German name for the Polish town Oświęcim and a general

term for Auschwitz I (the *Stammlager* base camp), Auschwitz II-Birkenau (the *Vernichtungslager* extermination camp), Auschwitz III-Monowitz (Buna Monowitz labour camp) as well as various other sub-camps. It is therefore impossible for participants to accurately classify Auschwitz as a concentration camp, death camp or extermination camp. In many senses therefore the findings of this question are redundant and simply highlight the importance of being very careful when asking questions. It is commendable that in the HEDP question (question 22) Auschwitz was not included in the list of options and that the wording was specific enough to not cause confusion or error.

A similar problem with wording was evident in another piece of research which preceded the 2005 study but was also commissioned by the American Jewish Committee. This was called ‘What do the British know about the Holocaust?’ It was carried out by Gallup in May 1993 and written up by Golub and Cohen.<sup>114</sup> The third question in its survey of 1,025 men and women over sixteen years of age, asked, ‘From what you know or have heard, what were Auschwitz, Dachau, and Treblinka?’ Unlike the seven nation comparative study of 2005, the question was open-ended and interviewees were not given a choice of options. While it was informative to see that 76% answered ‘concentration camps’, (although Treblinka and Auschwitz II were extermination camps) it was surprising that 20% did not know.<sup>115</sup> When talking about the camps, Henry Friedlander commented:

Confusion about their origin, their history, and their function is widespread; students cannot distinguish between them and usually confuse the various

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<sup>114</sup> Golub and Cohen, *What do the British know about the Holocaust?*

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 8.

types of camps. Most assume that all were killing centres, and that the methods used at Auschwitz and Treblinka applied also at Dachau and Buchenwald.<sup>116</sup>

The confusion which Friedlander laments in this statement is actually re-enforced by the AJC surveys and this is something which this research has sought to avoid. It is very important that any options which are given to respondents do not inadvertently support factual inaccuracy or actually encourage error. Friedlander's comment also highlights the importance of phrasing the questions on the camp system and camp structure with great care and specificity to avoid confusion. In fact the AJC research of 1993 on American knowledge of the Holocaust was heavily criticised after the US press reported that 22% of the population believed that the Holocaust never happened.<sup>117</sup> However, as Moore and Newport argued, the question which was asked used a double negative and was highly ambiguous.<sup>118</sup> When they simplified the question they discovered that fewer than 10% of Americans thought it possible that the Holocaust never happened.<sup>119</sup> Bischoping also criticises the AJC wording<sup>120</sup> while Jedwab in his 2010 case study of Canadian Holocaust knowledge does

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<sup>116</sup> Friedlander, 'Towards a Methodology'.

<sup>117</sup> This was based on the findings of the AJC-commissioned research, Golub and Cohen, *What do Americans know about the Holocaust?*

<sup>118</sup> The question was "Does it seem possible or does it seem impossible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened?" (Incidentally, this question was also used in the 1994 survey, *What do the British know about the Holocaust?*)

<sup>119</sup> Moore, & Newport, 'Misreading the Public'.

<sup>120</sup> Bischoping, 'Method and Meaning'.

likewise, stating that ‘when it comes to measuring knowledge about the Holocaust, the formulation of questions is all the more crucial’.<sup>121</sup>

As a result of the poorly-worded questioning in the 2005 AJC research, the findings are relatively redundant and other quantitative surveys are infinitely more useful in informing the researcher on what knowledge exists about the camp system.

The second question on substantive knowledge asked by the AJC-commissioned research of 2005 is much more helpful and of much greater use. It asked ‘approximately how many Jews in all of Europe were killed by the Nazis during the Second World War?’ The responses of UK participants were as follows, ‘25,000’ (4%), ‘100,000’ (7%), ‘1,000,000’ (13%), ‘2,000,000’ (12%), ‘6,000,000’ (39%), ‘20,000,000’ (8%), ‘don’t know’ (17%). This means that 61% of respondents in the UK did not know or answered incorrectly to how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust. This is supported by the findings of the 1993 study where 59% of respondents either did not know or answered incorrectly to the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust. This shows the importance of trying to discover whether pupils in England have a better or worse knowledge in this particular area.

The 1993 research by Golub and Cohen used two questions which the 2005 survey did not. The first of these was to ask respondents, ‘what does the term “the Holocaust” refer to?’ The reported findings are relatively unhelpful without greater scrutiny into the specific responses. In general terms however, the authors stated that 33% gave answers describing ‘extermination/murder/persecution/treatment of Jews by Hitler/Nazis/Germany’. Eighteen per cent described it as ‘extermination/murder/persecution of Jews’ while 5% gave other relevant responses.

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<sup>121</sup> Jedwab, ‘Measuring Holocaust Knowledge’.

Thirty five per cent offered other responses (such as concentration camps, death etc.) and 18% did not know.<sup>122</sup> This suggests that there is a lack of uniformity on what the term ‘Holocaust’ means, something which is very much mirrored in popular discourse. Although my research did not specifically ask pupils to define the Holocaust, these findings highlighted the importance of recognising that pupils may interpret the word ‘Holocaust’ in different ways. Although the questionnaire did not use the term, it was employed throughout the interviews.

The second unique question found in the 1993 survey was as follows: ‘Many Jews in Europe were forced to wear a symbol on their clothes during the Second World War. What was it?’ This was an open-ended question. Nine per cent of respondents were able to correctly state that it was the Star of David while a further 47% described it as ‘a yellow star’. Thirty four per cent didn’t know and 3% thought that the answer was ‘a swastika’. This means that only 56% of respondents were able to correctly answer this question. This is a similar finding to one made by Edwards and O’Dowd when they showed pupils a photo of a Jewish family walking through the streets of Berlin in 1941. They wrote, ‘half the class [thirteen pupils] went beyond our introductory prompt and identified the badges worn by the two adults as the Star of David and displayed an understanding that wearing this badge signalled discrimination and segregation during the Nazi era’.<sup>123</sup>

It is interesting that in addition to researching substantive knowledge about the Holocaust, the AJC-commissioned research of 2005 (not 1993) did compare the relationship between knowledge of the Holocaust and attitudes towards the

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<sup>122</sup> Golub, & Cohen, *What do the British know about the Holocaust?*, 7.

<sup>123</sup> Edwards and O’Dowd, ‘The Edge of Knowing’, 21.

Holocaust as well as attitudes towards the Jews and Israel. The report concluded that ‘having less knowledge about the Holocaust leads to less support for remembrance of and teaching about it in all countries. In turn, support for knowing and teaching about the Holocaust relates to seeing problems as serious, having sympathy towards Jews, having sympathy towards and accepting Israel as a Jewish refuge, and rejecting negative images’.<sup>124</sup> This conclusion suggests that education and knowledge of the Holocaust can lead to greater sympathy and understanding towards Jews and Israel today. The validity of the findings however, are severely limited by the fact that there are only two questions focused on Holocaust knowledge and one of these is highly problematic.<sup>125</sup>

Equally interesting are the conclusions drawn from the AJC report through the use of multivariate regression analysis, enabling conclusions that linked the findings with specific demographics. In the report, Smith writes, ‘in virtually all countries men are more knowledgeable about the Holocaust than women are’.<sup>126</sup> Whether or not this is the case in more general terms would need to be tested in other research with more effective questions. The report also concluded that ‘more education is also consistently related to greater knowledge in all countries’ and that ‘age had no consistent relationship to knowledge across countries’.<sup>127</sup> This may suggest that the responses given by adults in this research are likely to be mirrored (or perhaps, not very different) from the answers which pupils may give, although the respondents in

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<sup>124</sup> Smith, *The Holocaust and its Implications*, 16-17.

<sup>125</sup> For a further discussion of the relationship between knowledge and attitudes see, Carrington and Short, ‘Holocaust Education, Anti-Racism and Citizenship’.

<sup>126</sup> Smith, *The Holocaust and its Implications*, 9.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

the AJC research were all over sixteen years of age. This conclusion can by no means be drawn with any certainty and simply highlights the importance of carrying out studies into pupils' substantive knowledge of the Holocaust.

A much more useful piece of research than the AJC-commissioned surveys was the empirical case study on pupil preconceptions conducted by Edwards and O'Dowd in the summer term of 2009.<sup>128</sup> The study involved twenty six boys in one year eight class which meant that their understandings were explored before they were formally taught the Holocaust in their year nine History curriculum.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, there are clear limitations on the usefulness and generalisability of this particular study. Perhaps most importantly, the sample size was very small and lacked demographic variety; the semi-structured interview which was carried out for example, only consisted of four boys. It is also noteworthy that no girls were involved in the study. In their article, the researchers wrote that 'students' historical knowledge is derived from contexts outside of classrooms, typically from home, community and the mass media'.<sup>130</sup> While this statement is supported by numerous empirical studies,<sup>131</sup> Edwards and O'Dowd are presumably assuming that boys and girls both receive and digest identical stimuli and material from 'home, community and the mass media'. This would appear extremely unlikely as my study found significant differences between the sexes on the films and books that they had read

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<sup>128</sup> Edwards and O'Dowd, 'The Edge of Knowing'.

<sup>129</sup> Although eight out of 26 believed that they had studied the Holocaust in primary school and 14 out of 26 thought that they had already studied it in some form during years seven (ages 11-12) and eight (ages 12-13).

<sup>130</sup> Edwards and O'Dowd, 'The Edge of Knowing', 20.

<sup>131</sup> Barton, 'My Mom Taught Me'; Barton and McCully, 'History, Identity and the School Curriculum'; Sexias, 'Popular Film and Young People's Understanding'.

about the Holocaust. Therefore the findings of the research are really only limited to conclusions which can be made about the prior understandings of these boys.

The generic conclusions that Edwards and O'Dowd came to were in agreement with the ideas of Donovan and Bransford, as well as Pendry.

Responses to the photograph showed that this class would bring to formal teaching in year nine a varied range of prior understandings about the Holocaust. In few cases understandings were detailed and in most cases they showed a familiarity with some of the main events.... The responses confirmed our first impression that this class's prior knowledge of events varied in levels of complexity.<sup>132</sup>

One task that pupils were given was to 'describe what happened during the Holocaust'. From such an open-ended question there were myriad answers which enabled conclusions of greater specificity and utility. The findings suggested that, in a similar vein to the AJC-commissioned research, many respondents were unaware of the number of Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Edwards and O'Dowd wrote that 'students varied in their knowledge of the scale of the Holocaust. For some it ran into millions, one boy thought twenty million, for others it was thousands'.<sup>133</sup> Other substantive misconceptions included one individual dating the Holocaust as pre-World War Two and another believing that Poland was a Jewish country which provided a threat to Nazi Germany. It is very possible that these misconceptions are anomalies and are not necessarily popularly held misconceptions. For this to be ascertained further research with a much larger

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<sup>132</sup> Edwards and O'Dowd, 'The Edge of Knowing', 22.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

sample is required. The work of Edwards and O'Dowd's study demonstrates how valuable research can be undermined by very small samples. Within my research, I was determined to ensure that the credibility of my findings was strengthened by the size of the sample.

In their study, Edwards and O'Dowd gave a detailed summary of pupils' descriptions of the Holocaust, with some suggestions on what areas of Holocaust knowledge could be improved:

The students' description of the Holocaust was a two-stage process: persecution in Germany followed by extermination in camps. Other transitions such as radicalisation during the 1930s, the impact of the outbreak of war; ghettos, and the steps leading to the 'Final Solution' could be introduced. The geography of the Holocaust could be extended to include eastern, western and southern Europe; most students limited events to Germany and Poland. Forms of resistance were mentioned, though poorly understood. Most students saw that the victims of the Holocaust were exclusively Jewish, but few mentioned the other groups who were persecuted under the regime. Students mentioned the involvement of ordinary Germans in the Holocaust with little understanding of how varied that involvement was. Thinking in this area tended to be black and white.<sup>134</sup>

Further research is necessary to support or challenge these claims, despite their feasibility.

One very apparent preconception is the large emphasis on Hitler as the fundamental or principal reason for the Holocaust. Pupils were asked to give at least one reason

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 23.

why the Holocaust happened and ten out of twenty six thought that the ‘primary cause lay within the personality of Hitler, formulated as, ‘Hitler did not like the Jews’ or ‘Hitler was a nutter’.<sup>135</sup> Similar discoveries were made in the small-scale interview where three out of the four pupils ‘attributed the personality of Hitler as a prime cause’.<sup>136</sup> While it would be historically unsound to remove or marginalise Hitler’s role within the Holocaust and his ambitious determination to find a solution of the “*Judenfrage*” it would appear that pupils lack knowledge of the quasi-autonomous role of the SS hierarchy and the detachment of some parts of the decision-making from Berlin itself, let alone Hitler as an individual. This is unsurprising as it demands a detailed grasp of the polycratic and multi-faceted structure of the Third Reich and the state apparatus of Nazi Germany. It also demands an understanding of how the Holocaust evolved in different ways, in different places and at different times during the war. A Hitler-focused narrative avoids these complexities and in some senses is characterised by the global fascination of the individual. Edwards and O’Dowd’s research is undoubtedly useful but further demonstrates the necessity for research to be carried out on English pupils with a larger sample which is more demographically diverse. This study, as well as the forthcoming major study conducted by the IOE’s CfHE will help to achieve this.

A small step towards addressing this need was made in 2011 when I wrote ‘Understanding Pupil Preconceptions of the Holocaust in English Schools’.<sup>137</sup> This article was based on some pilot research carried out as part of my PhD. Fifty six

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>137</sup> Gray, ‘Understanding Pupil Preconceptions’.

pupils from three different schools completed a four page questionnaire where they were asked about their studies of the Holocaust to date, as well as a range of questions about the origins and events of the Holocaust. There were a range of open-ended questions as well as some multiple choice questions that focussed on which camps were built for the specific purpose of killing Jews, as well as the Jewish population size of Germany in 1933. Although the sample size was relatively small, the research was arguably the most important work to date on pupil preconceptions of the Holocaust in English schools.

The findings suggested that pupils do arrive with knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and that there is considerable variation in the extent and degree of it. Many pupils seemed to see the Holocaust as an event, rather than a process, thus potentially struggling with the concept that Nazi policy towards the Jews radicalised between 1933 and 1945. The findings also supported the work of Edwards and O'Dowd which emphasised the Hitler-centric approach of pupils in explaining the causes and origins of the Holocaust. Concurring with the findings of Lange and the HEDP, pupils also over-emphasised the percentage of Jews in 1933 Germany, with the modal answer being 21-30%. Pupils also appeared to believe that camps, which were specifically built for the murder of the Jews, were located in many countries, rather than modern day Poland. It supports the ideas that there is some confusion about the geography of the Holocaust. The questions about Jewish resistance also highlighted misconceptions. Only around a third of pupils believed that there were any uprisings or rebellions carried out by the Jews against the Nazis. Interestingly, all fifty six pupils also thought that the perpetrators of the Holocaust would have

been punished had they not participated in the process of killing.<sup>138</sup> This erroneous view suggests that pupils will not fully appreciate the voluntary nature of those implementing the murders nor the willingness and enthusiasm of many in Eastern Europe to collaborate. The article suggests a large number of preconceptions and misconceptions, although these need to be confirmed by further studies. In the light of the findings, my instrument evolved to explore certain topics to a greater extent. For example, scenarios were introduced into the interviews in order to explore pupils' understandings about resistance, collaboration and complicity. Moreover, pupils were given cards containing five different events and asked to put them in chronological order.

In addition to my work, the findings of McIntyre in his empirical study on students' knowledge and attitude towards the Holocaust are also valuable.<sup>139</sup> McIntyre's work looked at the effectiveness of the 'Facing History and Ourselves' course and so, like my own research, he explored pupils' understandings before they had formally studied the Holocaust in their secondary school history lessons.

In his case study of twenty six year nine pupils in an inner city South London comprehensive, he discovered that in the pre-course survey, in response to his question, 'where did the Holocaust happen?', 48% of respondents answered 'Germany', 28% left it blank and only 4% (one pupil) answered Poland. Moreover, 63% of respondents stated that Adolf Hitler was responsible for the Holocaust.

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<sup>138</sup> Pupils were asked, 'what would happen to a member of the German armed forces who refused to participate in the execution of Jewish civilians?' They were given four options: nothing would happen to that person; the person would be shot; the person would be sent to a concentration camp; the family of the person would be sent to a concentration camp. No pupils chose the first option.

<sup>139</sup> McIntyre, *To What Extent and in What Ways...?*

With a sample size of only 26 pupils, the number of meaningful conclusions which can be drawn from this research are few. If one answer represents 4% of the respondents, then it by no means can be concluded that 4% of pupils hold that view in general terms. Nevertheless, the research by McIntyre is useful for showing that there do appear to be areas where the substantive knowledge of pupils is very limited. When interviewed, pupils stated that they felt unsure about various questions concerning the Holocaust, such as the location of the death camps, how the Holocaust ended and how many Jews died. McIntyre also suggested that pupils typically approached their study without knowledge of the history of antisemitism and without understanding the causes of the Holocaust as being anything other than related to Hitler alone. He writes that the questionnaires and interviews ‘suggested that students saw antisemitism mainly in terms of Hitler’s own obsession with the Jews. Only one student displayed a sense of the long history of antisemitism and its Christian roots’.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, one pupil stated in interview:

There was a lesson where we found out it wasn’t just Hitler that was controlling the Jews...And every time we just used to think, oh, it’s just Hitler, Hitler was the main problem, but in the lesson we found out there was a lot more people, it made us think differently, that it wasn’t just Hitler was a bad man.

McIntyre’s small study supports the idea that there are bound to be huge variations and large-scale breadth in the range of preconceptions and ideas which pupils brings with them to the classroom. Yet at the same time, his findings suggest that there are common areas of confusion, ignorance or misconception. This highlights the

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<sup>140</sup> McIntyre, *To What Extent and in What Ways...?*, 86.

importance of exploring these in a fuller way to try and see these trends. It highlights for example, the importance of exploring within my own research whether pupils have a Hitler-centric approach as my pilot studies also suggested.

McIntyre's work examined one specific aspect of Holocaust education and involved only twenty six participants. To really explore preconceptions, a much larger survey of substantive knowledge of the Holocaust would have to be conducted, which is the aims of this research project.

### **Literature Summary and its Implications**

Overall therefore, some empirical research has been carried out regarding knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. Many of the studies however, have focused on the general public or on teachers, while very few have specifically looked at pupils or children. Fewer still have looked at pupils in English schools. In addition to this, the studies have typically been disparate and at times have employed questionable methodologies which limit the value of the findings and the validity of the conclusions. For their rigour, reliability, sample size and methodology, two surveys clearly stand out, the research of Lange in Sweden and the work of the HEDP in England. These two empirical studies highlight clear gaps in the knowledge of many teachers including trained specialists in history. If trained history teachers lack knowledge and understanding in some areas of the Holocaust, it seems probable that this will also be the case for pupils.

For their usefulness and relevance, the work of Edwards and O'Dowd as well as the study by McIntyre, are particularly valuable. They have provided glimpses into some of the understandings and preconceptions with which pupils arrive into the classroom. This may well be of some use to practitioners in their planning and

teaching but more work is needed. The data which is presently available is minimal to say the least and lacks any real demographic heterogeneity. Perhaps above anything, the literature shows that further research is crucial and that there is a real need for both qualitative and quantitative data which explores a range of Holocaust-related themes, on a larger scale than that which is already in existence.

The literature also demonstrates that some problematic methodological decisions have been made in the field over the last twenty years. These further demonstrate that care must thus be taken in the phrasing of questions, the size and composition of the sample, as well as the handling of the data.

Yet researchers also need to spend time considering *how* we acquire an understanding of pupils' preconceptions. This involves considering the forms of knowledge that exist and the relationship between preconceptions and our everyday lives. Only by having an understanding of how pupils see the world, how they learn and the relationship between evidence, propositions and beliefs, can a sound methodology be constructed which enables the researcher to explore pupils' preconceptions in a meaningful way.

Overall therefore, the literature in the field has had a large impact on the development of my own study. It has not only shown the various methodological approaches to avoid, but highlighted the importance of carefully-worded questions which are not only accessible for the respondent but which also maximise their opportunities to demonstrate what they know and understand. The existing studies have also emphasised the need for a sample which is demographically representative and large enough for meaningful conclusions to be drawn.

As the literature demonstrates, there is a lack of research on pupils' preconceptions of the Holocaust in English schools. This helped to shape my research questions and to enquire into what knowledge and what understanding 13 and 14 year-olds brought with them to their learning of this subject and what the implications of these are upon curriculum design and teaching.

Nevertheless, the various studies conducted to date, have suggested certain trends and patterns in pupils' thinking, for example, a focus on the importance of Hitler and confusion over the nature of the camp system. This was influential in shaping the content and structure of the research instrument.

## Chapter Three

### **Epistemology, Evidence and Enquiry: Trying to Know What They Know**

Before attempting to research what 13 and 14 year-old pupils know and understand about the Holocaust, as well as the subsequent implications, it was important to consider the nature of knowledge and the grounds upon which propositional knowledge stands. This chapter seeks to explore the nature and type of knowledge which this research project will be examining in relation to the research questions.

The acquisition of certain knowledge is central to the primary function of education and the whole notion of schooling. We acquire practical knowledge, such as how to tie up a shoelace or how to hold a pen. We develop our acquaintance knowledge through the evolving relationships with friends and teachers, in addition to the acquisition of factual or propositional knowledge such as the structure of a plant cell or the theorem of Pythagoras. The study of history involves this third form of knowledge. It involves making claims about the past such as 'the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066' and 'the power of the English Parliament increased during the reign of the Tudor dynasty'. This research study attempts to consider the propositional knowledge that a sample of 13 and 14 year-old students have about the Holocaust as well as looking at their understanding of the subjects.

Propositions, as seemingly as simple as 'the cat sat on the mat' have posed all sorts of problems for philosophers. How can we really know that the cat sat on the mat? What is the basis of our claim to know and how do we know that our senses perceive the world as it actually is? Such epistemological and ontological questions lead to philosophical enquiries into definitions of knowledge, the means of

knowledge acquisition and the relationship between the external world and our perceptions of its existence.<sup>141</sup>

When we apply these questions to the discipline of history and the study of the past, we see the importance of looking at the methodological and procedural nature of history as a discipline. How do we know about the past? Is knowledge of the past even possible and if so, how does it differ from propositional knowledge of the present? When broadening out the enquiry, we may ask how children know about the past and how can we as practitioners and educators acquire both knowledge and understanding of what it is that they really know and understand? Only by exploring these questions, will we be able to begin researching pupil knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust.

### **The Centrality of Evidence in the Discipline of History**

When pupils arrive for their history lessons, it is important to remember that they do not enter the classroom with a ‘*tabula rasa*’.<sup>142</sup> A diverse and immeasurable number of experiences have shaped and continue to shape the way that they construct and interpret the stimuli that they receive. Throughout their lives, children have received data which shape and inform the gargantuan volume of knowledge that they possess, including propositional knowledge. Their own experiences from recent history help them to develop a sense of the past, whether it was their football match in the playground or the drama performance from the previous term.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Cole, *The Theory of Knowledge*.

<sup>142</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 9.

<sup>143</sup> Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*.

The sense of the past which most pupils have acquired from their personal experiences is one which can lead to misconceptions about the fixed nature of the past and how that which has gone before must be seen in terms of truth and falsity.

If, for example, a child broke a window and was questioned about the past, their parent or teacher would perceive their accounts about the past to be either truthful or untruthful, to be either true or false. In the light of these experiences, children often perceive all historical accounts to fit into one of these two simple categories and therefore they find it difficult to develop understandings of validity and credibility, rather than simple truthfulness. As Donovan and Bransford pointed out:

Preconceptions developed from everyday experiences are often difficult for teachers to change because they generally work well enough in day-to-day contexts.<sup>144</sup>

Day to day contexts demand absolute and concrete notions of truthfulness. Considering that so much of the past is unknowable and based on what seems the most reasonable in the light of the available evidence, historians often have to be very cautious about making claims relating to truthfulness. It is more helpful for the historian if one speaks in terms of the source's usefulness to support the claim. The only way to shift from a notion of truthfulness to usefulness is by developing a procedural approach to the discipline and by developing a conceptual understanding and appreciation of evidence.

In addition to coming to terms with the counter-intuitive nature of history, pupils may have similar and well-established conceptual ideas about history itself; perceiving history and the past to be one and the same thing. As Ashby points out,

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<sup>144</sup> Donovan and Bransford, 'A Fish Story'.

there are few children who realise that the past is everything that has ever happened in the world, while history is that which is claimed about the past.<sup>145</sup> The relationship between history and the past is articulated by Lee when he states that ‘history *is* concerned with the study of the past’<sup>146</sup> and that ‘history supplies the only rational means of investigating the past’.<sup>147</sup> Yet the claims about the past, to which Ashby and Lee refer, can only be made on the basis of evidence. Despite the fact that there may be conflicting claims about the past, it is essential that pupils understand that the discipline is not a postmodernist one which allows for an ‘anything will do’ approach. As Rogers points out, ‘there is, after all, such a thing as a judicious and well informed opinion as opposed to a silly, ignorant and prejudiced one’.<sup>148</sup> Evidence therefore lies at the heart of history and without evidence, the discipline cannot even exist.

Claims about the past therefore, must be rooted and grounded in evidence; they cannot be simply known *a priori*. The proposition that ‘Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933’ cannot be a self-justifying axiom. Conversely,  $2 + 2 = 4$  cannot be denied without contradiction if one understands the meaning of the numbers and symbols used in the equation. Historical propositions can therefore only be known *a posteriori* and thus rely upon evidence.

In his important work, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, Bevir explains the nature of history as a discipline and the relationship between relics from the past and the meaning that is acquired through the process of study.

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<sup>145</sup> Ashby, *Evidence*.

<sup>146</sup> Lee, ‘Why Learn History?’, 19.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>148</sup> Rogers, ‘Why Teach History?’, 22.

Historians cannot have direct access to the past, in the way we can to the present, simply because it has gone. Instead they must begin by recreating, or perhaps creating, the past from relics available to them in the present. Historians study relics from the past. They use them to reconstruct historical objects, or, perhaps we should say, to construct historical objects. Historians of ideas study relics from the past in order to recover historical meanings. They seek to reconstruct ideas or meanings from the past.<sup>149</sup>

The danger that this presents, however, is that all historical claims rely upon further claims, which themselves rely upon further claims, leading to what sceptics refer to as an infinite regress of justification. In response to this, Locke and Hume argued for the existence of foundational knowledge; that which is non-inferential, axiomatic and acquired through the senses. In other words, the senses provide certainty which forms the foundation and bedrock of all other knowledge claims. Common sense would support this view and it also provides a workable framework for testing the reliability of evidence. When looking at a testimony for example, we may ask questions such as, ‘was the person there?’ ‘Did they witness the events that they describe?’ Surely if one has experience through the senses there can be nothing more reliable upon which to base knowledge claims. If I claim to feel pain or hear a noise, while it may be ontologically subjective, it is to me at least, epistemologically objective.<sup>150</sup>

The senses are therefore essential to *a posteriori* claims but they are still fallible. The senses can let us down, whether this be through the fault of the sensory organs

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<sup>149</sup> Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 31.

<sup>150</sup> Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 9-10.

such as the loss of hearing in old age, or the misconstruction of the data which is being received. A stick in the water may look bent or I may think that I have seen or experienced something which I have not.

Coherentism is a useful, but not infallible safeguard against the potential unreliability of the senses. Coherentism is the idea that our beliefs must be based upon a logical consistency; in other words that they cohere with each other. It is of course illogical and unreasonable to hold two fundamentally contradictory propositions and it is difficult for us to accept a proposition when it is epistemologically undermined by another known proposition. Although my senses may suggest that the stick in the water is bent or that the train tracks meet on the horizon, such beliefs do not cohere with my knowledge of the properties of a stick or other knowledge that I have of train tracks, which I have acquired from past experience. Thus I reject the claim that the stick is bent or that the train tracks meet on the horizon because it is inconsistent with my other knowledge, which is also based on my sensory experiences. In the light of this, it seems likely that pupils will reject claims which do not cohere with their existing knowledge. This highlights the importance of understanding pupils' preconceptions for there is a possibility that new knowledge may not cohere with existing misconceptions and beliefs and thus be rejected.

Moreover, it is possible for erroneous ideas to satisfactorily cohere. The Newtonian principles of classical mechanics and the ideas on special relativity logically cohered before the proposal by Einstein that the relationship between space and time is curved. Similarly, two erroneous ideas about the Holocaust can satisfactorily cohere in pupils' thinking, for example, the notion that all Jews in Germany were rich and Jews were targeted by the Nazis because of their wealth.

Knowledge of the past is consequently not an all or nothing phenomenon. Instead, propositions about the past can range from ignorance to incorrigibility. Truth and falsity are therefore relatively unhelpful terms in an understanding of the past and belong more to the register of the philosopher than the historian. Nevertheless, Ginzburg, who adopts a more philosophical approach to his consideration of history, remarked that ‘the historian’s craft involves something that is part of everyone’s life: untangling the strands of the true, the false, and the fictional which are the substance our being in the world.’<sup>153</sup>

The divergence of historians is increased by the fact that they may also interpret or understand specific words in different ways. The Nazi use of the term “Final Solution” was used in recorded phone conversations before January 1942, but was the same thing meant by that phrase as was meant in the post-Wannsee era of the Holocaust? Similarly, issues of language and interpretation come to the fore regarding Hitler’s address to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, when he stated:

If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!<sup>154</sup>

What did Hitler mean by ‘the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe’? Is this evidence that he always intended to murder the Jewish people in Europe? Is this justification to claim that Hitler had a blueprint for destruction and a plan of extermination? How does this marry up with evidence which shows an evolution of

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<sup>153</sup> Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces*, 8.

<sup>154</sup> Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, 737.

policy towards the Jews, such as ghettoisation, the Madagascar Plan, mass shooting and eventually gassing?

Consequently, one of the most important intellectual tools which it is necessary for a pupil to have is the understanding of the language and meaning in the source. This does not mean that they need the ability to be able to read German or Hebrew (though that may well be helpful) but rather an understanding of why that sort of language was used and what a particular word meant to a particular individual at a particular time. This could be considered to be semantic empathy. Without an understanding of this, we cannot understand whether or not the source will help us to show whether a proposition obtains or fails to obtain. Furthermore, when thinking about objects in the past, (whether these be literal artefacts or objects which have been painted or written about) one must understand the intentionality and functionality which has been imposed on these objects. The historical meaning of these objects may have been different to their present meaning. In his book, *The Construction of Social Reality*, Searle talks about ‘institutional facts’ which are socially constructed and ‘non-institutional’ (or brute) facts, which are not socially constructed.<sup>155</sup> Within an understanding of the Holocaust, pupils must understand that there are many socially constructed terms such as ‘gas chamber’, ‘the Jewish question’ and ‘Final Solution’. It is also important to understand how the use of these terms may mean different things at different times. ‘Resettlement’ obviously meant something different to the Nazis in 1940 compared to its use in memoranda after say 1942.

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<sup>155</sup> Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 31.

When understanding the meaning of a proposition in the present, one must know what is meant by certain words. This is exactly the same when looking at propositions of the past, however, clarifying what is meant by a word is not always possible. The meanings of words change and often something said in the past may not be available in the fullest context.

In establishing the truth about a proposition in the present, we may say that it can either obtain *de dicto* or *de re*.<sup>156</sup> This can be established using a plethora of methods, determined by the mode of enquiry. One may be able to establish that the proposition obtains by simply putting an item under a microscope, smelling something or speaking to an individual who can verify the proposition.

The process of establishing historical propositions is often a lot more difficult. The proposition that the ‘Final Solution’ was started and designed at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 involves looking at multiple sources. While the minutes of the meeting may suggest that this event was the turning point in the implementation of the Holocaust, it does not cohere with established propositions that Chełmno extermination camp, which opened on December 8, 1941, had “successfully” experimented with murder by gassing prior to the Wannsee Conference and that the term “Final Solution” to the Jewish question was used by senior SS officials during the *Einsatzgruppen* massacres in the second half of 1941. The scant records of the odd phone conversation are insufficient to verify categorically when the exact step from ghettoisation to annihilation took place, or if indeed there was a specific moment which originated from the Nazi regime in Berlin

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<sup>156</sup> That is, that it obtains either in its state of affairs or in the properties which are attributed to something.

or their subordinates in the field. It is difficulties such as these which prevent history from being a discipline which seeks to establish truth *per se*. Instead it seeks to make claims about the past which obtain to the greatest possible extent with the sources available. In some cases, the evidence is so overwhelming and the proposition so obtaining that any refutation of it would be irrational. This does not mean that the historian has discovered truth (the term is unhelpful) but that there are certain propositions which are indubitably incorrigible. On other occasions there can, is and ought to be legitimate disagreement and the historian ought not be afraid of stating that one cannot know whether certain propositions obtain in the light of the presently available evidence.

This has important implications for my research for there is likely to be a number of pupils who contradict each other, either in their written answers or in their interviews. While pupils may legitimately disagree about when the decision to murder all of Europe's Jews was taken, or the significance of the Wannsee Conference, there are other propositions which are incorrigible such as the Nazis murdered Jews in gas chambers, or that Polish Jews were placed in ghettos. This means that it is possible to not only comment about the propositions that pupils make, but also the reliability of their propositions in the light of the existing evidence.

History as a discipline therefore, is about seeking through investigation and scrutiny to establish a set of claims about the past which appear the most valid in the light of the available evidence. Although there is seldom consensus on all of these claims, the process of 'doing history' is a refining and purifying work. Moreover, the discipline is more than one simply believing something about the past; they must also know why they believe it. Justification is an essential part of what it is to

know. If one has no reason to believe something then this is not knowledge. The relationship between knowledge, truth, belief and justification is perspicuously summarised by Wittgenstein when he writes:

One says “I know” when one is ready to give compelling grounds. “I know” relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth.<sup>157</sup> Whether someone knows something can come to light, assuming that he is convinced of it. But if what he believes is of such a kind that the grounds that he can give are no surer than his assertion, then he cannot say that he knows what he believes.<sup>158</sup>

In my research, the interviews allowed me to probe pupils’ comments to see whether or not they had sure grounds for their propositions. Moreover, by making enquiries into the origins of their preconceptions, it was possible to suggest that certain beliefs and ideas had emerged as a consequence of a specific book or film.

History, therefore, is more than being able to simply state a set of assertions. At a disciplinary and methodological level, one must also know why they hold to that set of assertions. This is typified by the comments of Lee who stated that ‘it is generally held that if I can be said to know something, I have good grounds for what I believe’.<sup>159</sup> Barton and Levstik show the importance of justification and the centrality of evidence when they write:

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<sup>157</sup> Or in the case of history, the validity of a proposition.

<sup>158</sup> Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 32.

<sup>159</sup> Lee, ‘Historical Knowledge and the National Curriculum’, 48.

If students simply encounter assertions about the past and then remember those assertions, without understanding how they were arrived at in the first place, then it is difficult to say that they actually know anything at all.<sup>160</sup>

In order therefore to fully know, one must know *how* they know. A simple reply that ‘the teacher told me’ or that ‘it was in the textbook’ is surely not sufficient and cannot adequately equip any child for the wider world. A simple appeal to authority may work in the playground, but it will surely not hold weight much further than that. Rogers draws on the theme of how we know what we know when he writes:

To ‘know’ something on good authority means that the proposition which one ‘knows’ is the outcome of an enquiry which satisfies the appropriate procedural criteria- which criteria are identified by the nature of evidence available; only ‘know how’ can give ‘the right to be sure’ because it is the only valid basis for claims to ‘know that’.<sup>161</sup>

Yet ‘know how’ is not the goal in and of itself; rather it is the means to the end, which is the ability to ‘know that’. This is demonstrated by Ashby, when she writes:

Enabling pupils to gain some insight into how historical knowledge is established is clearly vital if pupils are to begin to understand both the nature and the status of what it is they know in History... But the point of this is to gain ‘knowledge’, not just ‘know how’. ‘Know how’ is a necessary condition for knowledge. However the understanding that knowledge is created through ‘know how’ and is supported by ‘know how’, however

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<sup>160</sup> Barton and Levstik, ‘Teaching History’, 83.

<sup>161</sup> Rogers, *The New History*, 32.

fragile this understanding is... will support independent and lifelong learning.<sup>162</sup>

This is concurrent with Lee's comments when he wrote that 'if the use of evidence in certain ways is what makes a rational investigation of the past possible, then being able to use evidence in these ways is a valuable acquisition'.<sup>163</sup>

It is therefore imperative that if pupils are to have the intellectual tools to 'do history' and understand the processes of the discipline, then they must understand both the centrality of evidence and the methods employed to use sources as evidence to support a particular claim.

At a practical level, it was important that the research instruments that were used provided pupils with the opportunity to demonstrate how they knew what they knew and to enable them to justify their propositions.

The design of the research instruments was determined by the nature of the knowledge that I was exploring, namely propositional knowledge of the Holocaust. Yet I wanted to examine different aspects of the Holocaust and consequently chose to divide the subject into seven sections which are explained in more detail in the next chapter. These sections included looking at the knowledge students had of the background to the Holocaust and their contextual application. It also included specific factual knowledge of people, places and methods of killing. Students were also given questions which tested their chronological knowledge.

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<sup>162</sup> Ashby, *Evidence*, 5.

<sup>163</sup> Lee, 'Why Learn History?', 4.

With Lee's important research<sup>164</sup> on second-order concepts influencing my thinking, the study also explored pupils' knowledge of causation, change and empathy in relation to the Holocaust, by looking at why the Holocaust took place, how the treatment of Jews changed over time and by considering how individuals would have responded in particular circumstances.

### **Evidence and the Past**

Evidence is necessary to validate and support a claim that is made about a proposition of the present, e.g. 'It is raining'. Yet the requisite evidence to validate such a statement is direct and available through the senses in that we can see the rain, feel the rain and even hear the rain hitting the ground. Yet to substantiate a similar claim that is made about the past involves a different procedure, e.g. 'it was raining yesterday'. It is impossible to use the senses directly to verify this claim because one is no longer able to see, hear or feel the rain that descended yesterday. While there are many relatively simple methods which may be used to establish whether or not it was raining yesterday, the process is a different one from validating a proposition concerning the present. Things become even more difficult if one is seeking to verify the proposition that it was raining in Oxford, for example, on January 1, 1482. This demonstrates the nature of historical enquiry. If it is difficult to ascertain something as relatively straightforward as the weather, how much harder it is to verify intentions, decision-making processes and personal attitudes.

One of the primary reasons for this difficulty is that the evidence whereby the historian may attempt to verify the proposition about the past is determined by the

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<sup>164</sup> Lee, Putting Principles into Practice.

sources or traces that the past has left behind. In the light of this, the truthfulness of some propositions appear to have more likelihood than others due to the availability of evidence. This does not mean that there is necessarily quantifiably more evidence. Although that may well be the case, the discipline of history is more than simply counting the number of sources in favour of the proposition and the number of sources against it.<sup>165</sup> Instead, historians look at the strength of the evidence which supports their claim, whether the sources upon which they are basing their evidence are reliable, trustworthy, accurate and coherent with other data or sources which may be available.

There are many different sorts of evidence which a historian may use, for example, a painting, parish records, a photograph or an artefact. Yet one of the most important and also one of the most epistemologically controversial is the historical testimony. This is the oral or written record of the past which has been produced after the event. In relation to the Holocaust it may have been produced by a survivor, a victim, a bystander or a perpetrator. In any case, testimonies have typically shone much light onto different aspects of the Holocaust. While these may be enlightening, harrowing and captivating, they do at best only represent one perspective and one experience of the millions who were affected by the Holocaust. Yet even more importantly, as far as the epistemological discussion is concerned, testimonies rely upon memory of the past. It is possible to be critical of the reliability of testimonies as a source of evidence to support a claim, on the grounds that the account relies upon the memory which is fallible. Testimonies would certainly be rejected by the philosophical sceptics and is a long way from Descartes

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<sup>165</sup> See progression models in Lee and Shemilt, 'A Scaffold not a Cage'.

*Cogito* although it is important to recognise that a philosopher's construct of knowledge is not always transferable to the art of the historian.

It would appear that the value of memory is determined by applying criteria to that testimony to assess its validity and its ability to justify a proposition about the past. This position stands in contrast to the claim of C.I. Lewis when he wrote, 'whatever is remembered, whether as explicit recollection or merely in the form of our sense of the past, is *prima facie* credible because so remembered'.<sup>166</sup> This is a problematic claim as it is possible to believe that one remembers something which did not actually take place. I may believe that I visited a certain place because I 'remember' so doing. Yet it is possible that I did not visit it but simply believe myself to have memories of it. Such a situation, while being possible, is not likely and is more a feature of childhood memories than those of adulthood. It is therefore generally (but not universally) true that as Chisholm writes, 'for any subject S, if S believes, without ground for doubt, that he remembers being F, then it is beyond reasonable doubt for S that he does remember that he was F'.<sup>167</sup> This stands in apparent contradiction to Chisholm's earlier statement that 'it would seem to be clear, in general, that we should assign a lower degree of evidence to the deliverance of memory'.<sup>168</sup> Instead, from a disciplinary perspective, the validity of the memory depends upon it meeting certain methodological criteria,<sup>169</sup> but it seems reasonable

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<sup>166</sup> Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, 334.

<sup>167</sup> Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 81.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>169</sup> This criteria is described effectively in Lee and Shemilt, 'A Scaffold not a Cage'. In box five, 'progression in ideas about evidence', they mention the sort of criteria which are necessary to validate evidence, including testimonies from memory. They write: 'reliability is not a fixed property of a source, and the weight we can rest on any piece of evidence depends on what questions

that in most cases at least, as Bertrand Russell declares, every memory should ‘command a certain degree of credence’.<sup>170</sup> In theorising the discipline and examining the philosophy of history, Ankersmit adopted what he himself described as a ‘reorientation’ by arguing that historical texts are not so much representations on a reality but rather dense realities in their own rights which when applied to memory, give it the credence to which Russell refers.<sup>171</sup>

In my research, it seems likely that many pupils will have drawn much of their knowledge and understanding about the Holocaust from testimonies or sources which relied upon memory. This may include a visit from a survivor, or the reading of something like, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. In the light of the arguments above, it seems that such sources of information are sufficient justification for certain propositions about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that pupils may believe the experiences of Anne Frank, Primo Levi or a visiting survivor were typical of many or even all Jews during the Second World War. Therefore, the way that pupils may seek to generalise their knowledge about specific individuals or places may demonstrate their level of understanding regarding the nature of the Holocaust in different countries and at different times.

### **Knowledge: Theorisation and Application**

In relating the above literature to this particular research it is important to articulate the exact model of knowledge that is being drawn upon and how this relates to the research instrument. Principally, the study is exploring the propositional knowledge

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we ask of it... A source only yields evidence when it is understood in its historical context: we must know what a source meant to those by and for whom it was produced.’ (p.8).

<sup>170</sup> Russell, *An Enquiry into Meaning and Truth*, 192.

<sup>171</sup> Ankersmit, F. ‘Bibliographical Essay’, 278.

that 13 and 14 year-olds hold about the Holocaust. This is related to their understanding of concepts such as ‘causation’, ‘change’ and ‘evidence’. The research instrument reflected that by asking questions about why the Nazis treated the Jews in such a fashion, how the conditions and experiences of Jews changed during the 1930s and 1940s as well as why students believed certain propositions.

Although the study acknowledges the important work that has been conducted on disciplinary preconceptions, this particular piece of research aims to explore the substantive knowledge. In other words, what knowledge and understanding do students have about who, what, where, how, when and why. In addition to this, the study sought to examine the evidence that they have to support this knowledge and understanding. Although the principal focus of my study was not to look at the sources of this knowledge and understanding, nor their attitudes towards the subject, these were considered to some extent. Consequently, upon deciding my research methods, the construction of questions in the survey and semi-structured interviews were guided by ensuring that respondents had opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the key aspects of the Holocaust. This meant answering the key questions such as what happened, where did it happen and how did it happen but it also involved looking at the key features of the Holocaust, such as the ghettos, the *Einsatzgruppen* and the camps and ensuring that these all features in some way.

### **Evidence and Pupil Knowledge and Understanding of the Holocaust**

Knowledge of the past is therefore an essential part of history but it is more than simply acquiring propositions. If such was the case, then progression could be measured through the simple aggregation of incorrigible propositions making

someone who can remember ninety propositions a ‘better historian’ than someone who can only remember sixty. History is also about what is done with that knowledge, in other words how it impacts on and develops understanding. A pupil may have a lot of knowledge about the Holocaust but very limited understanding.

In my study, I sought to explore far more than how many propositions a pupil knows. Being aware of and avoiding some of the methodological flaws in previous research, I sought to explore what pupils understood about the Holocaust as well as what they knew. The interviews provided excellent opportunities for discussion and a much clearer picture was able to emerge about what pupils’ knowledge actually meant to them, how it fitted together and how it was applied. Providing pupils with a simple set of multiple choice questions or true or false statements would have been sufficient to simply learn what propositions pupils knew. The nature of my research was significantly more complicated and sought to explore pupils’ understandings as well as their knowledge.

While there are certain propositions which one may ask a pupil, there are also more open-ended questions which allow the pupils to express their own understanding of these issues. Examples of this might be: ‘what was the Holocaust?’ ‘why did the Holocaust happen?’ or ‘can you outline the evolution of the Nazi treatment of the Jews between 1933-1945?’ Although this research is not principally about how pupils have acquired their knowledge, there must be an enquiry into why they are making certain claims about the Holocaust. If pupils claim to know something, it is important to understand the grounds upon which a pupil bases that claim. This will provide a much clearer picture of what pupils know, what they think they know and what they understand about the past. This holistic picture of pupils’ Holocaust

knowledge and understanding will enable teachers to prepare their lessons on the Holocaust, mindful of what ideas have already been acquired by the pupils.

In a general sense, it is extremely difficult, perhaps even impossible, for a researcher to know exactly what a pupil knows and understands; especially seeing that what a pupil knows and understands is ever-changing. Even if the researcher focuses explicitly on what a pupil knows and understands about the Holocaust, the attempt is unrealistic and it is probably impossible to locate every thread and item of knowledge about a subject as diverse and broad as the Holocaust. This was one reason why I selected specific topics within the subject of the Holocaust to explore with the respondents. By focusing my attention on certain areas, I felt that I was more likely to be able to see patterns which existed in the sample. The decision to look at these specific topics was also influenced by wanting to find out about the respondents' knowledge and understanding of the key substantive questions such as who, what, why and other similar questions.

Similarly, if one was seeking to know what pupils didn't know then this too poses huge conceptual and empirical issues. Where would such an enquiry end? Yet by nature, if a researcher is asking a pupil whether they know a certain proposition, then they must also be finding out if they do not know it, in which case, they are finding out of what they are ignorant. By asking certain questions in my research, I would discover certain trends and patterns of the sample. For example, by asking where Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, it became evident that many pupils were ignorant of the killings in the East. While the fundamental aim of the research was to explore what pupils already know and understand about key areas of the Holocaust, discovering their ignorance or confusion on such areas was equally enlightening and helpful. Had the principal goal of the research been to discover

what pupils didn't know then such an exploration could in one sense never have a satisfactory end.

In relating this to the theory, my study therefore asked questions about the Holocaust with the belief that this would demonstrate that certain incorrigible propositions are more commonly known than others. The questions used were also open-ended so that pupils could demonstrate their understanding of these propositions and how they related to each other. Moreover, in order to understand the Holocaust in any meaningful sense, there are certain propositions that one must know and some propositions which one might not need to know. For someone to have even a basic understanding of the Holocaust they would be expected to know that the Nazi regime persecuted and murdered Jews in Europe during the Second World War. It is thus reasonable to design a curriculum, which expects pupils to acquire knowledge of certain propositions so that they can understand the Holocaust as effectively as possible. My study therefore sought to explore pupils' knowledge and understanding in certain key areas which were considered particularly important.

Knowledge and understanding are therefore indivisibly connected. It is thus important that the researcher acquires a picture of what pupils know and what they understand in relation to certain themes and propositions regarding the Holocaust.

The discipline of history makes knowledge and understanding of the past possible and a sound methodology makes an understanding of pupils' knowledge and understanding possible as well. This means that one can address the key research questions of this study, namely, what 13 and 14 year-olds know about the Holocaust before they study it in history lessons; what they understand about it and what the

implications of this knowledge and understanding are for curriculum design and teaching.

Furthermore, only by understanding the disciplinary foundations can an effective research instrument be developed and some of the pitfalls of earlier studies be avoided. In designing the research and in constructing the methodology, the epistemological and theoretical foundations remained central, so that pupils' preconceptions could be explored as effectively as possible. Different methods were considered with the decision-making process being heavily influenced by the theories underpinning the research.

## Chapter Four

### The Methodology of the Research

#### The Research Questions

When planning and preparing my research methods, there were certain questions which were at the forefront of my mind and lay at the heart of what the research was trying to achieve. The first of these questions was:

What knowledge do thirteen and fourteen year-olds in English schools have about the Holocaust?

The specific and precise nature of this question was purposeful. The study of the Holocaust is not mandatory in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. With limited time and resources, extending the scope of the research to include schools in these countries was unrealistic.

The focus on 13 and 14 year-olds purposefully excluded looking at the preconceptions and pre-existent knowledge that pupils may hold in primary schools, although the knowledge acquired from primary school would no doubt affect their contemporary understandings. While such research would be a valuable addition to our understanding of Holocaust education, it would have broadened the scope of this particular research project to an unmanageable level and reduced the quantity of data that I wanted to gather.

In the absence of any major quantitative study on the sources of pupils' preconceptions on the Holocaust and in order to contextualise the answers which pupils gave, my survey included a short series of questions about the origins of

pupils' knowledge, including a question on whether or not they had previously studied the Holocaust in school. This will be discussed in more detail later.

This trend of teaching the Holocaust in year nine (ages 13 and 14) history lessons was highlighted by the findings of the HEDP in their national study conducted in 2009. They noted that '76% of the 992 respondents reported that they taught about the Holocaust during this academic year [year 9]'.<sup>175</sup> Conversely, however, this means that 24% of teachers do not teach about the Holocaust during year nine which means that many are likely to do so in years seven or eight. Considering the aim of my research is to find out what pupils know *before* they have studied the Holocaust in Key Stage Three history, it would seem unfair and counter-productive to include in my research, schools where the Holocaust has already been taught about to year nine pupils. When deciding and arranging which schools to visit, I ensured that I only went to schools where the Holocaust was taught about in year nine history. It was of course perfectly possible that pupils had formally studied the Holocaust in other subjects at secondary school or in history lessons in primary school. I judged this to be perfectly acceptable and simply one of the varying sources of knowledge. There was also a question on the survey to enable respondents to say whether or not this was the case.

In addition to specifying year nine pupils in English secondary schools, the research question also emphasised the aim of finding out pupils' knowledge of the Holocaust. The use of the term 'knowledge', in addition to being explained in Chapter Three, lies in purposeful contrast to conceptual understanding. As Lee and Ashby correctly state,

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<sup>175</sup> Pettigrew et al. *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 34.

It is necessary to distinguish between *substantive* history on the one hand and *second-order* or *procedure* ideas about history on the other. Substantive history is the content of history, what history is “about”... Concepts like historical evidence, explanation, change and accounts are ideas that provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge.<sup>176</sup>

The work of Lee in ‘Putting Principles into Practice’, represented a major step forward in exploring conceptual preconceptions. My research, while recognising the significance of conceptual understandings within the discipline of history, examined substantive preconceptions in the specific area of the Holocaust. It included the questions such as ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘how’ and when’. It sought to answer questions such as, what knowledge do pupils have about the personnel and agencies that were involved in the Holocaust? In which countries did the Holocaust take place and how was it carried out? How were the Jews treated and why were they treated like this? When did it take place and what events happened within the Holocaust? These sorts of questions about the substance of the Holocaust demonstrate the type of knowledge that the research is seeking to explore.

My second major research question that governed the methods was:

What understanding do 13 and 14 year-olds have about the Holocaust?

The distinction between knowledge and understanding is an important one. It is possible to know something without necessarily understanding it even if we have reasonable grounds for our knowledge. One may know for example that gravity makes an apple fall from a tree but may not necessarily understand how or why this takes place. Similarly therefore, pupils may be able to correctly state that the Nazis

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<sup>176</sup> Lee and Ashby, ‘Progression in Historical Understanding’, 127.

killed Jews in concentration camps without any real understanding of how or why this occurred. It was thus very important that the research instrument did not present the idea that a pupil understood something simply because they knew a correct proposition. Similarly, it was equally crucial that the survey did not underestimate a pupil's understanding simply because of an absence of certain factual knowledge. In other words a pupil who is familiar with the terms 'Auschwitz', 'Holocaust' and 'Nazi' does not automatically *understand* more about the Holocaust than someone who is less able to recognise these specific terms. It is possible for a pupil to have limited knowledge of specific and technical terms and yet have a relatively clear understanding of how the Nazi regime treated the Jews during the Second World War. The terminology, language and register of the Holocaust enables a more fluent and sophisticated construction of one's understanding but it is not necessarily the same thing as the understanding itself.

In order to prevent this from happening therefore, the questions that were asked of pupils were typically open-ended, allowing for them to express their knowledge and understanding. This meant that where the respondent did not necessarily give the correct answer to the question, knowledge and understanding could still be demonstrated. This allowed for a more sophisticated analysis of the data than simply marking it right or wrong and explains why there are so few closed questions included in the research instruments. This methodological approach draws upon the work of Bischoping who critically observed that many Holocaust-knowledge surveys 'are based on closed (i.e. multiple-choice) items that do not access critical-thinking skills, limiting the definition of knowledge to rote memorisation'.<sup>177</sup> Instead of seeing answers as simply right or wrong, Bischoping recommended that

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<sup>177</sup> Bischoping, 'Method and Meaning', 455.

researchers interpret incorrect answers in order to see what ideas are there, even if they are confused ideas based upon sporadic and amalgamated bits of knowledge: ‘an interpretative approach to knowledge, focusing on the factors underlying “incorrect” answers, may be as useful as counting “correct” answers’.<sup>178</sup>

While agreeing with certain aspects of Bischoping’s assessment, there is a danger that she goes too far. Her emphasis on exploring different dimensions of Holocaust knowledge (e.g., ‘the abilities to synthesise, organise, compare and contrast information’<sup>179</sup>) potentially broadens research beyond Holocaust knowledge into other aspects of assessment which are not necessarily determined by one’s knowledge or understanding of the Holocaust *per se*. Bischoping is correct that:

Closed questions (and even some short-answer open questions) typically used to study Holocaust knowledge are limiting because they arbitrarily emphasise specific kinds of readily-measured knowledge: names and dates, facts and figures.<sup>180</sup>

Nevertheless, by knowing specific areas (including names and dates, facts and figures) teachers can appreciate where popular knowledge is either strong or weak. After all, one cannot *understand* something unless one has some basic knowledge of the subject. Although a pupil may understand something without being familiar with the terminology, they cannot properly understand something if they do not know about it. In my methodological approach I sought to acquire both pupils’

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 459.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

knowledge and understanding, while appreciating the philosophical and epistemological differences between the two.

My third research question was:

What are the implications of these preconceptions for curriculum design and teaching?

This line of enquiry sought to go beyond simply finding out what pupils knew and understood and using their preconceptions to inform policy-making, planning, designing and teaching. The inclusion of this question was based upon the belief that pedagogy ought to be grounded in research and that the most effective teaching of the Holocaust will take account of what pupils typically already know and understand as well as what they do not. While it was recognised that every class will contain myriad preconceptions and that a study of this size cannot be generalised from a sample to a population, the dearth of existing empirical studies on the subject necessitated that common trends and themes were explored, which may help inform teachers in the future. In the present absence of any sizeable study of this nature, it seemed important that pedagogic implications were thoughtfully and cautiously discussed.

### **The Research Instrument**

The choosing of the research instrument was determined by various factors. These factors were both theoretical and practical in nature. In theoretical terms, the instrument needed to cohere with the epistemological and ontological position which underpinned the research. In practical terms, the instrument needed to provide the appropriate type, depth and breadth of data that would enable me to

satisfactorily address the research questions. This meant that I needed to be able to have an instrument which explored respondents' propositional knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and which could be analysed effectively and fairly.

When considering the philosophical and theoretical foundations of my study I was particularly influenced by the work of Janowitz and Hammersley,<sup>181</sup> who described their approaches to research in the social sciences as the 'enlightenment model'. This stands in particular contrast to the 'engineering model' where – within the field of pedagogy – the variations between individual students, different learning environments and cultural attitudes are not sufficiently considered. The enlightenment model, however, in the words of Hammersley, accounts for:

The diverse orientations of people involved in social activities; the way in which people actively make sense of their surroundings, and how this shapes what they do; the unintended and often unforeseen consequences of actions; and the resulting contingency of most courses of events.<sup>187</sup>

The research methods that I chose were influenced by the enlightenment model as it emphasises the varying meanings which social actions can have and challenges the positivist approach to educational research. The positivist methods of approaching the social sciences, in a similar way to the natural sciences, links very closely to an objectivist epistemology. If an objectivist epistemology is assumed, then the research may well be trying to uncover what pupils know and understand about a meaningful reality which already exists and which exists irrespective of the meaning

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<sup>181</sup> Hammersley, 'Educational Research and Teaching'; Hammersley, 'The Relevance of Qualitative Research'.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 394.

that they apply to it. This contradicts the model of knowledge discussed in the previous chapter. The epistemological approach that I hold to, views the past as complex and sophisticated due to the nature of human thought and human agency. As Crotty states in his definition of constructivism, ‘truth or meaning, comes into the existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world... It is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon’.<sup>188</sup> Although in epistemological terms the phenomenon is constructed, the status of that phenomenon is to be seen as a reality outside of the mind. Thus in ontological terms, the status of something may be real, even though the meaning of it needs to be constructed.

Constructivism and the enlightenment model are typically used by qualitative researchers and this influenced my decision to include methods which acquired qualitative data. At the same time, it was felt that the complexities of various aspects of the Holocaust, which were particularly nuanced and difficult to express through simple written answers on a questionnaire, merited research methods such as interviews or focus groups.

In practical terms, I recognised the importance of using research methods which would enable students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. While the purpose of this study was not to generalise from a sample to a population, it nevertheless seemed important to have a relatively large sample in order to consider trends and patterns within it. In this regard, quantitative methods seemed more appropriate as they enabled me to examine students’ propositional knowledge over a range of different areas. Moreover, it meant that respondents’

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<sup>188</sup> Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research*, 9.

answers to the key questions such as who, what, where, why, how and when (with reference to the Holocaust) could be addressed. Consequently, using complementary methods seemed logical and enabled the dovetailing of both theoretical and practical factors.

### **Research Design**

The precise methods that I selected can be divided between quantitative and qualitative research, although triangulation between the data from different methods took place. The quantitative research methods consisted of providing students with a blank spider diagram on which they were asked to write what they knew about the Holocaust. This is discussed in more detail below. The other quantitative research method I used was surveys which enabled me to explore students' knowledge of the key questions about the Holocaust. It also enabled me to gather a significant amount of data relatively efficiently. The qualitative research method that I employed was semi-structured interviews, which is also discussed in more detail below. This method enabled me to explore students' influences, attitudes and thoughts about the Holocaust and to develop and test many of the ideas and theories that had been generated from the quantitative data. Some issues, such as defining Jews, the nature of resistance and the decision-making of either perpetrators or victims were better articulated through discussion and dialogue rather than by writing answers on a questionnaire.

Despite having the above rationale for choosing these particular research methods, it was also important to consider the limitations of the research methods that were rejected.

Research methods broadly fit into two categories; that is they are associated with a positivistic or phenomenological methodological position. Within the former, methods typically include surveys, experimental studies, longitudinal studies and cross-section studies. Within the latter, methods often include action research, and ethnography among others.

In the case of both experimental studies and action research, the purpose of the research is to observe and analyse the outcome of an intervention or change, be it a treatment, programme or procedure. According to Neville, ‘experimental studies are done in carefully controlled and structured environments and enable the causal relationships of phenomena to be identified and analysed’.<sup>189</sup> Within the practical context of multiple classrooms as well as the epistemological context of antipositivism, such an approach was considered impossible and inconsistent. Moreover, the key research questions that I was trying to answer did not necessitate any intervention which made both an experimental study and action research an inappropriate research method.

Two research methods which were given particular consideration were longitudinal studies and cross-section studies. The former would have allowed me to explore students’ knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust over a specific period of time, such as three, five or even seven years. While there is an absence of longitudinal studies on students’ ideas about the Holocaust, such a project may have drifted away from exploring the nature of students’ preconceptions. Increasingly, such a study would need to address the sources and origins of their preconceptions, which while both fascinating and very important, was not what I wanted to focus my

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<sup>189</sup> Neville, *Introduction to Research*, 7.

research on. Moreover, such a study posed a number of practical challenges in terms of accessing the same students for a number of years. Such a study would most probably have involved a small sample from one school and the huge number of factors affecting students' learning, such as the quality of their Holocaust teaching, may have limited the applicability of the study to other contexts.

A cross-section study would again have been very interesting and could have worked well with my research. I could have considered the similarities and differences between boys and girls, as well as students from different geographical, ethnic, religious and socio-economic groups. This, however, would have involved a very large sample which would have been carefully constructed to ensure the validity of any comparisons that were made. This posed practical difficulties and threatened to make the study overly complex and beyond what was reasonably possible for a part-time PhD student.

When considering research methods associated with a phenomenological epistemology, particular thought was given to ethnography. Although definitions of ethnography vary, Harris and Johnson helpfully stated:

Ethnography literally means 'a portrait of a people'. An ethnography is a written description of a particular culture – the customs, beliefs and behaviour – based on information collected through fieldwork.<sup>190</sup>

When applying this to my study, it would have entailed observing and analysing students' learning about the Holocaust. While this may have generated some useful data, it may have been difficult to distinguish what students' knew *prior* to their

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<sup>190</sup> Harris and Johnson, *Cultural Anthropology*, 17.

lessons and what they had acquired through their programme of study. Moreover, the content of the lessons would have influenced the particular areas of Holocaust knowledge and understanding that could be observed. There were also practical problems. Ethnographic studies involve a significant amount of observation. As a part-time student in full-time employment, it would have been impossible to have found the time to have conducted such a study. In contrast, surveys and semi-structured interviews did not generate these problems.

Survey research (supplemented by interviews) appeared to fit the practical and intellectual demands of acquiring an understanding of common trends in pupils' thinking and in pupil knowledge. Sapsford defined 'survey' as:

A research style that involves systematic observation or systematic interviewing to describe a natural population and, generally, draw inferences about causation or patterns of influence from systematic covariation in the resulting data.<sup>191</sup>

In this study, survey research was an appropriate methodological choice, not because the findings were to be generalised from a sample to a population, but rather because this methodology enabled me to examine and then subsequently analyse the ideas of the respondents in the sample.

The first process, which generated both quantitative and qualitative data, was giving the pupils a spider diagram (see appendix 1.2) with eight empty boxes and asking them to write in the boxes anything they knew about the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War. The purpose of this exercise was to allow the pupils to record any area of Holocaust knowledge or understanding that they had, without

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<sup>191</sup> Sapsford, *Survey Research*, 12.

them being restricted by specific questions. When exploring his students' preconceptions, Totten always used clusters instead of spider diagrams.<sup>192</sup> Clusters were similar to spider diagrams in that there were points coming from a single source, yet each answer that the pupils gave had branches coming from them which allowed for further explanation.

Although clusters do serve useful pedagogic functions,<sup>193</sup> such as a pre-course assessment, piloting showed that a number of pupils found a structured spider diagram far more manageable and less daunting, subsequently producing more helpful results. Punch highlighted one advantage of this method by suggesting that spider diagrams avoid 'imposing adult defined categories' upon the participants.<sup>194</sup>

The spider diagram thus served a useful purpose but it did not allow me to explore designated areas of Holocaust knowledge. Furthermore, some pupils may have possessed knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust which they omitted to put on the spider diagram, but which they would perhaps have recalled if prompted by certain questions. Subsequently, a self-completion questionnaire was needed.

Unlike most self-completion questionnaires, which are typically completed at the respondent's leisure, the participant provided the data within the context of the classroom setting in a lesson-style format. This provided both benefits and challenges, which are discussed later in this chapter. One of the benefits was that it often yielded high response rates, although this may have been due to issues

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<sup>192</sup> Totten, 'The Start is as Important as the Finish', 70.

<sup>193</sup> Rico, 'Clustering: A Re-writing Process'.

<sup>194</sup> Punch, 'Interviewing Strategies with Young People', 53.

regarding the freedom of consent.<sup>195</sup> Oppenheim highlighted some of the practical challenges which are found by working in schools by saying that not only is there:

The additional problems of overcoming the children's possible fear of strangers and getting some genuine and valid responses; but also there are the logistics of lessons and break-times to cope with, and after the third or fourth interview every child in the school will have heard (a probably inaccurate) version of the questions being asked!<sup>196</sup>

There were various practical and methodological advantages to using a self-completion questionnaire. The most obvious of these was that I could gather a significant amount of data very quickly and easily. In two hours, with two classes I could have 50 or so responses. I had the participants that I needed seated in front of me, almost all of whom seemed more than happy to participate in my research, finding enjoyment and novelty in having a new face in the classroom and a temporary break from the regular history syllabus. Oppenheim states that 'with a promise of confidentiality, excellent results can be obtained quite rapidly from large numbers of school children' and I found this to be the case.<sup>197</sup>

Throughout the construction of the questionnaire, I sought to produce questions which demonstrated reliability. This meant that the question was answered the same way every time it was asked. In order to do this, I sought to minimise contentious or loaded words. Unfortunately, the subject matter that I was exploring contained words which are often used, including by the press, in a pejorative sense, such as

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<sup>195</sup> David, Edwards and Alldred, 'Children and School-Based Research'.

<sup>196</sup> Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design*, 141.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

‘Nazi’ and ‘Hitler’. The term ‘Jew’ is also loaded, both geo-politically and unfortunately, sometimes as a colloquially pejorative term amongst some children. Yet in order to be historically accurate, these potentially loaded terms were the correct ones and were thus used. By clearly using the terms in a historical and technical sense, it was hoped that this would minimise, although it was recognised that it would probably not entirely exclude, different interpretations of the same question. De Vaus argues that:

A question that fails to achieve consistent responses is unreliable... When analysing questions we assume that all respondents have answered the same questions. However if respondents interpret the questions in different ways they are effectively answering different questions.<sup>198</sup>

Oppenheim writes, ‘we must not imagine that once questions go into the field they will constitute an absolutely standardised set of stimuli; nor will the responses reach us in ‘pure form’’.<sup>199</sup> In the light of this issue of reliability, the word Holocaust was not used in the questionnaire because it is a word which is very much subject to interpretation. Some historians use it to refer to all deaths caused by the Nazi regime while others use it in a narrower sense to simply describe Jewish deaths. There was also the problem, as piloting clearly demonstrated, that some pupils would not be familiar with the use of this technical term.

In addition to reliability, it was also important that the questionnaire had validity. De Vaus states that ‘a valid questionnaire is one that measures what we think it

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<sup>198</sup> De Vaus, *Surveys in Social Research*, 97.

<sup>199</sup> Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design*, 121.

does'.<sup>200</sup> To ensure this, I tested the questions on various pupils in small focus groups, asking them to explain to me orally how they understood the wording of the question. In seeking to maximise the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, I was personally present while they were being carried out. This allowed me to answer questions and clarify the meaning of the question if someone was confused. It also helped to reduce the "teacher-effect" as in most cases, the teacher left the classroom and simply allowed me to conduct my research.

In seeking to find out about pupils' knowledge, understandings and perceptions, it was possible to use either open ended or closed questions or a combination of both.

De Vaus highlights some of the problems with closed questions:

A major problem of forced-choice questions is that on some issues they can create false opinions either by giving an insufficient range of alternatives from which to choose or by prompting people with acceptable answers.<sup>201</sup>

What De Vaus doesn't mention, but which is equally important, is that respondents may simply guess the answer. Furthermore, by giving a list of answers, it can provide oversimplification of complex historical phenomenon. For example, if the question, 'who carried out this treatment of the Jews during World War Two?' was given multiple choice responses, it may encourage pupils to simply say it was Hitler or the SS or the German Army, or even a combination of all three, although this is something of an oversimplification. In addition, it does not highlight whether or not pupils are aware of the role played by collaborators in Nazi occupied territories unless it is given as an option. If it is given as an option and some pupils circle it, it

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<sup>200</sup> De Vaus, *Surveys in Social Research*, 96.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 99.

does not necessarily mean that they had pre-existing knowledge of the existence or role of collaborators. It can also encourage a mono-causal approach to historical explanation, which would be counter-productive to their development within history. Instead, an open ended approach allows for pupils to answer according to their own ideas and allows them to express the relationship that existed between individuals and organisations in relation to the Holocaust.

The main disadvantage of open ended questions was that they can appear daunting. It was important to leave sufficient space for those pupils who wanted to give detailed answers but not make the questionnaire seem overwhelming to those who only wanted to write a few words or a single sentence. Piloting helped with deciding how many blank lines to provide for each question.

One positive outcome of the questionnaire was that pupils were more likely to give honest answers in an anonymised setting. In research carried out by Tourangeau and Smith, it was strongly suggested that respondents reported higher number of sexual partners as well as higher drug and alcohol consumption when answering these questions in a self-completion questionnaire as opposed to a face to face interview.<sup>202</sup> Bryman argues that ‘there is also a tendency for respondents to under-report activities that induce anxiety or about which they are sensitive’.<sup>203</sup> Of course it is perfectly possible that discussing the Holocaust was a sensitive issue and may have even induced anxiety.<sup>204</sup> The use of a self-completion questionnaire provided an opportunity for pupils to express themselves on the subject without perceiving pressure or a judgemental attitude from the researcher.

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<sup>202</sup> Tourangeau and Smith, ‘Asking Sensitive Questions’.

<sup>203</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 134.

<sup>204</sup> Epstein, ‘Inflicting Trauma’.

One common disadvantage of using a questionnaire was that it potentially hindered those who were less literate or who did not speak English as a first language. In such cases it was possible that their knowledge and understanding was greater than their answers suggested. Some of the pupils in my sample did not have English as their first language although they were often helped by Teaching Assistants (TA). I briefed the TAs to ensure that they only explained the meaning of the questions, rather than provide the answers. Unlike the interviews, the questionnaire advantaged those who were reticent in verbal communication and preferred to express themselves through writing instead.

Overall, the use of self-completion questionnaires provided an epistemologically and methodologically sound way to gather relatively large amounts of quantitative data which would help with the revealing of common trends and patterns in Holocaust knowledge, understandings and perceptions.

Nevertheless, there were some aspects of pupils' preconceptions which were better explored using other methods and thus I decided to also conduct interviews in addition to the questionnaires. Attitudes, biases and prejudices, for example, were less easy to demonstrate through questionnaires as verbal probes in interviews helped to clarify the exact meaning of a comment. The decision to use interviews was also influenced by the desire to ensure that those who were more comfortable expressing themselves through speech rather than writing, were also given an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Moreover, there were some topics, such as resistance, which seemed too complex to explore through questionnaires.

When deciding upon the form of interview to use, it was important to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the various options. The non-directive interview, which is largely associated with psychiatric interviews, was not appropriate for acquiring pupils' understandings in specific areas of the Holocaust. Bryman described an unstructured interview as one where 'the researcher uses at most an *aide memoire* as a brief set of prompts'<sup>205</sup> while Burgess suggested that it was comparable in nature to a conversation.<sup>206</sup> While this was helpful in highlighting some of the ideas that pupils held concerning the Holocaust, it was felt that pupils needed more guidance.

Structured interviews are defined by Wragg as those 'based on a carefully worded interview schedule'<sup>207</sup> while Cohen and Manion said that 'the sequence and wording of the questions are determined by means of a schedule and the interviewer is left little freedom to make modifications'.<sup>208</sup> The principal advantage of this structured interview is that it minimises variation of the schedule and thus produces greater reliability. Yet even within structured interviews, the body language, eye contact and subsequent rapport is likely to vary from respondent to respondent which means that there can be no guarantee of absolute reliability. Structured interviews are often used for the acquisition of short answers, which are easily codified. It is typically the case that the interviewer is not expecting or hoping for expansive or lengthy responses. In contrast, I wanted pupils to actually explain their thinking and to try and probe at areas of their understanding. Yet at the same time, there were key

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<sup>205</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 320.

<sup>206</sup> Burgess, *In the Field*.

<sup>207</sup> Wragg, *Conducting and Analysing Interviews*, 9.

<sup>208</sup> Cohen and Manion, *Research Methods in Education*, 273.

topics that I wanted to explore, although within these, I needed the freedom to explore specific sub-topics more fully if the situation arose. This led to the use of semi-structured interviews, which provided me with the ability to explore certain themes in a consistent manner while having the freedom to develop these within the interview process.

Within that process of semi-structured interviews, I adopted open-ended questions, which in the words of Kerlinger, ‘supply a frame of reference for respondents’ answers, but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression’.<sup>209</sup> Yet in addition to just questioning respondents, I used other methods within the interview. In her article, *Interviewing Strategies with Young People: the ‘Secret Box’, Stimulus Material and Task-Based Activities*, Punch argues that a wide range of methods are beneficial and bring with them the advantages of helping ‘to engage young people’s interest,... account for their different preferences,... stimulate discussion about a potentially sensitive topic and... help to lessen the unequal power relationship between the adult researcher and the young participant’.<sup>210</sup> One of these techniques included giving pupils five cards, each one containing an event which happened during the Holocaust. Pupils were asked to put these in chronological order. It was elucidating to hear pupils discussing the order amongst themselves and then explaining to me why they had chosen that particular order. Using this technique highlighted whether or not pupils had a concept that the Holocaust was not a solid plan from the beginning but developed as a process during the Nazi era.

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<sup>209</sup> Kerlinger, *Foundations of Behavioural Research*, 31.

<sup>210</sup> Punch, ‘Interviewing Strategies with Young People’, 45.

In addition to this, pupils were given specific scenarios which were faced during the Holocaust. This was to some extent a measure of pupils' historical empathy but was principally used to explore how they perceived issues regarding passivity, collaboration, resistance and acquiescence. By providing example stimulus material, it helped to spark off discussions and prevented questions about topics which would otherwise have been largely theoretical. The range of methods within the interview had a positive effect and did help create a relaxed environment. Relying on the findings of Harden et al.,<sup>211</sup> Punch stated that 'young people tend not to be as likely as adults to give long answers to open-ended questions so stimulus material and prompts can enable them to expand their responses'.<sup>212</sup>

Using an activity and some stimulus material within the settings of semi-structured interviews was helpful in generating rich data and ensuring that the respondents felt relaxed and comfortable. The purpose of the interviews was less on acquiring pupils' knowledge but gathering a sense of what pupils *understood* about various aspects of the Holocaust. It also enabled pupils to go off topic somewhat and talk about other areas of the Holocaust, often things which they perceived to be important. Although the interviews were relatively structured and there were particular topics that I wanted to cover, the nature of the interview and the atmosphere that I tried to cultivate was one that enabled pupils to expand on topics or introduce new themes.

The pupils were interviewed in groups of three for a number of reasons. One of the most important of these was that it was small enough to build up a good rapport. It

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<sup>211</sup> Harden, Scott, Backett-Milburn and Jackson, 'Can't Talk, Won't Talk?'.

<sup>212</sup> Punch, 'Interviewing Strategies with Young People', 54.

was also hoped that by having two of their friends with them, pupils may feel less intimidated. Three pupils also enabled a range of opinions and ideas to exist so that the interviewees could challenge or develop many of the themes that were discussed. Three pupils also worked particularly well for the chronology task as pupils could discuss why they thought certain events went in that order.<sup>213</sup>

### **Areas of the Holocaust to be Explored**

The complementary methods approach meant that I needed to decide which areas of Holocaust knowledge and understanding I wanted to explore through the questionnaire and which areas I wanted to examine through interviews. It was possible to include the same topic in both research methods but this was generally avoided because the huge range of potential topics meant that it seemed more beneficial to look at a wider range of issues than one issue twice. I was also keen to explore as many topics as was both necessary and feasible without compromising on the quality of the study

Deciding on which topics to include and which to leave out was no easy task, though the advice of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was helpful: ‘No one can learn, or teach, everything about the Holocaust. First determine your goals, and then select the most appropriate material’.<sup>214</sup> There has, however, been some considerable discussion about what pupils ought to know about the Holocaust and what should appear on the syllabus of Holocaust education. While choosing areas of pupil knowledge and understanding to research is not the same thing as

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<sup>213</sup> The chronology task involved providing pupils with five cards containing important events in the Holocaust. They were then asked to work as a group to place them in chronological order.

<sup>214</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Teaching about the Holocaust*.

saying what should or shouldn't be on a Holocaust curriculum, there had to be large-scale overlap. It would seem contradictory to argue that a certain topic should appear within a history syllabus for the Holocaust and yet suggest it is not important to look at pupils' preconceptions regarding that particular topic. Subsequently therefore, by including a specific topic in my research, I was by implication at least, suggesting its significance to the Holocaust curriculum, although there were undoubtedly a number of very significant aspects of the Holocaust which were not explicitly explored through the research such as the Wannsee Conference or Operation Reinhard.

In his article, *Ten Suggestions for Teaching the Holocaust*, Glanz highlights eight topics that any study of the Holocaust should include:<sup>215</sup>

1. A history of antisemitism
2. The early years of the National Socialist German Workers Party movement (1919-27)
3. The Nazi breakthrough (1928-33)
4. Setting the stage for war (1933-39)
5. The War period
6. The Holocaust, the genocide of the Jews and others
7. Perpetrators, victims, well-wishers and bystanders
8. Controversial issues

It is possible that Glanz places too much emphasis on a history of Nazism. Out of Glanz's eight suggestions, five of them are on the history of Nazism or the German

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<sup>215</sup> Glanz, 'Ten Suggestions for Teaching the Holocaust'.

state. If a teacher was fortunate enough to have eight lessons to teach the Holocaust, it might be deemed inappropriate to spend so much time on contextual background.

Henry Friendlander points to five essential topics.<sup>216</sup>

1. The German historical setting that produced Hitler and the Nazi movement
2. Totalitarianism
3. Jewish history
4. The behaviour of bystanders, the reaction of the world outside to the fate of the Jews
5. The Nazi concentration camps

This list is also problematic as it appears to exclude a number of important themes such as resistance, the ghettos and the *Einsatzgruppen*.

In the HEDP survey of 2009, teachers were given a list of thirty five topics and asked to mark along a five point scale how likely they were to include that topic in their teaching about the Holocaust. Below are the top ten topics as well as the number of teachers who were more likely than not to include it.<sup>217</sup>

1. The experiences of individual men, women and children who were persecuted by the Nazis (900)
2. Auschwitz-Birkenau (875)
3. Propaganda and stereotyping (801)
4. Kristallnacht (701)
5. The choices and actions of bystanders (671)

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<sup>216</sup> Friedlander, 'Towards a Methodology'.

<sup>217</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 124.

6. The Nuremberg Laws (606)
7. The choices and actions of rescuers (604)
8. The study of Hitler's rise to power and the Nazi state (600)
9. Combating current racist ideology (595)
10. An account of life in the Polish ghettos (e.g. Lodz) (573)

It must be taken into account that out of the 900 who chose the statement about individual experiences, only 65% (n591) of them were history teachers. Thirty per cent (n269) taught about the Holocaust in RE for example. It is logical that an RE teacher will be looking at the philosophical, ethical, moral implications of the Holocaust more than looking at any sort of historical narrative or historical explanation. This may perhaps explain why the choices of bystanders and of rescuers feature so heavily, although they do also appear on the list by Glanz and Friedlander.

The topics that I chose demonstrated some overlap and some divergence from the lists cited as seen in table 1.

**Table 1** **Research Topics**

	<b>Research Topic</b>	<b>Research Instrument</b>
1	Pre-war Jewish life, culture and identity	Interview
2	Chronology: events, processes and radicalisation	Survey and Interview
3	Perpetrators: who implemented the Holocaust and why?	Survey
4	Responses: resistance, collaboration and bystanders	Interview
5	Methods of killing and the camp system	Survey
6	The scope of the Holocaust	Survey
7	The ending of the Holocaust and its legacy	Survey and interview

Knowledge was modelled in this particular way for various reasons. As discussed in Chapter 3, there were key substantive questions which needed to be explored, such as who, what, when, where, how and why. By looking at students' knowledge and understanding of Jews, Jewish life, culture and identity as well as the perpetrators themselves, the question of who was involved in the Holocaust was examined. Asking questions about the methods employed showed students' knowledge and understanding of what happened and how it happened, while the scope of the Holocaust – which included the geographical scope – explored students' ideas about where the killings took place. The chronology activity and other questions in the semi-structured interview answered perceptions about when the Holocaust occurred while questions on the perpetrators discussed the issue of why the Holocaust took place.

In addition to using these key substantive questions, I felt that there were central elements of the Holocaust which were fundamental to any meaningful understanding of the topic. These had been influenced by reading core texts on the subjects such as *The Holocaust* by Gilbert. Central elements included pre-War persecution, the ghettos, the camps and the *Einsatzgruppen*. The instruments were designed to ensure that respondents had the opportunity to show their knowledge and understanding of these aspects of the Holocaust.

The modelling of knowledge was also influenced by the literature with which I had engaged. The work of Short,<sup>218</sup> for example, highlighted the importance of exploring pupils' knowledge of Jewish identity while the HEDP report of 2009<sup>219</sup> showed the lack of attention that was given to the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* as well as the ending of the Holocaust and its contemporary legacy.

Table 1 also shows whether I explored that topic through the survey or through the interview. If a topic was being explored in both the survey and interview, it was because different areas of that topic were being explored and the most appropriate method was then selected accordingly. In addition to the seven topics listed, I also asked questions concerning the sources of pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. It is important to take into account when comparing the list above with that of Glanz and Friedlander that the choice of topics for my research had to be somewhat broad and generic. Unlike the lists of Glanz and Friedlander, I was not saying that this is what ought to be taught to all pupils that study the Holocaust; rather it was a list of generic areas within Holocaust education where preconceptions need to be successfully explored.

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<sup>218</sup> Short, 'Teaching the Holocaust'.

<sup>219</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*.

The piloting suggested that historical antisemitism and pre-war Jewish life were areas where some pupils possessed an absence of knowledge. Consequently, it was believed that by exploring these topics through interview, pupils might be able to reveal more understanding. In addition, gentle probing during the interviews could be employed, which was not possible through the use of survey. Furthermore, the important topic of resistance was too sophisticated to appear on the survey. Pilot survey work which had included questions on resistance had made the error of forcing the respondents into making gross generalisations about the nature and extent of Jewish resistance. The sophisticated, varied and often unique examples of resistance could be better articulated through interviews rather than by survey questions.

The topics that I selected certainly covered the whole chronological spectrum of the Holocaust. They looked at whether pupils knew and understood the historical antecedents and context of the genocide as well as looking at Jewish culture and practices before the War. In addition, the topics explored through the questionnaire and interviews looked at the reasons why the Holocaust ended and enquired about what would happen to Jews who survived. This was an area that I was particularly interested to find out about as many teachers appear never to cover this particularly aspect of the historical narrative.<sup>220</sup> The topics that I selected sought to deal with some of the fundamental and foundational elements, such as how were the Jews treated, why were they treated like this and who carried out this treatment. The survey also explored the means of extermination, principally the camp system, asking pupils what they knew about the camps and to describe what would happen to Jews on arrival there. Although there was no question that specifically explored

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 125-6.

pupils' knowledge of the mass shootings in the east, it was felt that the questions 'what sort of things happened to the Jews during World War Two?' and 'what methods did the Nazis use to kill the Jews?', did provide the opportunity and scope for a pupil to mention this if they wished. More precise questions were asked about the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* in some of the follow-up interviews.

It was recognised that in an ideal world, it would be desirable to explore pupils' knowledge and understanding of every topic within the Holocaust but practical restraints on time prevented this from being a possibility. The knowledge areas which were chosen were selected on the basis that they covered what are generally considered to be the key themes necessary for an understanding of this subject.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In designing and implementing the research it was crucial that a wide range of ethical considerations were taken into account. Within contemporary social research this has too often amounted to the acknowledgement and application of a universalised and generally accepted set of codes or principles such as the British Sociological Association, the Social Research Association or the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Somewhat controversially, Homan argued that:

We have now reached the point where researchers are operating the principle of informed consent not to protect their subjects but to protect themselves and to guard against the possibility that subjects will claim their rights through litigation.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Homan, *The Ethics of Social Research*, 73.

While standardised ethical principles are essential and this research sought to follow the ethical guidelines of BERA, it is also important to recognise that there is often a wider array of potential problems for those working with children and young people. Heath et al. in their important article on informed consent and gatekeepers within child and youth-oriented institutions, highlight some of the major issues which relate to research within schools.<sup>222</sup> Perhaps one of the most important of these is:

The sub-ordinate position of children and young people within youth-orientated institutional settings, and the ease with which their voices can be overlooked by both gatekeepers and researchers.<sup>223</sup>

This research sought to take this into consideration and shift the emphasis on protecting the pupils and ensuring that they were willing to participate and did not feel under duress or influence.

### *Gatekeepers*

One of the first ethical issues that arose was in arranging my visits to each school. The support of the head of department within each institution was very useful in facilitating the administration involved in setting up the research. Heath et al. noted with regards to gatekeepers that:

Access may be denied for many reasons, from pressures of time and institutional inconvenience, through to reluctance to expose quasi-private

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<sup>222</sup> Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles, 'Informed Consent'.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 405.

worlds to public scrutiny, or the actual or assumed inappropriateness of a proposed research topic and/or its methods.<sup>224</sup>

In their empirical study of researchers' relationship with gatekeepers within educational research, Heath et al. suggested that some researchers found gatekeepers to be too paternalistic and assumed a lack of competency in the children to give their own informed consent. They also emphasised the importance of respecting pupil agency and questioned 'whether or not the decision to give or withhold access is always best made by gatekeepers'.<sup>225</sup> I explained to all of the heads of department and teachers involved that pupils ought to be making their own informed decisions as to whether or not they wished to participate in my research.

In my experiences, most department heads were genuinely fascinated by the nature of the study and more than willing to help. After all, as Oliver states:

The relationship between researcher and gatekeeper can be fully symbiotic. They both have a great deal to gain from the relationship...Many people in positions of authority in organisations would often like to have research conducted on aspects of their work.<sup>226</sup>

No incentives were given to any gatekeepers or participants as this was believed to be unnecessary and, as the BERA guidelines state: 'has the potential to create a bias in sampling or in participant responses'.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Oliver, *The Student's Guide to Research Ethics*, 39.

<sup>227</sup> BERA, *Ethical Guidelines*, 7.

### *The Consequences of the Research: Maximising Benefit and Minimising Harm*

When explaining to schools, pupils and parents the benefits of the research I suggested that in many senses there were no obvious advantages other than it may encourage pupils to think about certain issues or questions which they might not otherwise have encountered. It was important that when pupils (and parents) made the decision of whether or not to consent, they did not feel that if they refused consent then they or their children would be missing something valuable or useful to their education. Despite the relatively small personal benefit to respondents, I did suggest to all those concerned that the research itself was of importance in giving teachers a picture of pupils' pre-existent knowledge and understanding. This in turn had the potential to shape how Holocaust education is taught and what particular parts of the Holocaust are addressed by teaching within schools. The potential holistic benefit to the teaching of the Holocaust could be of use to future teachers and thus future pupils.

Ethicists have often disagreed about the extent to which social research ought to be beneficial. Although 'scholars often claim that by contributing to a general body of knowledge, the class of people who make up the participants might eventually benefit from the research',<sup>228</sup> this view has been challenged by the likes of Fontes. Although Fontes was looking at domestic violence and sexual abuse, she argued for the 'increasing use of research designs that benefit the participants directly... Here I am not referring to some theoretical benefit down the road, but rather to the extent to which these specific participants benefit from their participation'.<sup>229</sup> Most of the

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<sup>228</sup> Israel and Hay, *Research Ethics for Social Scientists*, 100.

<sup>229</sup> Fontes, 'Ethics in Family Violence Research', 58.

literature on what researchers owe to their participants has focused on vulnerable, disadvantaged or powerless groups. Little discussion has been carried out on what positive impact researchers ought to bring to those who represent stable socio-economic categorisations. In contrast to Fontes' position, it is perfectly acceptable for those who grant informed consent to be participants in research which does not directly benefit them, so long as it does not in any way disadvantage them. Helping others is a noble thing and Fontes' view can discourage altruism.

In addition to exploring the benefits of pupil participation, it was important that I assessed any potential disadvantages that may occur from someone not taking part. The primary disadvantage for such an individual was that they would not engage with the range of Holocaust questions that were being answered by the other pupils. This may have marginally disadvantaged them within the class because it was likely that pupils would acquire some knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust simply by participating in the research, such as inferring that the Holocaust took place during the Second World War.

In addition to the disadvantages of not taking part, it was important to assess any potential disadvantages which may affect those who did. Under the guidelines of the Economic and Social Research Council (2005) this includes physical, psychological, social and economic damage.<sup>230</sup> The 2011 ethical guidelines of BERA state that 'researchers must make known to the participants (or their guardians or responsible others) any predictable detriment arising from the process or findings of the research'.<sup>231</sup> In some senses it is difficult, if not impossible to

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<sup>230</sup> ESRC, *Research Ethics*.

<sup>231</sup> BERA, *Ethical Guidelines*, 7.

predict all of the consequences of social research. Oliver noted that ‘predicting discomfort or distress during the data-gathering process may be impossible’.<sup>232</sup>

Nevertheless, every effort should be taken to prevent any discomfort or pre-empt anything that could be upsetting.

It was crucial that the questions that were asked both in the survey and the interview did not re-enforce any negative stereotypes or perpetuate concepts or ideas that were in any way unpleasant, untrue or racist in nature. Carrington and Short, when exploring children’s understandings of Jewish culture and antisemitism amongst 8-11 year-olds, asked the question, ‘have you heard anyone say anything unkind about Jewish people?’<sup>233</sup> By their own admission, the researchers here confessed that ‘merely to ask the question is to suggest to the children the possibility that Jewish people have some objectionable quality’.<sup>234</sup> In like manner there was a danger that by asking pupils to describe the treatment of Jews during the Second World War and to also ask them why the Jews were treated like this, some pupils might have perceived that the Jews were at least partially responsible and blameworthy for their fate. In an attempt to avoid this, I purposefully phrased the questions in as neutral a way as possible and in a style that would not lead pupils into the idea that the Jews were in anyway culpable for their treatment or eventual fate. Asking pupils why the Holocaust took place is a valid historical question, which while allowing for an antisemitic response, certainly does not encourage one and neither does it suggest in any sense that the Jews were blameworthy or responsible for their suffering. The existence of antisemitic attitudes is obviously highly concerning but knowing that

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<sup>232</sup> Oliver, *The Student’s Guide to Research Ethics*, 32.

<sup>233</sup> Carrington and Short, ‘Probing Children’s Prejudice’, 168.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

such attitudes exist is far more valuable than ignorance of their existence. If a pupil approaches their study of the Holocaust with a prejudicial attitude then that will adversely affect their understanding and interpretation of the past. While the primary nature of the research was to look at knowledge and not attitudes, the two cannot always be easily separated as attitudes can affect how one understands, uses and perceives knowledge. The phrase ‘attitudinal-knowledge’ is relevant here as some pupils’ attitudes affect the nature and content of the knowledge that they acquire.

While striving to produce a survey which did not encourage or facilitate the expression of antisemitism, it was recognised that antisemitic comments were possible. The anonymous nature of the research may also have given pupils a sense of greater freedom. It was important that pupils felt free to write what they knew and understood about the Holocaust, even if this was factually incorrect or showed evidence of prejudice. By completing the survey, it was not felt that these views would necessarily be re-enforced and because pupils were carrying out the surveys by themselves, then no one else would read their answers.

This was not the case however with the interviews. Pupils were being interviewed in groups of three and subsequently any antisemitic or racist remark which was aired by one interviewee could very easily influence the other. This forced me to consider whether or not I ought to intervene if such a comment was made. The advantages of doing so was that it would challenge the holder of that view and that it would also prevent the other interviewees from simply accepting the comment as truthful or legitimate. The disadvantages of intervening however, was that it risked pupils feeling that I was judging their answers, and that I only wanted to hear correct responses. This could have meant that they became less willing to open up and

reveal the ideas, conceptions, thoughts and understandings which they had in their minds. This would have been particularly problematic and limited the usefulness and reliability of the interview data.

The decision that I made regarding this ethical issue was the same one that Carrington and Short used in their research which was a combination of practicality and moral responsibility.<sup>235</sup> Instead of immediately intervening, I decided to wait and see whether or not the other participant would contradict their view. If the other participant did challenge the prejudicial or antisemitic view, then I did not intervene. If however, they ignored or supported the comment then I decided that intervention was necessary. The style and method of intervention was critical in such cases. A reprimanding, accusatory or even disparaging approach had the potential to alienate, confuse or anger the respondent and limit or even annul the usefulness of the interview. Yet it is of course possible to directly contradict without being confrontational or accusatory. An openly contradictory intervention therefore took place when a pupil spoke simply out of ignorance rather than out of prejudice or emotion. In the words of Carrington and Short, ‘where in our view this was not the case, we thought a more profitable strategy would be to oppose the remark indirectly: that is, by encouraging the children to question the empirical basis of their ‘knowledge’ claims’.<sup>236</sup> Although this method was not as simple as either intervening or not, this approach provided greater balance and ensured that the correct and proportional responses were made by the interviewer. By doing this, prejudicial comments were challenged and not re-enforced while the flow, usefulness and integrity of the interview were all preserved. A few times during the

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<sup>235</sup> Carrington and Short, ‘Probing Children’s Prejudice’, 167.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

interviews, I did ask pupils to explain the grounds on which they had based their comments and on a single occasion, I directly contradicted a pupil's comments about all Jews being rich at the expense of the nation in which they were living.

It was important that Jewish pupils who were participating in the research did not feel self-conscious. Although the research itself made every attempt to prevent any sense of embarrassment (e.g. the absence of unpleasant pictures, a focus on Jewish practices or rituals) I ensured that I checked with the teacher of each class whether or not there were any Jewish pupils present. Having taught about the Holocaust to a number of Jewish pupils over the years, I was conscious of the obvious sensitivity of the subject matter and aware that other pupils could look at them to observe their reactions, even if they were not doing so with any malice. During the gathering of the data there were Jewish pupils who participated and while I carefully monitored the situation, no indication of embarrassment or awkwardness seemed apparent. On some occasions it was quite the contrary, with Jewish pupils being positively happy to participate, demonstrate their knowledge and enquire about the nature of the research that I was doing. In all the schools that I visited, I had set up a contingency plan should pupils have become upset or distressed, which enabled pupils to either complete the research in a separate location (e.g., history department office, library, etc.) if they so wished, or to stop participating altogether and to take "time out". At no times was this contingency plan needed.

#### *Informed Consent*

Another important ethical consideration involved the acquiring of informed consent in order to ensure that it was acceptable for the pupils to participate. By the term informed consent I adopted the BERA definition. This described informed consent

as ‘the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway’.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, the sentiment of the Nuremberg Code of 1946 was considered particular pertinent in defining and explaining the importance of consent:

The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential. This means that the person involved should have legal capacity to give consent, should be so situated as to be able to exercise free power of choice, without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, over-reaching or any other ulterior form of constraint or coercion; and should have sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the elements of the subject matter involved as to enable him to make an understanding and enlightened decision.<sup>238</sup>

In their compelling article, *Children and School-based Research: ‘Informed Consent’ or ‘Educated Consent’?* David et al., offer a new approach to the orthodox position of informed consent. They argue that while ‘consent has usually been seen as a ‘one-off’ event at the outset’,<sup>239</sup> (as suggested in the BERA guidelines) it ought rather to be a ‘process... checking that they wish to continue to take part in the research, and in what ways, at each stage of their involvement’.<sup>240</sup> In practice, this meant trying to cultivate an environment within a school setting which was not necessarily school-like. In other words, emphasising the voluntarily nature of the research throughout and the absolute freedom of those involved to stop participating

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<sup>237</sup> BERA, *Ethical Guidelines*, 5.

<sup>238</sup> The Nuremberg Code (1946), reprinted in Reynolds, *Ethics and Social Science Research*, 143.

<sup>239</sup> David, Edwards and Alldred, ‘Children and School-Based Research’, 348.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

at any point. As Denscombe and Aubrook have emphasised, there is a danger that within a school setting, due to the power relations, pupils may feel that they cannot opt out.<sup>241</sup> David et al. go onto argue that:

The issue of how children can place researchers in a school is complex, but it is certain that they will attribute some form of role to researchers, and that the images invoked will have implications for how they make decisions about participating in research.<sup>242</sup>

Examples of this include the way that the researcher is dressed, the manner in which they address the pupils, where they stand within the classroom and the disciplinary role that they may adopt within the carrying out of the research. All of these things suggest that the researcher is at least an authority figure and thus the idea of informed consent can easily slide into a subtle and subconscious form of coercion. In talking to the pupils and in explaining the nature of the research I attempted to avoid the typical mannerisms that are associated with teachers. I introduced myself with my Christian name and tried to dress down slightly, while remaining conscious of the fact that I was representing my employers (and, to an extent, the IOE) within each school. David et al. confesses that ‘we are not arguing that research methodologies should, or indeed can be, context-free’,<sup>243</sup> yet measures were taken to at least reduce the effect of teacher-pupil relationships being mirrored in researcher-pupil relationships.

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<sup>241</sup> Denscombe and Aubrook, ‘It’s just another piece of School Work’.

<sup>242</sup> David, Edwards and Alldred, ‘Children and School-Based Research’, 359.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 363.

In order to encourage informed consent rather than coerced consent, I asked the pupils to opt in rather than opt out. The pupils who wished to participate signed a consent form (see appendix 4.2) and were consenting on the grounds of an information sheet about the research (see appendix 4.1) and an explanation by their teacher. I asked teachers to collect these forms in before I arrived. Had I given the form to the pupils upon my arrival then they may have felt awkward or uncomfortable in declining their consent. In an ideal world, I would have been able to visit every school in person to explain the nature of my research and to distribute the information sheets and consent forms for them to go away and decide upon before returning in the future to carry out the research. In reality that was never going to be possible as I was holding down a full time teaching job the entire time that I was conducting my research. This meant that I had to rely upon the teachers to a greater extent than I would have wished. This may have unfortunately reinforced the idea that the research was another piece of school work or that the work was in some way compulsory because it was connected to the classroom and the teacher. Nevertheless, I talked through with each teacher the ethical principles which the research was abiding by and ensured that they emphasised to the pupils that their participation was completely voluntary.

It was absolutely essential that informed consent was received from the pupils themselves, rather than simply accepting the consent of the school or the parents. The BERA guidelines, referring to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that ‘children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate to their age and maturity’.<sup>244</sup> From a legal perspective under English law, the idea of

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<sup>244</sup> BERA, *Ethical Guidelines*, 6.

‘Gillick competency’<sup>245</sup> applies in that if a child wishes to opt in, then their parent has no right to override. In applying this principle to my research, I decided that should a pupil wish to opt in to the research then their decision took authority over the parent’s decision to decline consent. Subsequently, after the pupils gave their consent, parents were given an information sheet about the research containing my contact details so that they could discuss the research further if needs be. There was no occasion when a parent sought to change their child’s consent. If a parent had wished for their child not to take part then I would have agreed to have met them and the child to discuss the research, seek to re-assure the parent, but ultimately side with the informed decision of the child unless there were exceptional circumstances.

#### *Parental Awareness*

In order to achieve parental awareness, a letter was sent home with a detailed explanation of the research that I was conducting (see appendix 4.3). In this letter I outlined what my research was about, the reasons for carrying it out and whether or not there were any advantages or disadvantages of doing so. I explained to parents that pupils did not have to take part, that they could withdraw at any time (including during the research) and assured them of both personal and institutional anonymity. I also informed them that the research conformed to the guidelines of the British Education Research Association and had been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education.

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<sup>245</sup> This relates to the case of Victoria Gillick who sought to ensure that none of her daughters could be prescribed or advised on birth control before the age of sixteen. This was denied by the House of Lords in 1985.

### *Data Protection*

Protecting data was both a moral and legal requirement. Yet this process of data protection was more than simply restricting access to the material. The promise of confidentiality as well as personal and institutional anonymity was important to all those who had participated, whether they were individuals or schools. For this reason, the schools were codified, for example, ‘School 1’. This provided a safeguard in case anyone should somehow access the data. Furthermore, pupils were asked not to put their names on their surveys as this could give the appearance of betraying confidentiality and anonymity, thus limiting the freedom with which pupils answered questions. When interviewing pupils, I was aware of their names as this was important for building up rapport. Nevertheless, their names were codified in the transcribing of the interviews and then anonymised.

In relation to the storage of data, all of the survey responses were stored in a safe and destroyed after the research was finished. The interview recordings were also stored on a portable hard-drive which was kept in the safe alongside the survey data. It was formatted after the completion of the research. This conformed to the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998) which states that personal data must not be held for longer than is necessary and used only for the purposes specified at the time of collection. No information was disclosed to third parties.

### **Piloting**

Piloting took place in order to ensure that the research instrument was providing the most effective and reliable means of answering my research questions. I wanted to ensure that the data that I gathered were able to demonstrate pupils’ preconceptions and as a result of a multi-staged piloting process which lasted nearly two years, my

instruments changed dramatically. As it turned out, the piloting proved to be of great value in ensuring the collection of rich, reliable and meaningful data.

The first round of piloting that I conducted was in June 2010 involving three year nine classes, each consisting of twenty five pupils in a school in Oxford. It had always been my intention to try and discover what pupils knew or thought about the Holocaust without specific question prompts and so my first pilot involved giving pupils a blank spider diagram activity (see appendix 1.1). In the middle of the spider diagram were the words ‘The Holocaust’ with eight spokes coming out from this central word; each one attached to a blank box. At the top of the page was the simple instruction, ‘write in the boxes anything you may associate with your understanding of the term ‘The Holocaust’’. The first class on which this was piloted was a high attaining group and the pupils did not struggle with the task. Yet the answers that were returned, while fascinating and certainly of some use, were not considered to be as informative as they could have been. Responses were typically very brief (often only one word) and included things like ‘gassing’, ‘Anne Frank’, ‘death’ or ‘horrible’. It was felt that longer answers about the use of gas or Anne Frank would be more helpful. Subsequently I modified the instructions on the sheet so that the boxes were larger and so that it now read, ‘write in the boxes things that you know about the Holocaust’. By asking pupils to tell me what they knew rather than what they associated with the Holocaust, it was hoped that more detail would be provided. I had originally chosen the word ‘associate’ rather than ‘know’ because I feared that some pupils may know almost nothing about the Holocaust and that if they just had to write associations rather than knowledge then they may feel less daunted and I would receive far fewer blank sheets. This first pilot suggested

that pupils did actually know a significant amount about the Holocaust but that the use of the word ‘associate’ was a hindrance to them displaying that knowledge.

This modified activity asked pupils what they knew about the Holocaust and was then given to the second year nine class. It brought to light a very important issue. When conducting this new pilot on a mixed ability set, many pupils were able to complete the task and provide detailed and informative statements regarding what they knew about the Holocaust. Yet a significant quantity (about one third of the class) was unable to write anything. After a short while I spoke to the pupils who still had blank sheets of paper and enquired why they had not written anything. They all informed me that they did not know the meaning of the term ‘Holocaust’. Initially I thought that this meant that they were unaware that the Nazi regime had systematically murdered the Jews during the Second World War. Yet when I talked to them further and asked them various questions it became very apparent that they did know quite a lot about the Holocaust, and they had simply not come across the term. This useful experience suggests that there may often be occasions in the classroom when the teacher assumes that a pupil knows far less or far more than they actually do know, because the question or terminology does not allow them to express or demonstrate that knowledge. This experience stuck in my mind and heavily influenced my approach to research. I recognised the importance of ensuring to the greatest possible extent that the instrument facilitated pupils in expressing their knowledge and did not prevent or limit them from communicating their ideas and understandings.

In the light of this, I modified the spider diagram activity for a third and final time (see appendix 1.2) so that the statement at the top now read, ‘write in the boxes things that you know about the way that the Jews were treated during the Second

World War'. I also replaced the term 'The Holocaust' from the centre of the spider diagram with 'Treatment of the Jews during the Second World War'. This modified version was given to another mixed ability year nine class and produced rich and informative results. Respondents gave a wide range of comments which appeared to be helped rather than hindered by the instrument.

The second round of piloting focused on the questionnaire. The purpose of this instrument was to provide more structure for the pupils' answers and to acquire responses to some of the fundamental questions of the Holocaust such as 'what was it?', 'who carried it out?' and 'why was it carried out?' I also wanted to explore key themes within the Holocaust such as its geography and the way that the killings ended. Originally I had used the term 'Holocaust' throughout the questionnaire such as 'who carried out the Holocaust?' After piloting the spider diagram exercise, this was replaced with, 'who carried out this treatment of the Jews during the Second World War?'

This early version of the questionnaire (see appendix 2.1) also contained three photographs and asked the pupils to 'comment on the photograph'. This statement was purposefully open-ended and although it produced a wide range of responses, these were not particularly useful in assessing pupils' knowledge or understanding as comments were often incredibly vague or the meaning of the photographs had been misinterpreted.

This particular version of the questionnaire also contained five multiple choice questions. Despite the pupils' answers being relatively interesting and informative, it was felt it was too prescriptive and did not provide pupils with the ability to express what they knew. This decision was also influenced by the ideas of

Bischoping, as discussed earlier.<sup>246</sup> Consequently, most of the closed questions were removed. Furthermore, it also seemed unreasonable to ask pupils whether or not Chelmno was specifically built for the extermination of the Jews when the HEDP study found that most teachers do not even know the answer.<sup>247</sup> It was thus replaced with a map of Europe and pupils were asked ‘where in Europe did the killing of the Jews take place?’ This also provided a variation in the tasks that pupils were given on the questionnaire.

The multiple choice question which explored resistance was also removed as it was felt that the complexity of the issues was not fairly or accurately reflected in the wording. The answers did not account for the huge variation in responses by victims, perpetrators and bystanders and encouraged generalisations. Although the answers that pupils gave in the pilot concerning whether or not there were uprisings and rebellions in a number of the ghettos and camps were interesting, it was considered that the nuances of resistance were much more fairly explored through interviews rather than multiple choice questions on a survey.

Unlike the first, the second edition of the questionnaire included specific enquiries into the extent to which pupils had previously come across the subject of the Holocaust. This explored whether or not they had studied it before and explored what films or books they had encountered.

The questionnaire which was used in the second round of piloting was completed by fifty six pupils in three different schools from Oxford and Middlesex in June 2011. Although the research instrument was later modified and improved, the results from

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<sup>246</sup> Bischoping, ‘Method and Meaning’.

<sup>247</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 56.

this second round of piloting were very fascinating, carefully analysed and then published in *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*. The findings concluded that ‘almost all pupils do have at least some knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust’.<sup>248</sup> It also suggested that many adolescents have a Hitler-centric approach to the Holocaust as well as often believing that anyone without blonde hair and blue eyes would be exterminated. It was also evident that many more pupils had seen *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* than *Schindler’s List*. The three schools used in this pilot were carefully selected. One of them was an independent school and two of them were state comprehensives. One of the state comprehensive schools was a voluntary-aided Anglican school and the other was a community comprehensive. In addition to analysing the results collectively, they were also analysed by school type and it was very evident that the commonalities found in the data were patterns which emerged irrespective of school-type or demographic. In all three schools, pupils had read the same sorts of books and watched the same sorts of films and there were no significant or discernible differences in the nature of their answers. Although this was by no means a license to ignore the demographic composition of my sample, it highlighted that school type did not appear to be a significant factor. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the research was exploring pupils’ knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust *before* their formal study of the topic.

The third round of piloting also focused on the questionnaire and introduced some important changes. The multiple choice questions were removed and questions were added on the ending of the Holocaust and the fate of the Jews who survived. A set of six events in the evolution of the Final Solution were also listed and pupils

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<sup>248</sup> Gray, ‘Understanding Pupil Preconceptions’, 25.

were asked to put these in order. The results of the second round of the pilot research suggested that many pupils saw the Holocaust as an event rather than a process and the idea of putting the events within chronological order was to assess whether pupils would typically put them in a scale of escalating severity.

This modified version of the questionnaire (see appendix 2.2) was then tested on another fifty two pupils in November 2011 and produced some fascinating results. It highlighted a number of misconceptions about why the Holocaust ended, suggesting that the Holocaust suddenly stopped once Hitler died, although many pupils did also talk about the liberation of the camps by the Russians, British and Americans. The questions on the ending of the Holocaust were a little repetitive in places and thus the final version of the questionnaire only had one question on this topic, with the issue of the fate of survivors being brought up in the interviews. The placing of events in order was also moved to the interviews (see appendix 2.3).

The fourth and final round of piloting took place in February and March 2012 and involved the development of interview questions and activities. The first interviews that were conducted, consisted of around ten questions such as ‘do you think the Jews resisted the way they were treated?’ and ‘what do you know about Jewish culture and life?’ Although some interesting responses were given, it was felt that the interviews failed to engage the pupils sufficiently and that prompts and activities would yield more specific responses. Subsequently, the interviews evolved into a series of questions, prompts, activities and stimuli (see appendix 3.1). This included looking at two photographs, having to put a set of cards containing certain events in chronological order and providing typical scenarios where the pupils had to say what they thought would be the most likely outcome. The interviews started by exploring the end of the Holocaust first and left the more sensitive questions to the

end. During this pilot, around fifteen pupils in a local comprehensive school were interviewed in groups of three.

The four rounds of piloting between June 2010 and March 2012 were very useful in developing the instruments to ensure that they provided data which were useful and rich. They involved a total of 198 pupils from three different schools, who took part in the spider diagram exercise, the questionnaire or the interview. None of the pupils who took part in the pilot work participated in the main collection of data.

### **Sample for Main Data Collection**

As previously stated, the Holocaust is most commonly studied in year nine when pupils are aged 13 and 14. It was thus felt most appropriate to explore the preconceptions of pupils at this age before they commence their formal study of the Holocaust in history.

When selecting my sample I recognised that the purpose of this research study was not to generalise my findings but was more of a case study which may or may not be typical of broader and more general trends. Nevertheless, in the absence of any major studies of this nature, it seemed important to recognise that this research would perhaps provide the most comprehensive study to date on pupils' preconceptions. Consequently, it was felt that it would be more beneficial for teachers and educators if the sample was as representative as was practically possible. This would also enable it to be tested against any future national studies such as the forthcoming research by the IOE's Centre for Holocaust Education. If the study was particularly unrepresentative it may have been of less relevance and would perhaps have been more useful had it focused on a specific ethnic, national or religious demographic. This study made very few claims about specific sub-

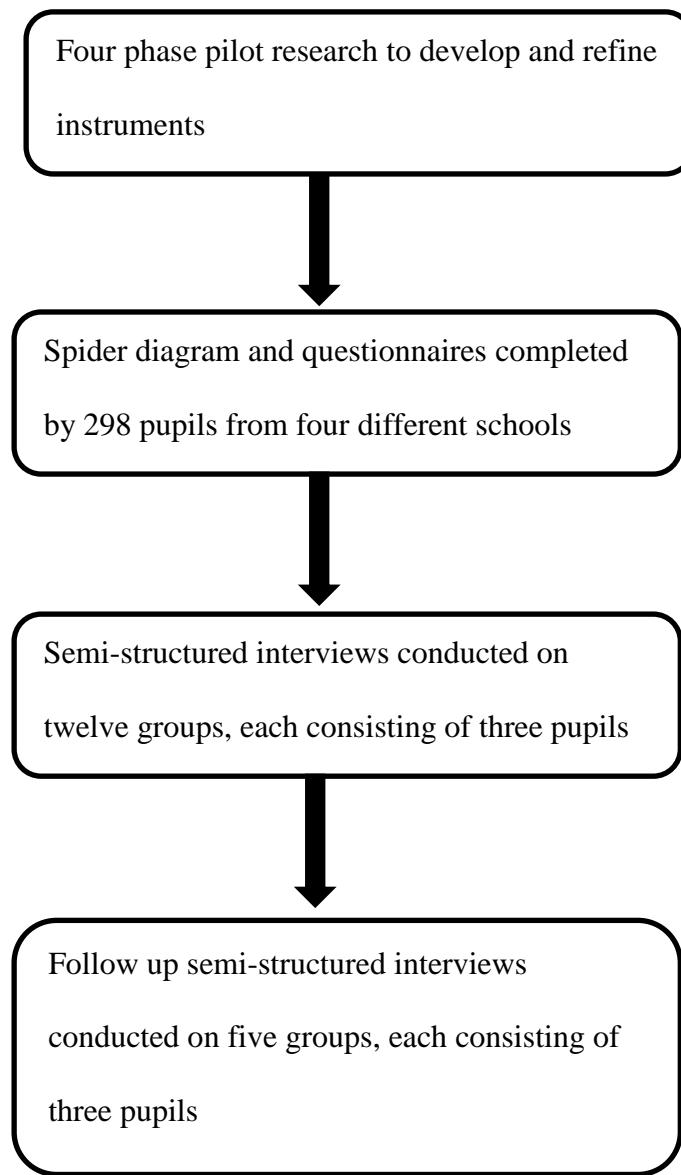
sections of the sample, although some comments by respondents were analysed by gender.

Out of the 298 pupils who completed the spider diagram exercise and questionnaire, 75.2% were thirteen years of age at the time of the research and 24.8% were fourteen. The reason why the majority of pupils were thirteen is because the data was gathered in the first two terms of the academic year so that it took place before their formal study of the subject in history lessons.

Fig. 1 demonstrates the various stages of data gathering process.

**Fig. 1**

**Summary of Data Gathering Process**



*The Nature of the Schools Used*

The data were gathered from four schools, three of which were in urban environments and one in a suburban location. They were all in the south of England. Two of the schools were comprehensive schools, one of which was a community comprehensive and the other a Catholic voluntary-aided school. The other two schools were independent in nature, one of which was a boarding school and the other a day school. Although the percentage of independent school pupils in

the sample (39%) was disproportionately higher than the national average (7%), in many ways the independent schools were demographically representative, although obviously less so in terms of socio-economic status. The large number of independent school pupils in the sample was partially due to ease of access, but also because the pilot research had demonstrated that there were no evident disparities in the preconceptions held by pupils from the maintained sector and the independent sector. Although education was obviously one factor in determining pupils' preconceptions, the research was not measuring the specific education that pupils had received. Pilot data highlighted that pupils from the maintained and independent sectors had come across the same books and films about the Holocaust in equal measure. The main data that was eventually gathered confirmed that there was no discernible disparity between the different educational sectors in terms of pupils' preconceptions of the Holocaust.

### *Gender*

As seen in table 2, the gender balance in the sample was roughly equal.

**Table 2      Sample by Gender**

	Sample for questionnaire	Sample for first round of interviews	Sample for second round of interviews
Male	47.9%	41.6%	46.6%
Female	52.1%	58.3%	53.3%

### *Ethnicity and Religion*

In two of the schools, the percentage of ethnic minority pupils was slightly lower than average while in the other two schools, the percentages of pupils from an ethnic minority background were higher than average. According to one of the schools, ‘almost half of the pupils are from a range of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds’ (in distinction to white British).

Two of the four schools used in the research were Christian. One of these was a Catholic comprehensive where the majority of the pupils come from families of the Catholic faith. One of the independent schools used was Anglican in its origins. The other two schools were not religious in nature. None of the schools had a significant Jewish population. In order to assess whether or not answers from a faith-based school would be different, I purposefully used an Anglican school for some of my pilot research. There was no evidence to suggest that a pupil at a Christian school provided different answers to someone at a non-religiously defined institution. Pupils from Christian schools made up 62.7% of the sample.

Upon reading my article ‘Understanding Pupil Preconceptions of the Holocaust in English Schools’, Saul Friedländer observed that the knowledge and understanding of Jewish pupils was likely to be noticeably different from non-Jews.<sup>251</sup> This is probably because the Holocaust was such an important part of Jewish history and thus likely to play a more significant role in their cultural identity. This seems very plausible indeed. Four pupils who took part in the research were Jewish, which represents just over 1% of the sample. This figure is too low to generalise about prior knowledge held by Jewish pupils.

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<sup>251</sup> Personal correspondence, 2012.

### *Other Factors*

Another important factor to take into account is the percentage of pupils that have English as an additional language. In one of the comprehensive schools, 25% of pupils had English as an additional language. In the other comprehensive school and in one of the independent schools the percentage was significantly lower, while in the other independent school it was also 12%.

Another factor worth noting was the academic attainment of the four schools used, although it was not automatically the case that pupils who went to a higher achieving school necessarily arrived with greater knowledge and understanding. After all, the research was about finding out what pupils knew before they had been taught the subject. Despite this, students from high achieving schools may be able to articulate complex ideas more easily or have greater self confidence in expressing themselves. In three of the schools, the institution's exam results were moderately above average while in the other it was moderately below average.

It is important to recognise that there are some weaknesses concerning the nature of the sample. In an ideal world, the size of the sample would have been much larger for the quantitative study. Moreover, a lower percentage of the pupils would have come from the independent sector, even though this was not considered to be a significant variable. Overall it was felt that the sample did reflect a wide variety of pupils and was broadly representative. This increases the likelihood that the trends found from the data are characteristic of thirteen and fourteen year-old secondary school pupils in England, although the intention was not to generalise the findings.

## **Implementing the Research**

In gathering the data, I personally administered all of the research instruments, although teachers administered the consent forms prior to data collection. The four schools which I entered had planned my visits so that I could see successive classes. After a brief introduction I typically had forty minutes with the pupils whereby they could complete the spider diagram exercise and questionnaire. As it turned out, all pupils were able to complete the two tasks in the allotted time. I specifically asked teachers when they introduced me to the class, not to mention the term 'Holocaust' as it would impact upon their answers to the first question on the second page of the questionnaire. Subsequently, when I spoke to the classes before the research, I reminded them that I was finding out about their knowledge and understanding of the way that Jews were treated during the Second World War.

I emphasised to the pupils that this was not a test; that their teachers would not see the answers that they gave and encouraged them to think for themselves and to not copy from the person sitting next to them or discuss the questions with them. The pupils were all very obliging and almost universally worked in silence, minimising the potential for collaboration between respondents. In all cases, the spider diagram exercise was distributed to pupils and once they had completed as much as they could, they would put up their hands, enabling me to collect in their answers and to distribute the questionnaire.

Although some schools offered to implement the research without me being there, I felt that it was important to be present during the gathering of the data. This ensured fairness across the sample and allowed, as far as it was possible, for identical circumstances to exist. It also reduced the likelihood of pupils feeling that they

could not withdraw from the research as they could not withdraw from work that their teacher had given to them. By overseeing and managing the collection of the data, I ensured that pupils always completed the spider diagram exercise before the questionnaire and that they were not introduced by the teacher to the term 'Holocaust'. Moreover, some teachers may have helped the pupils or given precise information to them which made their knowledge and understanding appear to be greater than what was really the case. Implementing the research myself did enable me to be consistent with the sorts of assistance that was given. This was generally restricted to explaining the meaning of a word or simply encouraging pupils to write what they thought when they asked me whether something was right or wrong. It is probable that had teachers implemented the research they may have told pupils whether their answers were factually correct as they perhaps had a vested interest in making it look like their class had a good level of historical knowledge.

When conducting the interviews, I was given the use of a classroom or an office. Having liaised with the head of the history departments, pupils were selected at random from the register and sent from their lessons in groups of three. The interviews seldom lasted longer than twenty minutes, which typically enabled me to get two interviews done in one forty minute lesson and three done during an hour's lesson. The reason for keeping these interviews short was because the teachers, understandably, did not want their pupils missing too much of their lesson. A few of the interviews were carried out in a boarding school and pupils were interviewed in the more relaxed setting of a boarding house. This appeared to have no influence on the outcome of their answers and both the formal and less formal settings produced similar results with some pupils being very keen to talk, while others were more reserved. On one or two occasions, there appeared to be a single pupil within

the three interviewees who dominated the conversation to the extent that the other two pupils felt less able to contribute. In such circumstances, I was careful to sometimes ask questions specifically directed at one or two of the interviewees. Although it was never going to be the case that all three pupils spoke equal amounts, the techniques employed of engaging all three pupils, either directly or through eye contact, ensured that all the pupils that were interviewed made helpful and valuable contributions to the discussions.

To ensure fairness, all of the pupils that were interviewed had already completed the spider diagram exercise and the questionnaire. It was felt that if they were interviewed before they completed the written elements of the research, then this would probably influence their written responses. There was certainly far less material in the questionnaire that could have impacted upon pupils' responses to the interview questions than the other way round.

Five follow up interviews were then conducted with three pupils in each interview. All those who were interviewed in these follow-up sessions had already been interviewed once before. There were precise advantages to doing this. Firstly, I was not a complete stranger to the pupils; they had seen me administer the written tasks and I had already spent some time interviewing them before. This meant that they may have felt more relaxed and may thus have provided greater detail to their answers. Secondly, it enabled me to follow up on some of the specific comments that were made, seeking clarification or development. It was possible to show the interviewees what they had previously said and ask them exactly what they had meant. Moreover, pupils were shown some of the common trends that respondents had demonstrated in the quantitative research and asked whether or not they agreed with them.

By carrying out a second round of interviews, a decision had to be made as to which pupils were going to be chosen. The pupils chosen for the follow-up interviews all came from the most demographically representative school, which was an urban comprehensive. The head of department and all the pupils were very obliging indeed and all fifteen pupils that took part had previously been interviewed. Choosing which pupils to ask to participate in the second set of interviews was influenced by looking at the comments that had been given first time around. The pupils who were selected were thus those who had provided an answer which seemed to typify a trend in thinking or where two pupils in the same interview seemed to characterise the differences in opinions. The dynamic of the first interview was also taken into account. If one particular pupil had been too dominant and not allowed the other interviewees to express themselves as freely as they may have wished the first time round, they were less likely to be asked to take part a second time. This was to ensure that the richness and quality of the data was as high as possible.

The lines of enquiry that were used in the second interview were determined by my analysis of the written data and interview transcripts. Patterns which emerged, such as the influence of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the lack of knowledge regarding the ghettos and *Einsatzgruppen* as well as Hitler's role in the killing process were all explored further. These interviews typically concurred with the initial trends that had emerged and enabled pupils to articulate their thinking more precisely. Photographs from the Warsaw Ghetto were also shown to the interviewees (see appendix 3.2). There was also discussion about the accuracy of popular films as well as enquiries into who had actually carried out the murders of the Jews on the

ground, considering that Hitler himself was predominantly in Berlin, Obersalzburg or elsewhere.

### **Analysing the Data**

By conducting the spider diagram exercise and a three page questionnaire on 298 pupils, as well as interviewing 36 respondents, there was a large volume of data to analyse. In order to improve the validity of the findings, analysis of the data involved the principle of triangulation so that trends which were apparent within the questionnaire for example, could be cross-checked with patterns that emerged from the spider diagram, as well as comments made during the interviews. The analysis both focused on data and emergent themes that corroborated, as well as data between which there appeared to be some tension and inconsistency. Systematically analysing the data in this way ensured that the reliability of the findings was more robust.

Despite the use of triangulation, the nature of the research produced different types of data which involved non-identical forms of analysis. The qualitative data from the interviews was transcribed and initial codes, themes and categories were produced. The development of codes from the qualitative data drew on the principles of emergent theory and the iterative process was supported further by findings from previous empirical studies, pilot research and existing literature. Examples included whether pupils saw the Holocaust as a process or an event. Also whether they understood the Holocaust as an inevitable outcome of Hitler's personal antisemitism or perceived it as the product of gradual radicalisation. This grounded theory approach relied upon the ideas of Glaser and Strauss.<sup>252</sup> The emerging

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<sup>252</sup> Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*.

theory developed in the light of frequent testing of the data until the meaning of the data became coherent and clear.

In practice, this involved a lengthy process which began by transcribing each semi-structured interview as soon as possible after it took place. The transcript was then printed out and the seven research topics in Table 1 were then colour coded. Comments regarding ‘who implemented the Holocaust and why?’, for example, were underlined in the corresponding colour so that central themes could be seen. Codes were initially developed from the data. With regards to ‘who implemented the Holocaust and why?’ initial codes included ‘Hitler carried it out’, ‘the Nazis carried it out’ or ‘other examples’. Yet this fitted within the context of another set of codes regarding why the Holocaust was perpetrated. These two codes were ‘perpetrator oriented’ and ‘victim centred’. Returning to the data with these initial codes, a theory began to emerge that those who were ‘victim centred’ in their explanations of why the Holocaust took place, often seemed to blame the Jews for being “different” either in religious or racial terms. In contrast, perpetrator oriented approaches tended to lay the blame exclusively on Hitler. This emerging theory influenced the questions employed in the second round of interviews where respondents were explicitly asked about who actually conducted the killing of six million Jews if Hitler did not personally do it. Pupils who had adopted perpetrator oriented explanations maintained their position but often saw many of the individual perpetrators as either ‘brainwashed’ or forced to commit such atrocities. This showed the entrenchment of the Hitler centric perspective and supported available literature and pilot studies which suggested that many students thought that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were acting under duress. (For further examples see appendix 5.1 and 5.2).

Qualitative research, according to Suter, ‘is often described as “exploratory” (not confirmatory) because a researcher’s goal is to generate a hypothesis (not test one)’.<sup>253</sup> Using complementary methods, my aim was in some cases to generate a hypothesis, while in a few areas, to test existing ones. Examples of this included the hypotheses that pupils believed Germany to contain several million Jews and that the Holocaust itself occurred exclusively in Germany. The open-ended nature of my questionnaire meant that although coding often revolved around common trends in the answers, it was also possible to employ grounded theory and develop codes on emerging patterns. For example, when exploring why the Jews were treated in such a way, it was possible to quantitatively codify answers which did or did not make reference to Hitler and thus confirm existing theories within the literature that pupils’ thinking is often very Hitler-centric. Yet at the same time, it was possible to develop new coding in the light of this, which explored whether answers explained the Holocaust through the ideology and actions of perpetrators or the status and character of the victims.

In addition to qualitative analysis techniques, my data also enabled descriptive statistics where the distribution of variables could be expressed. The various pilot studies that I conducted, helped me to develop questions that produced rich data, which could then be quantitatively coded based on emergent trends. A simple example is the first question of the questionnaire, which asked, ‘what name is given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during the Second World War?’ The number of answers that stated ‘Holocaust’, ‘genocide’, ‘racism’ or other chosen terms could be clearly shown in a bar graph or a frequency distribution. With the card-sorting activity used in the interview, the numerical data produced enabled statistical

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<sup>253</sup> Suter, *Introduction to Educational Research*, 353.

measures of central tendency, such as mean, median and mode. Such methods could also be applied when exploring the number of reasons or facts that a respondent offered, the completion rate, or number of words that were written in answer to a particular question. Descriptive statistics were particularly necessary when pupils were asked how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust, with standard deviation being used to show the variation from the average.

When analysing the data generated from open-ended questions such as ‘describe what you think would happen to Jews upon arrival at a camp?’, coding emerged from the data, using rational analysis of the types of answers that emerged. Consequently, typologies developed on the basis of the nature of responses, such as answers which referred to clothing and uniforms, which emphasised Jews being beaten or tortured, or which made reference to them being killed or gassed. These taxonomies allowed for suitable coding which could be described using statistics. In addition to the main data, the answers provided in the pilot studies also helped to shape my initial thinking on the types of codes which developed.

Overall, it was felt that the methodological decisions were thoughtful, ethical, in the interests of the participants and suitable for producing the appropriate blend of quantitative and qualitative data. They also enabled data to be gathered which was meaningful, rich and reliable and which would provide a valuable insight into pupils’ preconceptions of the Holocaust. They went a long way in helping to address the key research questions regarding pupils’ knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and the implications of this on curriculum design and teaching.

## Chapter Five

### Results: The Characters and Causes of the Holocaust

The data that were gathered overwhelmingly supported the proposition that almost without exception, pupils in year nine of secondary education possess meaningful, and in some cases considerable, knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust before they formally study it. Many pupils are confident in expressing this and are able to develop and expand their ideas, either in writing or verbally. Their knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust was often considerable and in some cases extensive although common misconceptions also existed. This chapter explores the sources of pupils' knowledge and understanding; the causes of the Holocaust; why the Jews were specifically targeted and who perpetrated it.

#### General Remarks

The extent to which the spider diagram exercises were completed by the pupils suggested that most pupils seemed confident that they knew something about the Holocaust. It must also be taken into account that this exercise was the first thing that the respondents were asked to do and the wording ('treatment of the Jews during Second World War') provided minimal stimuli or structure. Out of 298 pupils, 39.9% (n.119) of them filled in all eight boxes with only one pupil leaving all of them blank. The mean number of boxes completed per respondent was 6.1 and in total 1,823, out of a possible 2,384, were completed (76.4%). It was also noteworthy that pupils were not simply writing one or two word responses in each box. The 1,823 boxes that were completed totalled 24,913 words, making the average pupil's response 14.29 words per box.

The answers which pupils gave to the spider diagram exercise were studied with the aim of finding any common themes. With minimal stimulus, it was important to explore what the respondents opted to emphasise and to which areas of the Holocaust they chose to refer. The most repeated theme which was found in the answers was that of the camps, with 24.6% (n.448) of the 1,823 answers making reference to them. Connected to this was the second most common type of answer, which was statements concerning the Jews being killed or dying. In total, 21.8% (n.399) of the answers fitted into this category, with 18 pupils using the word ‘murder’ or ‘murdered’. In addition to this, a further 13.5% (n.247) stated that Jews were gassed.

Some comments sought to provide specific information by mentioning names and places. Reference to Hitler was the most common, with his name appearing in 212 boxes in 130 pupils’ answers. Anne Frank’s name was given on 43 occasions, while Oskar Schindler, Winston Churchill and Heinrich Himmler also appeared in more than one answer. Overall, 14.6% (n.266) remarked on a specific person. In total, 7.0% (n.128) referred to an individual country, with 69 answers making reference to Germany and 15 to Poland.

Somewhat surprisingly, there were relatively few answers which passed judgement on the way that the Jews were treated. Such comments constituted only 5% (n.91) of pupils’ remarks, with Nazi actions being described as bad, cruel, horrible, harsh and nasty. Overall it seems that pupils were comfortable providing a number of comments in the spider diagram exercise and that the vast majority of these were factual in nature and adopted an objective perspective.

Having completed the spider diagram exercise, pupils typically wrote lengthy answers to the questions on pages two and three of the questionnaire as well. The questions that were asked on these pages were as follows:

1. What name is given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during World War Two?
2. How were the Jews treated during World War Two?
3. What sorts of things happened to the Jews during World War Two?
4. Why were Jews treated like this?
5. Who carried out this treatment of the Jews during World War Two?
6. What percentage of people living in Germany in 1933 do you think were Jewish? (Multiple choice.)
7. What methods did the Nazis use to kill the Jews of Europe?
8. During World War Two many Jews were sent to camps like Auschwitz and Dachau. What do you know about any of these camps?
9. Describe what you think would happen to Jews upon arrival at a camp?
10. Why did the Nazi killing of the Jews end?
11. Approximately how many Jews were murdered during World War Two?
12. Where in Europe did the killing of the Jews take place? (Map provided.)

The average pupil used 100.5 words to answer the twelve questions, taking into account that three of the questions only required one or two word responses. Interestingly, boys wrote on average 96.3 words on pages two and three of the questionnaire while girls wrote 105.1. By including pupils' answers to both the spider diagram and the questionnaire, the 298 respondents wrote a total of 66, 573 words, averaging 223.4 words per pupil. Table 3 shows what percentage of pupils in total and by gender left each question blank. Table 4 shows how many words the

average pupil wrote for each question as well as showing the variation between boys and girls. It must be taken into account that the space designated to each answer did vary, for example, pupils were given five lines on which to answer question three and only two lines for question seven. The number of lines designated to each question is shown in the right hand column of table 4.

**Table 3      Questionnaire Responses (1)**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Percentage left blank</b>	<b>Percentages left blank (boys)</b>	<b>Percentages left blank (girls)</b>
1	30.8 (n.92)	23.2 (n.36)	39.1 (n.56)
2	3.0 (n.9)	1.9 (n.3)	4.2 (n.6)
3	6.4 (n.19)	7.1 (n.11)	5.6 (n.8)
4	8.1 (n.24)	7.7 (n.12)	8.4 (n.12)
5	5.4 (n.16)	7.1 (n.11)	3.5 (n.5)
6	1.0 (n.3)	0 (n.0)	2.1 (n.3)
7	7.3 (n.22)	6.5 (n.10)	8.4 (n.12)
8	12.1 (n.36)	12.3 (n.19)	11.9 (n.17)
9	12.4 (n.37)	12.9 (n.20)	11.9 (n.17)
10	19.4 (n.58)	17.4 (n.27)	21.6 (n.31)
11	22.1 (n.66)	18.1 (n.28)	26.6 (n.38)
12	9.4 (n.28)	11.0 (n.17)	7.7 (n.11)

**Table 4      Questionnaire Responses (2)**

Question	Average words per respondent	Average words (boys)	Average words (girls)	Number of rows
1	1.05 (n.312)	1.10 (n.171)	0.99 (n.141)	1
2	14.34 (n.4,273)	14.14 (n.2,192)	14.55 (n.2,081)	4
3	16.70 (n.4,978)	14.88 (n.2,306)	18.68 (n.2,672)	5
4	13.83 (n.4,120)	14.23 (n.2,206)	13.38 (n.1,914)	4
5	5.02 (n.1,497)	5.4 (n.850)	4.52 (n.647)	3
6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
7	6.92 (n.2,063)	6.50 (n.1,008)	7.38 (n.1055)	2
8	14.09 (n.4,201)	13.01 (n.2,017)	15.27 (n.2,184)	4
9	14.76 (n.4,398)	13.19 (n.2,044)	16.46 (n.2,354)	4
10	8.20 (n.2,443)	8.11 (n.1,258)	8.29 (n.1,185)	3
11	1.01 (n.300)	0.95 (n.148)	1.07 (n.154)	1
12	3.61 (n.1075)	3.64 (n.565)	3.5 (n.510)	N/A

It is also worth noting that some pupils may have become bored by the end of the questionnaire and thus decided to leave blank the questions near the end. Pupils did not run out of time as I personally administered every questionnaire and pupils had no real limit to the time that they could spend answering the questions. It is interesting that question one was left blank the highest number of times. The percentage of respondents leaving the question blank is an indicator of the difficulty of the question and the lack of confidence pupils had in answering it. Although on average, boys wrote fewer words than girls, the breakdown of average words per questions shows that on four of the Holocaust-knowledge questions, girls wrote less

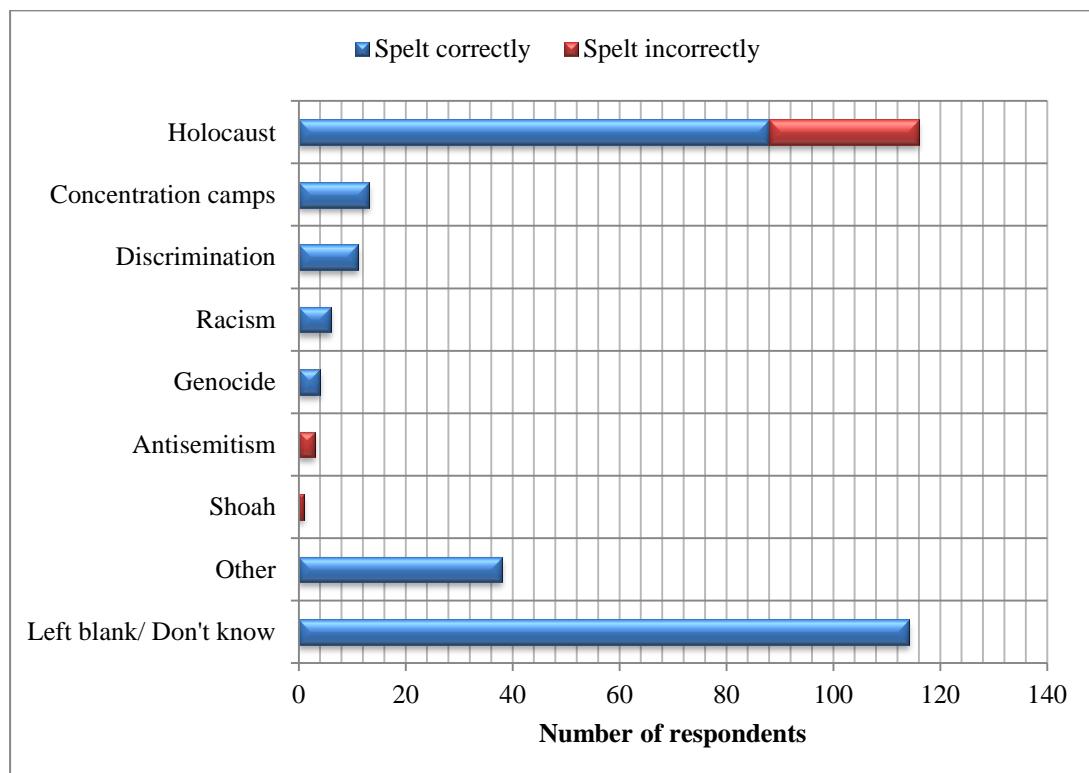
than boys and on seven of the questions, a higher percentage of girls left the question blank. Ultimately, the quantity of words which pupils wrote is only one indicator of their willingness and ability to answer and is by itself a very insufficient means of measuring knowledge or understanding.

Overall, the data showed that within many pupils' thinking there are trends and patterns in their approaches and explanations of the Holocaust. Unsurprisingly, there are certain topics within the Holocaust which are more well-known than others and there are some areas where misconceptions, confusion or ignorance seem to prevail.

### **Terms and Definitions**

In both the spider diagram and the questionnaire, the term 'Holocaust' was not used in any of the questions or stimuli and instead the phrase 'the treatment of the Jews during World War Two' was employed. In the questionnaire, pupils were specifically asked, 'what name is given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during World War Two?' and a wide range of responses was returned. Fig. 2 and table 5 both demonstrate where respondents spelt terms correctly and where they misspelt them. It seemed likely that if pupils did not know how to spell a word then they were less familiar with the term or had perhaps seen it written down less often than they had heard it spoken. Conversely, dyslexia, weak literacy and other factors might also account for spelling errors. While the general purpose of the questionnaire was not to test spelling, I considered it valuable with regards to technical terms. Consequently, one might suggest that the data indicates that many pupils were not very familiar with the term 'Holocaust' even though they had come across it. Further enquiries into this would need to be conducted.

**Fig. 2** **Responses to Question One (n.298)**



**Table 5** **Responses to Question One (n.298)**

	Spelt Correctly	Spelt Incorrectly
Holocaust	88	28
Concentration camps	13	0
Discrimination	11	0
Racism	6	0
Genocide	4	0
Antisemitism	0	3
Shoah	0	1
Other	38	0
Left blank / Don't know	114	0

The responses supported the findings of the pilot research, that many pupils are not necessarily familiar with the term ‘Holocaust’. Although 116 pupils used the word, as fig. 2 and table 5 demonstrate, only 75.8% of them were able to spell it correctly. Out of the total sample of 298, only 38.9% (n.116) of respondents used the term Holocaust at all (either correctly or incorrectly spelt). It is very evident that although many pupils are not familiar with the word ‘Holocaust’, as the pilot work also showed, they still have knowledge and understanding of the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War. This was also clear from the spider diagram answers where a wide range of knowledge and understanding was demonstrated, even though the term ‘Holocaust’ was only used 41 times by 35 different pupils.

One pupil wrote ‘Holocaust/Shoa’ in his questionnaire response which was the only time that the word ‘Shoah’ was used by any pupils during the research. Pupils’ responses which fitted into the ‘other’ category included a wide range of answers such as ‘gas chambers’, ‘slavery’ and ‘massacre’ while one pupil wrote, ‘wow, it even has a name for it?’ Four pupils, perhaps fittingly, used the term ‘genocide’ which was first used by Raphael Lemkin in order to describe what would later become popularly known as the Holocaust.<sup>254</sup>

Some pupils wrote more than one answer for this particular question, which is why the total number of answers in table 5 is 306 and not 298, such as ‘genocide/racism’ or ‘segregation/racism’. Three pupils used the phrase antisemitism in their answer to this question, which was a term relatively seldom used by respondents during the research. ‘Antisemitism’ or ‘antisemitic’ appeared four times in the spider diagram answers and eight times in total during the questionnaire (including the three times

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<sup>254</sup> Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, 79.

used in question one). In each case, the word was hyphenated (thus classified as an incorrect spelling) which is problematic as by hyphenating the word it inadvertently gives the impression that the Jews are a Semitic race (the descendants of Noah's son, Shem), which was the intention of racial theorists who coined the phrase. Nevertheless, the very small usage of this word in pupils' responses suggests that most are not familiar with it. The phrase anti-Jewish was used twice during the questionnaire, which was probably due to their lack of knowledge of the term 'antisemitism'.

Although the term 'Holocaust' was used by less than half of the sample, some pupils seemed keen to expand the definition in their various answers and include a wide variety of Nazi murder victims. In the spider diagram comments included:

*Hitler, the leader of the Nazis hated blacks, Jews and gypsies.*

*Nazis thought the gypsies, Jews, blacks and disabled people were a waste of space and should be executed.*

In the interviews, one dialogue between two pupils briefly discussed whether the Holocaust included non-Jewish deaths as well:

Pupil 1: *No, but in the Holocaust it wasn't just Jews*

Pupil 2: *Yeah, I know*

Pupil 1: *It was gays and...*

Pupil 2: *But it was mainly Jews*

Pupil 1: *Yeah*

Similarly, when responding to a photograph of inmates being liberated the following comments were made (see appendix 3.2), which suggested that some pupils see the Holocaust in a more inclusive sense:

Interviewer: *So who are the people in these photos?*

Pupil 3: *Jews*

Pupil 2: *Not necessarily just Jews they could be other people from the Holocaust.*

Interviewer: *Such as?*

Pupil 1: *Black people and disabled people*

Interviewer: *So it could be all different sorts of people?*

Pupils 1 & 2: *Yeah*

It is difficult to know whether pupils understand the Holocaust as referring to only Jewish deaths or to all sorts of Nazi victims. Yet when pupils did talk about other groups they typically referred to ‘gypsies’ (Roma and Sinti), ‘blacks’, ‘homosexuals’, ‘the disabled’ and in one case ‘the elderly’. No pupils talked about Poles, Russians, Jehovah’s Witnesses or prisoners of war as being victims of Nazi murder, even though there were many more deaths from the latter list than the former. It seemed peculiar that a number of pupils talked about ‘blacks’ being the victims of the Holocaust and further research into why pupils hold this idea would be very interesting.

## **The Sources of Holocaust Knowledge and Understanding**

Although the primary aim of the research was not to focus on the sources of pupils' Holocaust knowledge and understanding (that is a study which still needs to be conducted), it was considered important to ascertain something about pupils' backgrounds and experiences of studying the Holocaust. This would mean that if a class had recently studied the subject in another discipline or been shown a particular film in one of his or her lessons, then that could be taken into account. It was also very fascinating to begin to investigate from where pupils acquired their knowledge and understanding; what Holocaust books and films were currently read and watched by thirteen and fourteen year-olds, where they perceived their knowledge had come from and whether or not they had previously studied the Holocaust in either primary or secondary school. Unlike in previous studies, my research was exploring what pupils' perceived to be the influences and sources of their preconceptions and cross-verified them with their answers to a range of specific Holocaust questions.

It turned out that fewer than half the pupils (44.9%) believed they had studied the Holocaust outside of the History classroom in any of their formal education. While some pupils did not explicitly state in their answers when or in what subject they had studied the Holocaust, nine pupils did mention that they had come across the subject in their primary school education.

Other pupils stated that they had briefly studied the treatment of the Jews in their history lessons on the Second World War. These responses gave the impression that the Holocaust had not been studied in its own right but was nevertheless mentioned. One pupil commented, 'we learnt a little about Anne Frank but we mostly looked at

World War Two Britain, not Germany'. Another respondent stated, 'I did my primary school project on World War Two and learnt about the Nazi camps'. A further pupil remarked, 'I came across it briefly when we were studying World War Two, but we did not go into anything of any great detail. We learnt they were treated very badly'.

Some pupils referred to studying the Holocaust in other subjects. Five pupils mentioned religious education and another ten stated that they had come across the topic in their English lessons. Those who had studied the topic in English had done so through reading *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *Friedrich* or *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. As a consequence of studying these texts, the teachers provided some historical context. One pupil wrote: 'In English we studied *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* so we discussed the conditions'. In the religious studies lessons to which respondents referred, one pupil said that they had learnt about 'how the Jews were punished for their religion'. Another pupil said that 'in RE we watched *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and learnt about concentration camps'.

The HEDP research on over two thousand teachers demonstrated that fewer than 75% of English, RE, Citizenship and PSHE teachers were confident in their ability to teach about the Holocaust.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, in the nine factual questions that were given to teachers, the highest number of correct answers was provided by history teachers.<sup>256</sup> While this may be unsurprising, it does highlight that non-history specialists are perhaps more likely to establish misconceptions, as demonstrated by

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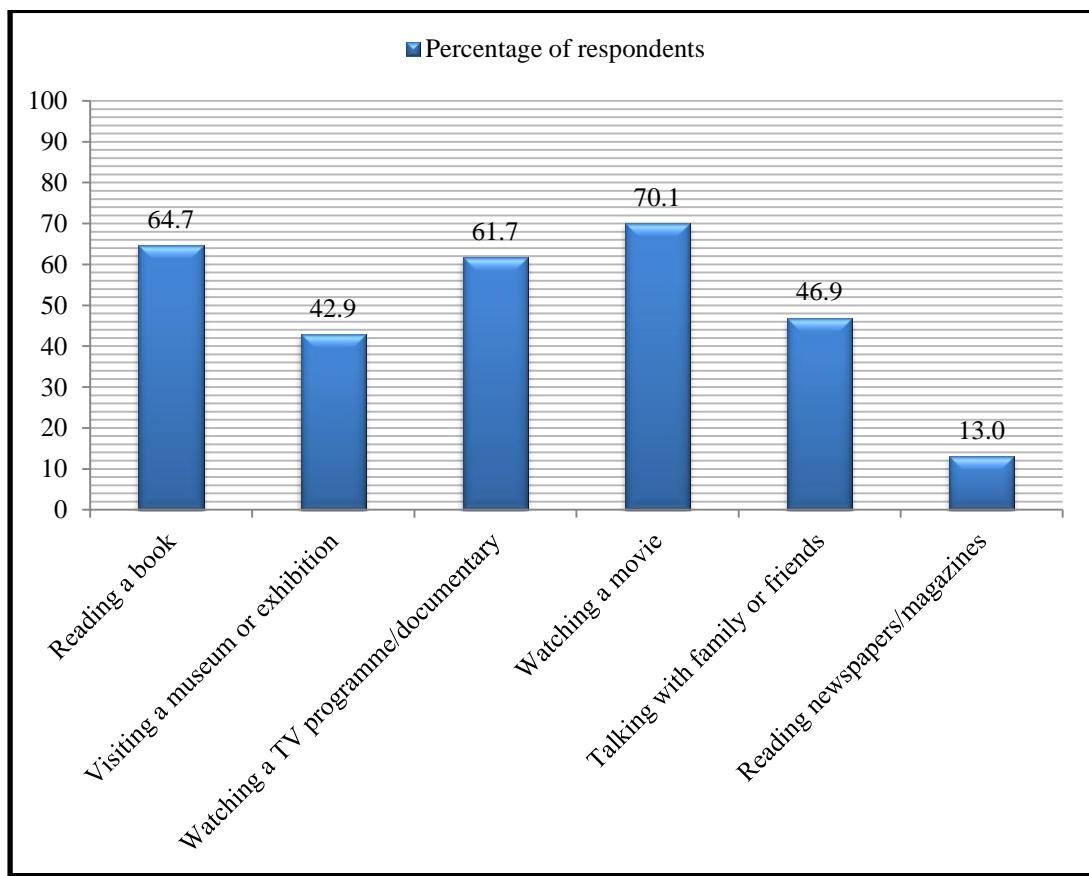
<sup>255</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 47.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 48-57.

the pupil who said that he had learnt in RE that the Jews were persecuted because of their religion.

Ideally it would have been possible to have made further enquiries into what the pupils had already studied in their primary schools and in their non-history, secondary education, by talking with a wide range of teachers and looking through their curricula. Although this was considered, it was felt that this would take the research away from its central focus. Nevertheless, it remains an interesting study which could be completed in the future.

In addition to school, however, it seems evident that children acquire knowledge and understanding from a number of other sources. When given a list of six ways in which pupils may have learnt about the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War, television, films and literature were the most commonly cited mediums of information and are perhaps the primary sources of Holocaust knowledge. Further research is needed to really test the validity of the pupils' claims, for it is possible that pupils found television, films and literature more memorable than discussions with family members or visits to a museum, but it does not necessarily mean that they acquired greater knowledge and understanding from these sources.

**Fig. 3****Perceived Sources of Holocaust Knowledge (n.298)**

As seen in fig.3, visiting a museum or an exhibition was circled by nearly half of the respondents. In the succeeding question, 'what did you learn about the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War or about Jewish life from these things?', three pupils specifically mentioned the Imperial War Museum in London, which has a permanent Holocaust exhibition. Another pupil highlighted the Jewish Museum in London, while one pupil mentioned a museum in France and a further respondent had visited museums in Poland, including Oskar Schindler's factory. The findings suggest that many pupils do visit museums and that they may provide an important source of pupils' Holocaust knowledge and understanding.

The importance of films and literature as a source of pupils' preconceptions was evident from the pilot research and so respondents were given a list of eight titles

and asked to circle any that they had either watched or read. The results conclusively showed that there were two very important sources, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. It was noteworthy that *Schindler's List* had been seen by fewer than 10% of respondents, seeing that it originally won seven Academy Awards, seven BAFTAs, three Golden Globes and grossed \$321m worldwide.<sup>257</sup> Writing as late as 2005, Wall stated, 'it is tempting to say that for many people, the Holocaust is now viewed through *Schindler's List*'.<sup>258</sup> While in the words of Levy and Sznajder, *Schindler's List* 'greatly contributed to the universalization of the Holocaust',<sup>259</sup> it would appear that contemporary children certainly do not view the Holocaust through *Schindler's List* and this is seen in fig. 4. Perhaps what was been popularly referred to as the "Schindler effect" is now over.

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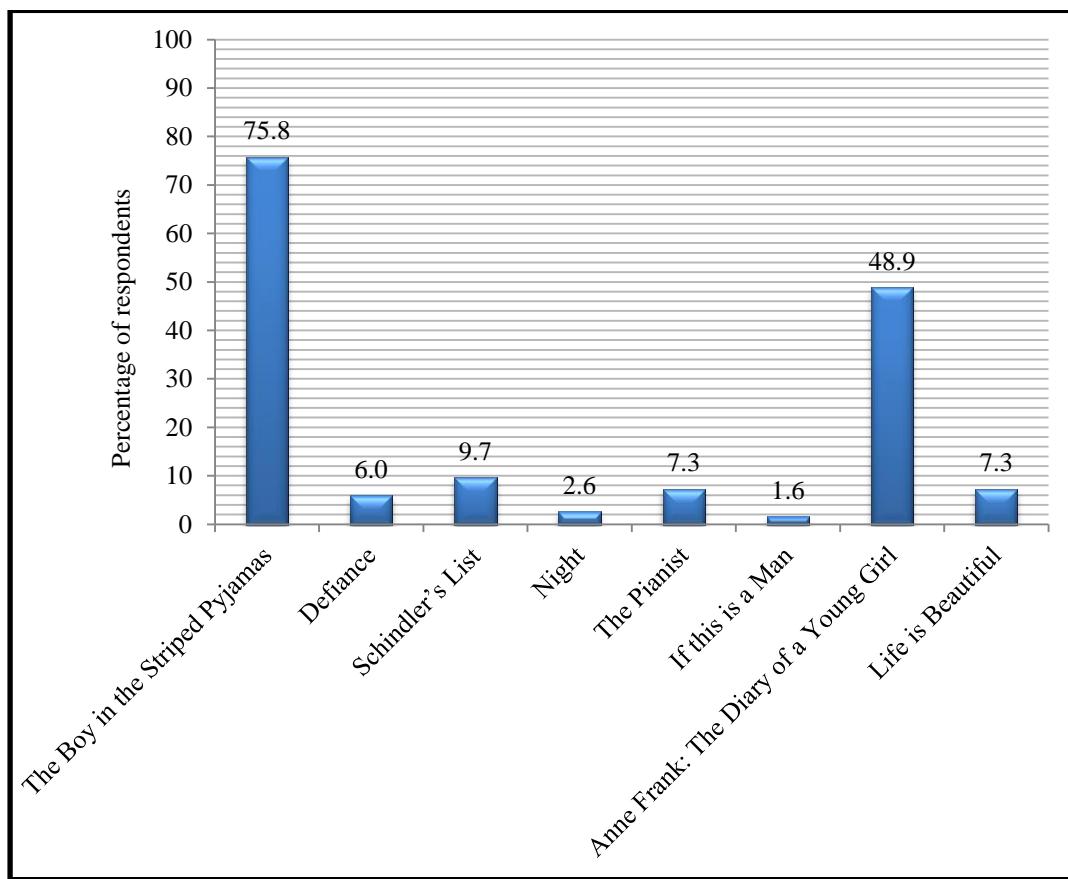
<sup>257</sup> Freer, *The Complete Steven Spielberg*, 220.

<sup>258</sup> Wall, 'The Holocaust, Film and Education', 207.

<sup>259</sup> Levy and Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound', 98.

Fig. 4

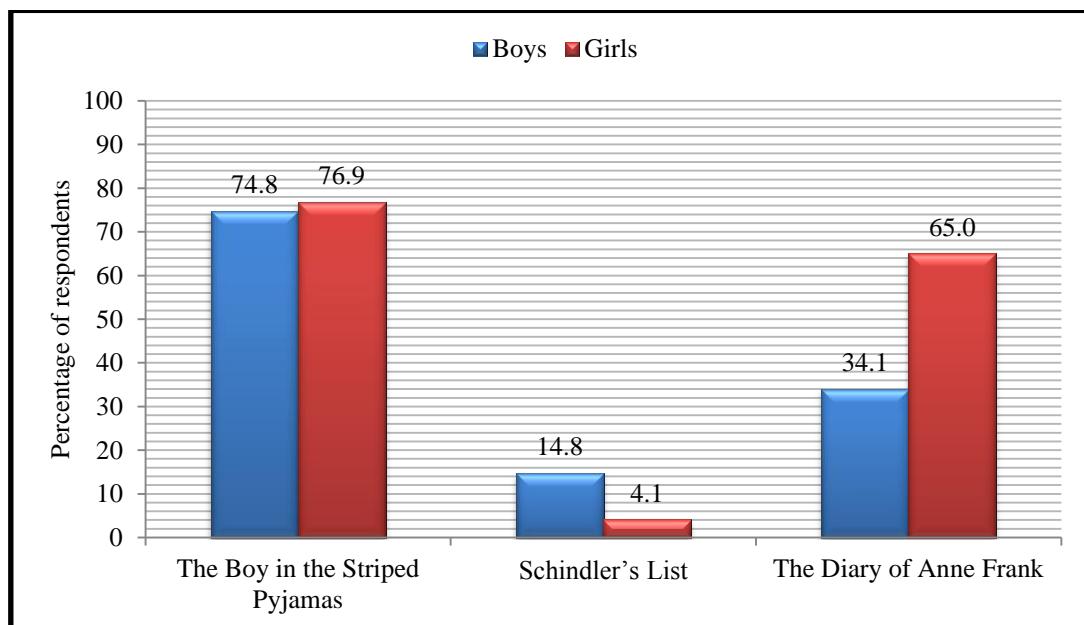
Sources of Holocaust Knowledge (n.298)



Although *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* were by far the two most popular sources, the former of these appeared to be mentioned almost equally by both genders, whereas this was not the case with the latter. The margin between genders with reference to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was 2.1%, whereas it was 30.9% for *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, which is shown in fig.5. There was also a noticeable difference between boys and girls with regards to how many had seen the film *Schindler's List*. This had been watched by 14.8% of boys but only 4.1% of girls. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was also equally viewed by pupils from both the maintained sector (75.7%) and the independent sector (76.0%).

**Fig. 5**

**Sources of Holocaust Knowledge by Gender (n.298)**



The influence of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was not simply evident from the questions on the first page of the questionnaire but it was apparent through many pupils' answers to the spider diagram, the Holocaust-knowledge questions on the questionnaire and comments made during the interviews. Although this is also discussed later on, it is worth observing something of the impact of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* on pupils' comments at this juncture.

*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was explicitly mentioned by 38/298 pupils (12.7%) in the spider diagram exercise. A further ten pupils gave implicit answers which suggested that they had been influenced by the film or the book. Some pupils simply commented that they had seen the film or read the book while others actually stated that their knowledge of the Holocaust had come directly from this source. One pupil wrote, 'most of my information about the Jews has come from the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*'. This suggests that the pupil saw the film as truthful and factually accurate. Many of the answers strongly suggested that pupils

were unquestioning in their attitudes towards it and viewed the book and the film as a reliable source of Holocaust knowledge. There were certainly no negative comments about either the historical accuracy or the questionable morality of the film as demonstrated by the following remarks:

*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is a great film because it shows the brutality of the German people towards them.*

*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas gave a great insight into Jewish gas camps.*

*You can find out by watching the Boy in the Striped Pyjamas.*

*The movie The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas gave me an insight to what actually may happen in a concentration camp.*

*I also read The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas. I learnt a lot about concentration camps from this.*

Only a few comments were able to recognise that there were limitations to the value of the source, although the pupil quoted below still accepted that much contained within it was valid:

*Although this book is fictional it contains a lot of real life events they carried out on Jews.*

In one of the interviews with three boys (two of whom were in fact Jewish) an interesting dialogue emerged regarding the film. The non-Jewish boy stated how much he hated the film and how upsetting he had found it. He commented, 'I literally ran out. I actually thought it was true'. Immediately one of the Jewish boys replied 'it is true'. Incidentally, both pupils had been shown the film in religious

education lessons. The non-Jewish boy had left the room in tears while the Jewish boy spoke of how his teacher had insisted that he and another pupil leave the classroom and work elsewhere in case they got upset. Another respondent from a different school also commented that the whole class had seen the film in religious education. In the questionnaire a pupil from a third school said that they had studied the book in English lessons.

In one of the follow-up interviews, pupils were asked more specific questions about their views and beliefs about *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. It was unanimously the case that respondents very much liked the film with one pupil stating: 'I enjoyed watching it as it portrayed what it must have been like'. When asked whether they had learnt anything from the book or the film one boy said:

*Definitely, like it was possibly the best source until like other sources you read about, but before that it was possibly a great image to put in your mind about what the Holocaust was like.*

In the light of the number of answers to the spider diagram exercise and questionnaire which suggested that pupils thought *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was true, pupils were asked about this directly in the follow-up interviews.

Pupil 1: *Obviously it's based on a true story.*

Interviewer: *In what sense do you mean, 'it's based on a true story'?*

Pupil 1: *It does say it's based on a true story. There was a General's son who bonded with one of the Jewish boys and went in. I'm not sure if that's actually true but I think it says at the beginning of the film it's based on a true story.*

In contrast, one pupil stated: 'I think some of it may be put on. Some of it may be acted to make it more emotional'. While some pupils appreciated some of the limitations of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* as a source of Holocaust knowledge, many pupils appeared to accept it at face value and thus frequently wrote about it in their answers.

While a lot of respondents did not mention *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* directly, they often described the inmates' clothes as 'pyjamas' or 'striped pyjamas' which is a phrase that does not appear to have been used before the release of the book. This shows that the story has had a big influence on Holocaust terminology if nothing else. When the pupils were shown two photographs taken at the liberation of camps (see appendix 3.1), it was extremely common for pupils to talk about them being in 'pyjamas' or 'striped pyjamas'. One pupil said for example, 'there's only one guy in pyjamas and the rest are in casuals', while in response to the question, 'what do you think is happening in these two photos?', a pupil replied: 'they are all wearing striped pyjamas'. It seems apparent that *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* has affected the very terminology and language that pupils use to describe aspects of the Holocaust and this may prove to be the biggest long-term impact.

The influence of this source was also demonstrated by the fact that one boy mentioned the book even though he had not read it:

*I have heard of books about the Holocaust which are Anne Frank's Diary and The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas. I have not got these books as I don't know enough about the Holocaust.*

Some answers strongly hinted that pupils had been influenced by *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. This seemed especially probable in the answers that focused on

Jews working and serving in the houses of Germans. In the book and the film, Pavel is an inmate at Auschwitz who helps to prepare the commandant's dinner and serves their meal and wine and is quite an important character. There is no way of knowing whether pupils were influenced by *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* when they wrote things like, 'made to be slaves for rich Germans', but it is a distinct possibility.

Even more probable is the influence of the book and the film on pupils who mentioned that the camps were presented by the Nazis as 'lovely holiday camps'. In answering the question, 'what name is given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during World War Two?', one pupil even wrote 'holiday camp'. Further on in the questionnaire, five pupils mentioned that the camps were presented as really nice places. This will be discussed in Chapter Six.

One girl's comment in an interview was particularly revealing in showing how far the influence of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* potentially extended and how aspects of the film which might be perceived by a learned adult as obviously fictional, could be perceived by a thirteen or fourteen year-old as true. When asked 'do you think that the ordinary Germans knew about the camps?', she replied:

*I know *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is made up, but you know that when his mother finds out that she didn't know they were being burnt and gassed, I mean and then burnt the bodies burnt until the smoke, and then that guy was like, 'they smell bad when they're dead'. And so she didn't know and she was living next to one and her husband was high up in the Nazi reign.*

Although the pupil states that she is aware that the story is made up, she clearly is unable to accurately discern the fiction contained within it. If this girl thinks that

the commandant's wife was unaware of the Holocaust, then she is bound to think that only an incredibly small number of people must have been aware of its existence which was clearly not the case.

*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was read or watched by a greater number of pupils than *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, yet more respondents mentioned the latter than the former in their spider diagrams. This would suggest that even though some of the pupils' answers gave the impression that John Boyne's story was true (or at least contained truth), more respondents talked about Anne Frank because they recognised that her account was not fictional. Forty three pupils made explicit reference to Anne Frank, her family or her diary. Some pupils mentioned her as an example of a Nazi victim, while others used her as an example of someone who went into hiding:

*Anne Frank was one of the victims who died when they went to gas chamber.*

*She hid from Nazis in German-controlled Holland.*

*Many Jews went into hiding (Anne Frank) and waited till war was over, but lots got caught.*

The influence of Anne Frank's diary is possibly seen by the fact that 76 pupils (25.5%) mentioned that Jews hid or went into hiding during the Second World War in their spider diagram answers. It seems probable that the common perception that many Jews hid, has originated from Anne Frank's fame and it is possible that because the Frank family were successful in hiding for so long, then some pupils may think that hiding was common and sometimes ultimately successful. One pupil, for instance, wrote: 'the Jews would hide until the war was over'. Although of course, many Jews did hide, this was often in the ghettos with incredibly low

success rates. Some Jews hid in the forests before joining partisan groups and a minority did secure support from local communities. Certainly Anne Frank's experience of hiding in a secret annex in a major European city was not typical of the Jewish fate in Europe during the Second World War. Many of the pupils who mentioned Jews hiding during the Holocaust gave the impression that the nature of their hiding places was similar to those of the Frank family:

*They hid in their basements.*

*They would hide in houses to be protected.*

*Hid up in their houses as they were so scared.*

Throughout the entire research, only eleven pupils mentioned ghettos and none did so in relation to Jews hiding. No pupils talked about Jews hiding in the forests either and thus it seems possible that many pupils arrive in history lessons with the misconception that large numbers of Jews were hiding in their own homes or being protected by friends and families in Germany or Nazi-occupied Europe. While this clearly did happen on occasions, it was the exception rather than the rule.<sup>260</sup> The story of Anne Frank is thus untypical in that her experiences of hiding in the secret annex by no means characterises the experiences of most Jewish children under Nazi rule.

In contrast to *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, the film *Schindler's List* appears to have had a relatively minimal impact on contemporary thirteen and fourteen year-olds. Oskar Schindler was mentioned six times by pupils in the spider

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<sup>260</sup> Gilbert, *The Holocaust*, 466-93.

diagram. On two of these occasions, he was used as an example to support the claim that people helped the Jews:

*Some [Jews] got treated well though like from Schindler's List.*

*There were a few Nazis that helped the Jewish. Oskar Schindler was the owner of a concentration camp. He gave the people within his camp extra food and water and made sure less people died.*

Pupils' apparent perception that Anne Frank's situation was very common appears to be mirrored in some pupils' comments about Oskar Schindler and the frequency of those who aided the Jews. This is quite problematic for after all, it is the rarity of Anne Frank and Oskar Schindler which help to make their stories so famous.

It seems, therefore, that pupils acquire their knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust from a very wide range of sources, and that films and literature appear to be particularly influential. This poses some serious challenges to the educator. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, for example, is highly problematic in terms of its historical inaccuracy and the questionable nature of the moral lesson that it teaches. It is highly likely that the character of Shmuel would have been gassed upon arrival at Auschwitz and it is certainly impossible that he would have had daily opportunities to sit at the perimeter of an unguarded fence and talk to the son of the commandant. Moreover, both the book and the film revolve around Bruno and his family with the nature of Bruno's death leaving the reader or viewer mournful for Bruno rather than the six million Jewish deaths. In the film especially, the viewers' sympathies lie with the lamenting parents, which is morally reprehensible seeing that Bruno's Father is presumably Rudolf Hoess or someone similar – certainly one of the major perpetrators of the Holocaust. Furthermore, if one imagines that Bruno

had been rescued from the gas chamber and returned to his life in Berlin, what would have happened to Shmuel and the other Jews? They would all have been gassed and yet the film's focus on Bruno and his family gives the impression that this would almost have been the outcome we should desire. While *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is useful in developing cognisance and encourages engagement with the subject matter, most pupils appear to struggle in distinguishing the fiction from the facts.

### **The Jews, Jewish Identity and Pre-War Jewish Life and Culture**

Understanding the Jews and the religion and culture of Jewish people, is important to understanding the Holocaust and its significance. Appreciating the relevance of *Kristallnacht* for example – the destruction of synagogues and the burning of sacred texts – cannot exist without some grasp of Jewish identity and religion. Only by appreciating the complexities and richness of what it means to be Jewish, can pupils see the Jews of war-time Europe as communities, families and individuals, rather than simply as victims. It also helps to restore agency and dimension to those living in the past.

#### *Defining the Jews*

In the interviews, pupils were asked the question, ‘who are the Jews?’ Overwhelmingly, the responses defined Jews as ‘a religious group’. One girl said, ‘it’s just like being a Catholic or like a Christian’ while another girl remarked, ‘they’re normal people who just have a religion that is different to Christianity’. Although pupils almost always made the initial response of Jews being a religious group, it was common for other pupils in the group to either question such a

statement or to develop it. In one interview, for example, a pupil said, ‘they’re a religious group’, which was followed up by his peer’s comment:

*But as well as a religious group they are an ethnic group as well. Like if families, if, [pause] I think they count as an ethnic group because if your parents were Jewish then you count as Jewish even if you don’t believe, if you’re not religiously Jewish.*

This level of understanding is clearly more complex and takes into consideration the importance of consanguinity. The answer did not wholly persuade the other interviewee however, who responded with the opinion that religion clearly is important and that perhaps some people are more Jewish than others:

*Well I think it should be if you believe and practise like the Jewish; depends what you do but it can be like what he said, if your parents are Jewish then you’re part Jewish.*

In a different interview, one pupil responded to his peer’s religiously-grounded definition by saying: ‘the family you are born into; if the family are Jewish, then they are Jewish’.

Yet some pupils saw the Jews in national or racial terms. In responding to a scenario about Jewish involvement in the camps, one pupil wrote: ‘well he’s Jewish so it would be quite hard to kill his own race’. A different pupil, talking about remembrance, commented: ‘it’s important to remember, particularly those that are Jewish as so many of their race was wiped out’. Another pupil compared being Jewish to being Greek or English. She said:

*Is it like when, like I'm Greek, you're English, you're English, is it like, you're Jewish?*

Two pupils in separate interviews briefly mentioned the physical characteristics of Jews, perhaps showing signs that they had been influenced by Jewish stereotypes.

*I always think of Jews as having dark hair and dark eyes.*

*They have like dark curly hair.*

One girl unusually began to distinguish between the ways that Jews are typically defined in religious terms and how the Nazis treated them in racial terms. Although the other two interviewees had both just said that the Jews were a religious group, she stated:

*Well I suppose they were sort of treated like a race at that point, so obviously the same sort of thing happened with racism with black people...so they were treated like a race rather than a religion.*

This was the only occasion when a pupil explicitly distinguished between how one might define the Jews and how the Nazis treated them.

Despite this, many pupils did explicitly state why the Nazis persecuted the Jews, often in response to the question, 'why were the Jews treated like this?'. This question was also addressed in the spider diagram exercise where 38 pupils either defined Nazi treatment of the Jews as 'racist' or described the Jews as a 'race'. Even though some of these comments clearly demonstrated that the pupil understood that it was the Nazis, rather than themselves, who defined the Jews in racial terms, other answers suggested it was less clear. A comment such as 'Hitler thought of the Jews as an inferior, sub-human race', gives no impression that the

pupil sees the Jews in racial terms. Yet this is very different to other statements such as a respondent who recognised Hitler's antisemitism but also appeared to see the Jews as a race, not to mention his acceptance of the myths of Nazi propaganda:

*Hitler did not like the Jews as they were quite clever and as a race had quite a lot of money.*

Another way which indicated that many pupils saw the Jews in racial or national terms was when they were specifically contrasted with 'Germans', despite the fact that before the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935, around 80% of Jews in Germany had German citizenship.

*The Germans were fed up of the Jews earning more money.*

*The Jews were picked on because they were taking up all of the jobs in Germany, leaving the Germans with no money.*

The prejudicial nature and historical inaccuracy of comments such as these is discussed later, but they strongly suggest that the respondents do not see the Jews of Germany as German. Instead of seeing the Jews as a religious group within Germany, the two respondents see them as racially distinctive or at least nationally distinctive.

Slightly fewer pupils, 26 out of 298 in total, explicitly defined Nazi treatment of the Jews in religious terms or described the Jews as a religion in their spider diagram answers. Again, however, some answers showed that the Nazis persecuted the Jews for religious reasons but did not indicate whether or not the respondent themselves also defined the Jews religiously:

*It was a religion that Adolf Hitler particularly disagreed with.*

*They were treated badly by the Nazis for following the Jewish religion.*

Other answers demonstrated that some pupils saw the Jews in religious terms:

*Jews were one of the most affected religions during the war and lots of Jews around the world were killed by the Germans in World War Two.*

Conversely, in the questionnaire, more pupils explained the cause of the Holocaust as Nazi hatred of the Jewish religion rather than a hatred of their race. In answer to the question ‘why were the Jews treated like this?’, 21.7% (n.59) of pupils stated that it was due to the Jews’ religion. This was in contrast to 11.8 % (n.32) who said that it was due to racism. There is no obvious reason to explain why the answers to the spider diagram do not mirror those from the questionnaire, although it must be taken into account that respondents in the spider diagram were not directly asked why the Holocaust occurred. These results do not particularly support the comments made by pupils in the interviews either. When directly asked ‘who are the Jews?’, pupils typically said that the Jews were a religious group, yet in their written exercises and in response to other interview questions, pupils often described the Jews in racial terms. It is possible that some respondents were reluctant to directly define the Jews in racial terms during interview for fear that they may be perceived as antisemitic or racist. This is a particular area where more work is required.

In the light of many pupils’ beliefs that the Nazis persecuted the Jews because of their religion, respondents were asked in follow-up interviews how the Nazis would have treated non-religious Jews who did not go to the synagogue or practise Judaism. Pupils appeared divided on this issue with some suggesting that non-religious Jews would be treated just the same as the religious ones and other

believing that they would be spared. In one of the interviews, a very interesting debate emerged, which characterised the two different schools of thought:

Interviewer: *And so what do you think happened to non-religious Jews?*

Pupil 3: *They still took them as they still believed that they had Jewish blood and even though he'd never been to the synagogue or read from the Torah, he's still Jewish in their eyes.*

Interviewer: *Do you agree with that?*

Pupil 2: *Partly, but also, I still think that if they were Jewish and not very religious in the Jewish sense, they might have not really been counted as one of the Jews that they needed to keep in a concentration camp.*

Pupil 3: *In Anne Frank's Diary, in the summary I watched about it on TV, it said that her Father fought in the First World War and fought on the German side, he wasn't a religious man, but he was still taken to a concentration camp to be persecuted but he survived it.*

Pupil 1: *Not discarding John's original point, maybe Hitler may have been, some of the Jews that weren't necessarily religious and didn't go to the synagogue and didn't actually want to be Jewish, then maybe he might have praised them for doing that because he did hate Jews so maybe he might be happy that they don't want to be Jewish and then not kill them.*

Pupil 3: *But they weren't really given the chance to denounce their religion and get away from the Jewish faith. He just said, get on the trucks and get on the trains.*

The results strongly suggested that there was no general consensus among the pupils as to precisely who the Jews were and whether or not the Nazis persecuted them due to their religion or race.

Another barrier to pupils having an accurate knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust was that thirteen and fourteen year-olds appeared to think that the Nazis defined the Jews in religious terms and persecuted the Jews because of their religion. This means that many pupils may believe that the Jews could have saved their lives by renouncing Judaism or by converting to Christianity. As Bauer very powerfully points out, this was not the case:

In the Holocaust, Jews were not killed for what they did or did not believe, and they could not escape death by conversion, apostasy or change of ideology. They were murdered for being Jews, that is, for being descended from three or four Jewish grandparents. There was absolutely no element of personal decision in their fate: they were murdered for having been born.<sup>261</sup>

### *Pre-War Jewish Life and Culture*

During the interviews, pupils were asked where Jews had lived throughout recent history and what life was like for Jews living in Europe before the Nazis came to power. In response to the first of these questions, one girl replied: 'they haven't lived anywhere; they're a religion'. Another pupil commented: 'they live

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<sup>261</sup> Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, 205-6.

everywhere, I mean, you get Jews everywhere'. It was noteworthy that pupils often paused before answering this question and clearly had to think about it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this question generated a wide range of answers such as, 'Europe and the Middle East', 'near Germany and Poland' and 'there are quite a lot in England'. One of the most common responses that pupils made to this question was referring to Israel. It was clear that a familiar misconception amongst pupils was that the state of Israel existed in the immediate centuries before the Second World War. As demonstrated in the dialogue below, the consequence of this is that pupils may think that the Nazi regime took Jews from Israel:

Interviewer: *Where have the Jews lived typically throughout history?*

*Let's take the last 2000 years for example.*

Pupil 2: *Israel.*

Pupil 1: *Yeah, Israel.*

Interviewer: *So you think they've lived in Israel historically over the last two thousand years?*

Pupil 1: *Yeah. And weren't Jews from all over the world?*

Pupil 2: *Yeah, so maybe they would have taken them from other places as well instead of Israel.*

Pupil 3: *There were loads of Jews living in Germany that had to flee and Poland.*

This misconception also arose in a different interview when pupils were asked where those who survived the Holocaust might go after the War.

*Well if it's World War Two, aren't they going to go back to like Jerusalem, isn't that where they were taken from?*

Moreover, another pupil asked in one of the follow-up interviews: 'were any Jews taken from Israel?'

Conversely, some pupils recognised that the Jewish people were stateless in the centuries before the Holocaust. One pupil said, 'they've never had a homeland', while another stated: 'they've never actually had a homeland, I mean, I think someone once said, Jews will always walk the land'. This second comment may refer to 'the wandering Jew', which is a character from medieval Christian mythology. Another pupil wrote: 'the Jews also didn't have a proper Fatherland so they sort of invaded other countries and they [Nazis] didn't like it'. This comment shows a combination of ignorance and the possible influence of Nazi propaganda of the Jews as parasites feeding off the host nation. Moreover, it suggests that the pupil is unaware that Jews had been living in Germany for many centuries, the earliest record dating back to an imperial decree in Cologne in 321AD.<sup>262</sup>

In responding to the question about what life was like for Jews in pre-Nazi Europe, there was also a mix of responses. One pupil asked, 'didn't they have to wear a Star of David or was that after the Nazis?' Some pupils thought that Jews living in Europe had always been treated just like any other group of people and that their lives had been comfortable and happy. One boy stated, 'I think their life was quite good because, well it was just normal really'. His comment was immediately followed up by his peer who said: 'I don't think they got discriminated against before the Nazis'. In a separate interview, one girl commented that their lives were

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<sup>262</sup> Gilbert, *Holocaust Maps and Photographs*, 6.

‘quite nice and relaxed, they didn’t know it was going to happen’. Clearly there is a danger in generalising about pre-War Jewish life in Europe and the Jewish community in Krakow under King Kazimierz III in the fourteenth century had very different experiences from those living in Russia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, in understanding the Holocaust, it is beneficial for pupils to have an awareness of historic antisemitism and the persecution that was prevalent across so much of Europe, ranging from the anti-Jewish pogrom in York in the twelfth century to the Dreyfus Affair in France at the end of the nineteenth century. In the questionnaire responses, only one pupil referred to the notion that antisemitism had been in existence in Germany and Europe long before the Nazis. Although many struggled to articulate this sentiment, some pupils in the interviews were able to suggest that Jews had been treated differently. One boy talked about how Jews were ‘frowned upon’, while another remarked: ‘they were never accepted in society, no one ever really liked them’. Respondents also said:

*Jews weren’t treated exactly the same; maybe a bit less because they never really, they’ve never been popular.*

*I think they were always singled out even if Hitler wasn’t in power as a separate class.*

Teachers need to recognise that pupils have very little knowledge of the way that Jews lived and that taking the time to deal with the complexities of their past will enable a better understanding of the Holocaust.

### *Perceptions of Jews and Contemporary Antisemitism*

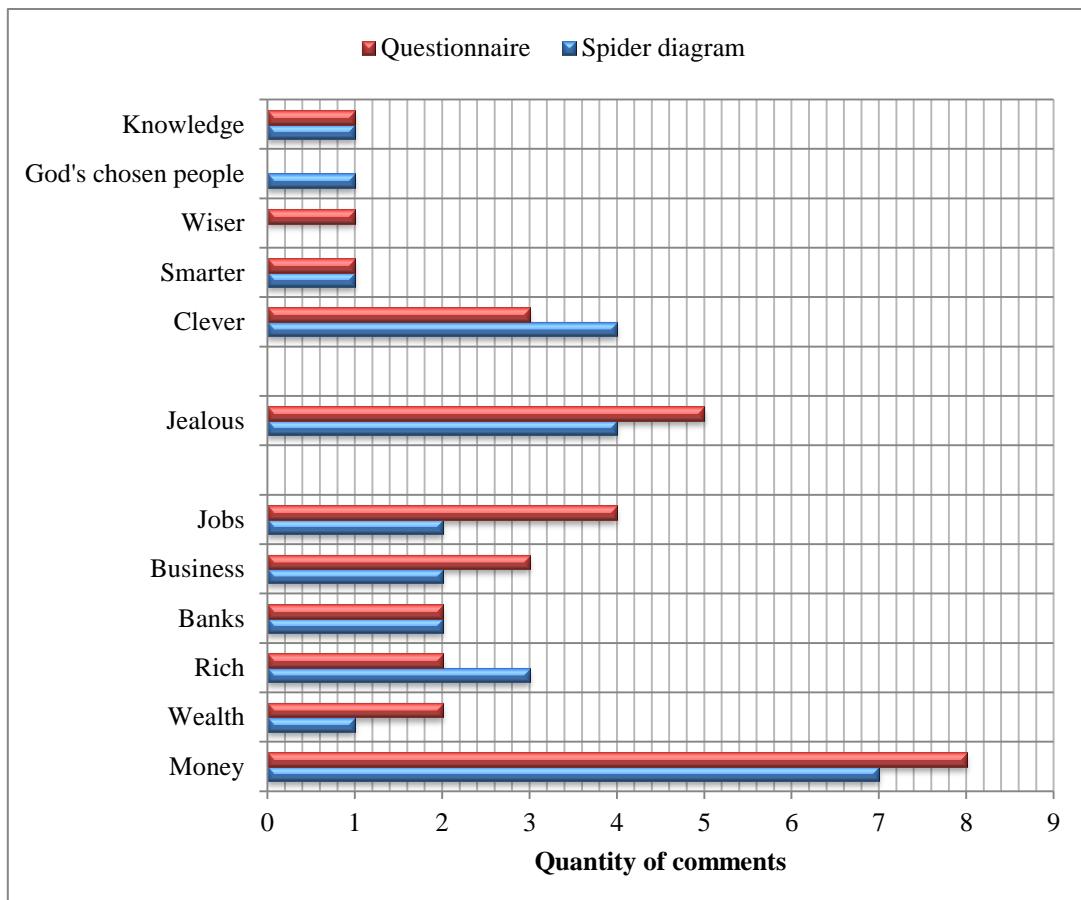
In answering the question on what Jewish life was like in pre-Nazi Europe, some pupils showed that they had been influenced by positive or negative stereotypes of the Jews, which are shown in fig.5. The themes of wealth, money, intelligence and success in business were particularly prevalent. In an interview one girl said:

*I think the main reason they were picked, was because they were doing quite well in shops and businesses. I think they were doing quite well, like in profitably and I think that's one of the main reasons why Hitler and the Nazis chose the Jews.*

These sorts of comments were also demonstrated by a range of answers given in the spider diagram and to the questionnaire.

Fig. 6

Pupil Responses Reflecting Stereotypes of Jewish People held by Respondents (n.298)



As fig. 6 shows, some of the comments made by pupils reflected both the positive and negative stereotypes of the Jews. In total, there were 60 comments made which reflected stereotypes, making up 20.1% of the sample. Some answers contained reference to both of these and often explained the Holocaust through Hitler's jealousy of Jewish wealth or intelligence:

*Hitler believed that they were clever and took all the money.*

It was the emphasis on Jewish wealth and money, however, which was the most common. Many responses highlighted that some pupils genuinely believed that Jews started banks and were the key money lenders in Weimar and Nazi Germany:

*The Jews were blamed because they could lend money.*

*Hitler did not like the Jews because as a race they had a lot money due to bringing around banks.*

Some pupils also stated that Jews were taking up all of the best jobs in Germany. Although some respondents prefaced their comments with 'Hitler thought', others appeared to believe that Jews really were depriving Germans of employment and money:

*The Jewish people were treated like this because Hitler thought that they were getting all the good jobs in Germany around that time such as doctors, lawyers and bankers.*

*The Jews were treated like this because in Germany the Jews were taking up jobs like doctors and they put the Germans out of jobs, giving the Germans no money.*

One pupil clearly believed that Jews earned more money because he sought to justify the statement:

*The Germans were fed up of the Jews earning more money; this was because they worked harder and put in more effort.*

The prevalence of negative stereotyping in pupil answers, suggests ignorance on the parts of the respondents. Yet more worrying is if such answers contained elements of antisemitism. There were certainly some comments which appeared to reflect this attitude. One pupil commented that Jews were regarded 'as freaks for their beliefs', while others wrote: 'Jews were annoying', 'they had done many things' and they were persecuted 'because they were Jews'.

Conversely, other pupils provided philosemitic responses, in some cases showing very favourable views of Jews:

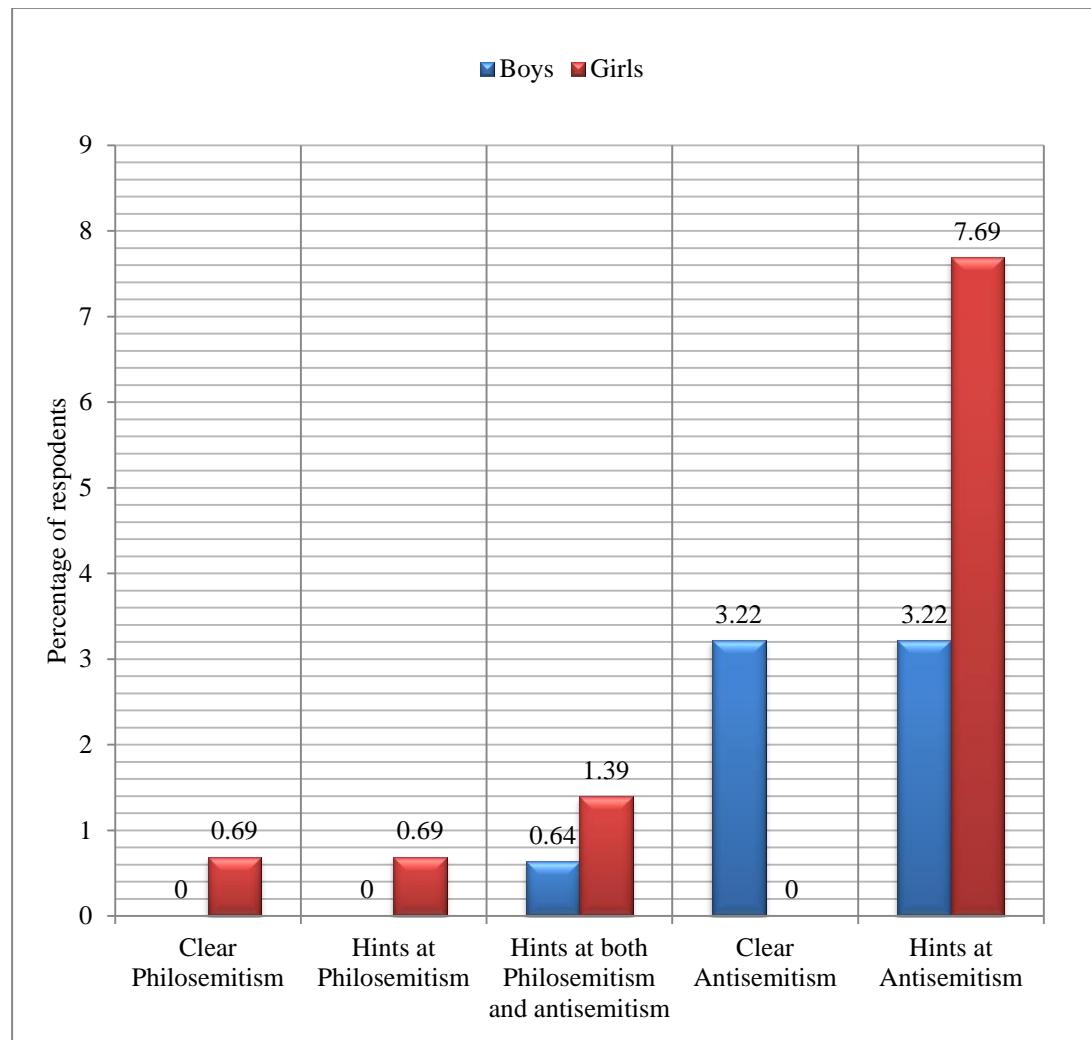
*The Jews were and still are amazing people and are very clever and Hitler possibly did what he did because he was jealous.*

Although intent was not always easy to assess, pupils' written responses were analysed and if relevant, were categorised into one of five groups and then given as a percentage of the sample. This was done for all pupils and then pupils by gender. Answers were classified as hinting at antisemitism or philosemitism if they explained the causes of the Holocaust through a negative or positive stereotype which was prefaced by 'Hitler thought' or 'Hitler believed'. For example, a statement such as 'Hitler believed that Jews were taking all the money in Germany' was classified as hinting at antisemitism and 'Hitler was worried because he thought that all the Jews were very intelligent' was categorised as hinting at philosemitism. Comments which were more explicit were labelled as clearly antisemitic or philosemitic. In order to fit into this second category, answers had to present the Jewish stereotype or myth as a fact that appeared to be believed by the respondent. For example, 'Jews had freakish beliefs and were stealing all the jobs' was considered clearly antisemitic while 'Jews are God's chosen people and wiser than everyone else' was categorised as clearly philosemitic.

Although it must be accepted that intent and prejudice is often difficult to ascertain and thus the graph has a large margin of error, it suggests that pupils are more likely to express antisemitic comments than philosemitic or perhaps be more familiar with negative Jewish stereotypes as opposed to positive ones. According to the data presented in fig. 7, girls appeared more likely to express these stereotypes but boys

were more likely to convey overtly antisemitic comments. Due to the difficulty of assessing intent, the reliability of these findings is certainly open to question. Further research is needed on this topic, which goes beyond the remit of this thesis.

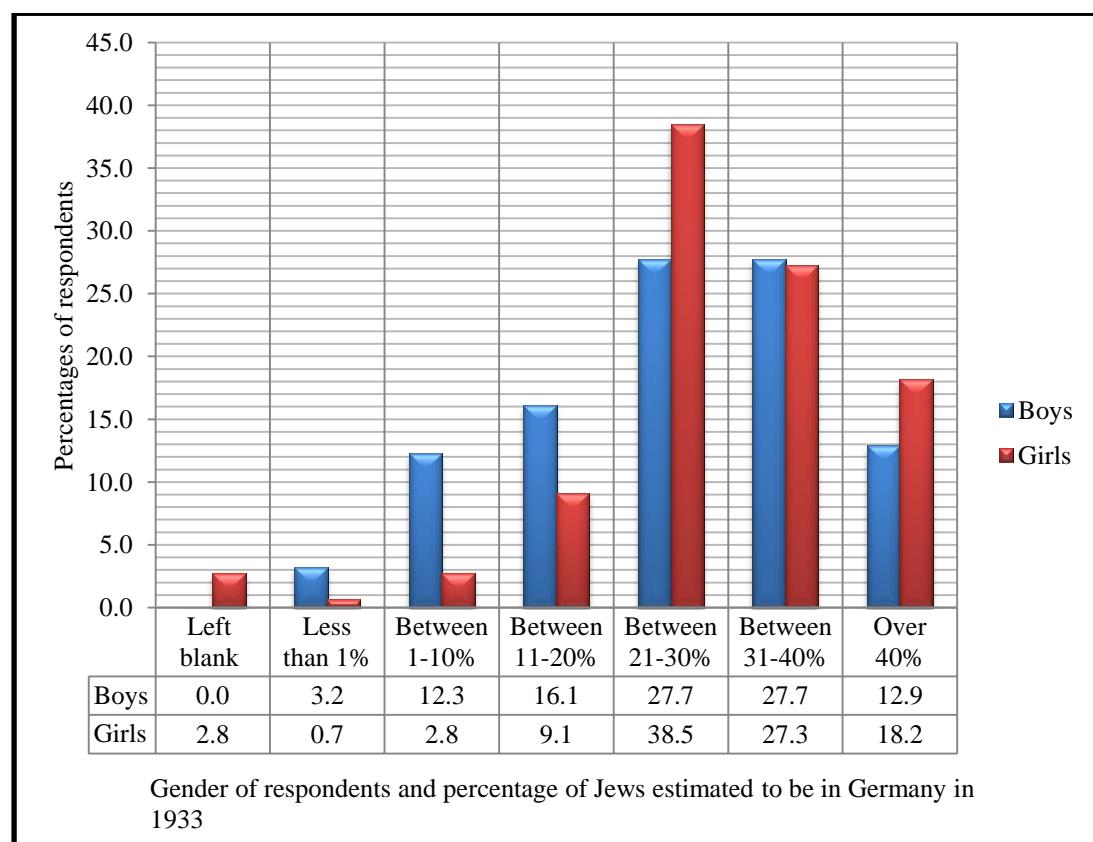
**Fig. 7 Philosemitic and Antisemitic Comments (n.298)**



Some of the negative ideas that some pupils hold about Jews appear to be based upon the erroneous assumption that they represented a much larger percentage of the pre-War German population than they really did. Ideas such as the 'Jews were taking up all the jobs', clearly assumes that there must have been a considerable number of Jews in Germany. On June 16, 1933, a census was carried out in Germany which found that there were around 505,000 Jews among a population size

of 67 million. This meant that the Jewish population of Germany consisted of 0.75%. In the questionnaire pupils were asked, 'what percentage of people living in Germany in 1933 do you think were Jewish?' This was of course a very difficult question and the purpose of it was not so much to test whether or they would get it right. Instead it was to assess if pupils would grossly overestimate the Jewish population size, showing how they could then be susceptible to the ideas of Nazi propaganda that Jews were ubiquitous throughout Germany and were taking all of the jobs and the money. Pupils were given six options, ranging from less than 1% to over 40% in margins of 10% in between. Fig. 8 demonstrates that most pupils grossly exaggerated the size of the Jewish population in Germany.

**Fig. 8 Responses to Question Six (n.298)**



The modal average was between 21-30%, which is the equivalent of Jews making up around one in four of the German population. Moreover, only 29 out of 298

pupils thought that Jews represented either less than 1% or 1-10% whereas 82 pupils believed it to be over 40%. In the light of this, it is understandable why some pupils were under the impression that the Nazis hated the Jews because ‘they took all the jobs’ and it is also understandable why a minority of pupils suggested that Jews really were preventing Germans from being employed.<sup>263</sup> Some pupils in their questionnaire and spider diagram answers, also explicitly commented on the size of the Jewish population in Germany:

*Hitler thought there were too many Jews in the country and they were overpopulating.*

*There were too many of them, Hitler didn’t like them.*

Such comments are extremely misguided and represent very dangerous misconceptions. These two comments were in response to the question ‘why were the Jews treated like this?’ and thus the two respondents appear to think that Nazi persecution was due to the size of the Jewish population rather than biological and racial antisemitism.

The data also showed that girls typically opted for one of the higher percentages. Noticeably, only five girls (fewer than 3%) thought that the Jews made up less than 10% of the pre-war population of Germany. This was in contrast to 24 boys (just over 15%). Similarly, 83.9% of girls thought that Jews made up over 21% – a view held by 68.4% of boys. While there appears to be no particular explanation for the distinctions between the genders in relation to this question, it does support the idea that misconceptions regarding the size of the Jewish population in Germany may be

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<sup>263</sup> Although the simplistic distinction between Germans and Jews is an erroneous one seeing that 80% of Jews living in Germany in 1933 were also German citizens.

linked to negative stereotypes, as the graph showed that more girls than boys gave answers which hinted at antisemitism.

Some responses given by pupils, either hinted at or explicitly acknowledged an awareness of contemporary antisemitism. This was specifically acknowledged by two Jewish pupils who both said that they were the only Jewish children in their primary schools and were thus teased and singled out. One boy said, regarding contemporary society: 'there is still teasing, even forms of bullying'. Another pupil said: 'there's always the odd joke'. These responses are obviously causes for concern. If contemporary antisemitism continues to exist amongst schoolchildren, then this is likely to have a detrimental effect on the way that they view the Jews in the history of the Holocaust. Two different pupils made interesting comments in their answers, which perhaps suggested that antisemitism continued to exist. The first pupil in answering the question about why the killing of the Jews ended, wrote: 'it ended nothing, it only caused hatred'. This is a difficult statement to interpret but it is possible that the pupil concerned is indicating that there continues to be tension and hatred, which exists between Jews and perhaps Germans, or other national or political groups. Less enigmatic was a comment made by a non-Jewish pupil in an interview:

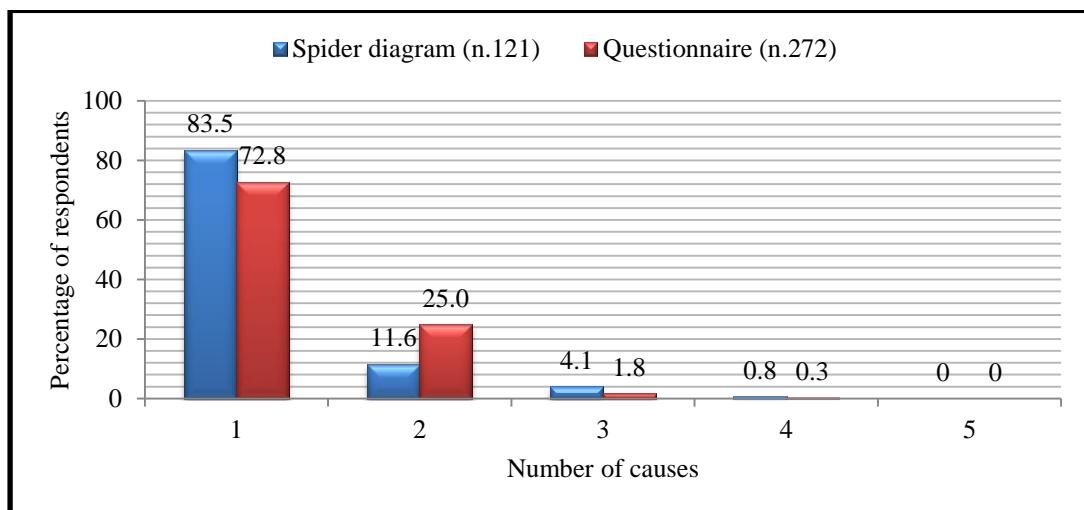
*I still think that some people still hold some sort of antisemitic views. I don't think the whole concept is completely gone from the scene.*

It certainly appears that more pupils have negative perceptions of Jews, perhaps even antisemitic tendencies, than the reverse.

## **The Causes of the Holocaust**

In order to find out how pupils explained the causes of the Holocaust, the questionnaire asked, ‘why were Jews treated like this?’ Many responses in the spider diagram also tackled this question and 40.6% of respondents (n.121) used at least one of the eight available boxes to try and answer this crucial question. The explanations that pupils offered to explain the causes of the Holocaust varied dramatically, but what was particularly evident was that despite the five lines that were provided for the answering of this question, many pupils sought to offer mono-causal explanations. It is possible that this could be explained by pupils simply not wanting to write a lot when given the chance, although mono-causal explanations were also common in the interviews.

Out of the 121 respondents who offered an explanation in their spider diagram exercise, 83.4% (n.101) only provided a single reason. This is shown below in fig. 9. Pupils’ responses in the questionnaire to, ‘why were Jews treated like this?’, yielded a similar outcome. Out of the 272 respondents who answered this question, 72.8% (n.198) provided only one reason.

**Fig. 9****Number of Causes Given for the Holocaust**

It is important to adopt a balanced approach when analysing the data. Just because pupils only gave one explanation does not automatically mean that they believe the Holocaust had a single cause. It is possible that respondents simply provided what they perceived to be the most important factor. Nevertheless, in both the spider diagram and the questionnaire there was certainly sufficient space provided (and pupils had more than enough time) to write down more than one cause if they so wished. Thus it may be the case that while the number of pupils who see the Holocaust in mono-causal terms is not as high as the figures in the graph, there is still a tendency for pupils to approach the Holocaust in simplistic terms and not comprehend the complex manner in which it came about. In many senses this is unsurprising. According to Lee students often fail to see the relationship between factors when analysing causation.<sup>264</sup>

It is perhaps also unsurprising that pupils' explanations as to why the Holocaust took place, revolved around the character of Adolf Hitler. The most common sort of

<sup>264</sup> Lee, 'Putting Principles into Practice', 258.

answer adopted what was once popularly known as extreme intentionalism, suggesting that Hitler's hatred of the Jews and his desire to destroy them was the fundamental reason for why the Holocaust took place. The obsession with the character of Hitler within society and the media may be one of the causes of this preconception. Yet the pupils who focused their explanations on Hitler did differ slightly in explaining that hatred. Some respondents, for example, simply commented that 'Hitler hated the Jews', while others emphasised Hitler's desire for an Aryan race and how the Jews did not fit into that racial-biological framework:

*Hitler wanted the world turned into an Aryan race and being a Jew didn't fit into being Aryan.*

Other pupils were much less explicit and simply put 'because of Hitler' or 'because Hitler hated them'.

This Hitler-centric type of response was explored during the follow-up interviews in which pupils were asked who carried out the actual killing in the Holocaust. The conversation below characterises the centrality of Hitler in pupils' thinking but acknowledges the role of other individuals:

Pupil 3:       *Hitler used his charisma to turn his people against the Jewish people so they would be more accustomed to killing the Jews.*

Interviewer:   *So do you think that ordinary people were involved in the process of killing Jews?*

Pupil 3:       *I think people needed jobs as it was after the First World War and the economy was bad so they thought it would be a job*

*for them. They might not have had a choice. They might have been forced to do it at gunpoint.*

Pupil 2: *They might not have wanted to, but they were probably a part of it.*

It is difficult to know whether some pupils use Hitler as a synonym for the Nazis and that the Hitler-centric perspective is not as dramatic as the data initially suggests. One respondent's answer suggested this when she wrote, 'because the Germans (Hitler) believed they were less beings'. A few pupils mentioned both the Nazis and Hitler in their explanations, for example, 'Hitler and the Nazis did not like Jews and Hitler wanted a pure race'. The majority of pupils however, clearly meant Hitler and not the Nazis, for example, 'because Hitler did not like them so it was his personal views and made thousands to agree with him'. Overall it seems that most pupils who refer to Hitler are not simply seeing or using him as the embodiment of National Socialism.

Teachers need to strike a careful balance when seeking to tackle pupils who place too great an emphasis on Hitler. While a totally Hitler-centric view is not helpful in developing more sophisticated understandings of the Holocaust, teachers do not want to play into the hands of Holocaust deniers or Neo-Nazis by marginalising Hitler's role or inadvertently giving the impression of "letting him off the hook". In the words of Lee, 'the impetus for genocide must be considered Hitler's. But the means by which this would be carried out resided with the SS, which alone could provide the degree of organisation and commitment that was needed'.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Lee, *Hitler and Nazi Germany*, 88.

Within the group of pupils that gave Hitler-centric explanations, there appeared to be a spectrum of answers ranging from incredulity and disgust of Hitler, to answers which almost sought to rationalise why he harboured such extreme levels of hatred. The more emotionally-charged responses included statements such as ‘Hitler was extremely horrible’ and ‘Hitler was an idiot’, while others described his previous experiences during World War I or even his early encounters with Jews as a child. One pupil described Hitler as a ‘sadistic psychopath’ and two pupils as ‘mad’. While the psychological state of Hitler may be legitimately called into question, teachers must tackle any misconceptions that pupils hold regarding the general psychological nature of Nazi perpetrators. Men like Rudolf Hoess the Commandant of Auschwitz remained a practising Catholic and devoted family man. Arendt famously stated that:

The process of extermination was dealt with neither by fanatics nor by natural murderers nor by sadists. It was manned solely and exclusively by normal human beings.<sup>266</sup>

The Hitler-centrism of many pupils’ answers relates to (but is not necessarily the same as) what has been described by Salmons as ‘perpetrator-oriented’ perspectives.<sup>267</sup> This is where the causes of the Holocaust revolve around and are explained through the motives and actions of the perpetrators. Despite the wording of the question being focused on the victim (i.e. why were Jews treated like this?), the majority of pupils’ answers (75.0% (n.204)) focused on the perpetrator. In contrast, 19.1% (n.52) explained the Holocaust through the beliefs, actions,

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<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head*, p.352.

<sup>267</sup> Salmons, ‘A New Kind of Pedagogy?’

behaviour or identity of the victims and 5.9% (n.16) mentioned both the views and intentions of the perpetrators and the behaviour and identity of the victims. The answers that were Hitler-centric almost exclusively fell into the perpetrator-oriented group of responses although some pupils explained the Holocaust through Hitler's racial hatred and by focusing on the victims, e.g., 'they were different and Hitler didn't want them in the world' and 'because they were different and Hitler blamed them for Germany's problems'. If the question had been phrased, 'why did the Nazis carry out the Holocaust?' it would have been interesting to have seen whether or not pupils' would have focused their answers on the perpetrators to an even greater extent.

Answers that explained the causes of the Holocaust through the identity of the Jews (either exclusively or alongside perpetrator-oriented explanations) often generated problematic responses. This was because the explanations were either historically inaccurate or appeared to place the blame for the Holocaust on the Jews rather than the Nazis. There were 20 answers (7.4%) which explained the Holocaust exclusively through the Jewish religion, for example, 'because of their religion' or 'because of their beliefs'. Such answers placed no responsibility on the perpetrators and appeared to assume that all those who were killed were practising Jews. Yet many other answers which ignored the perpetrators were equally if not more problematic. These included responses such as: 'Jews were annoying', 'because they are Jews' and 'because Jews looked down on Germans at that time'.

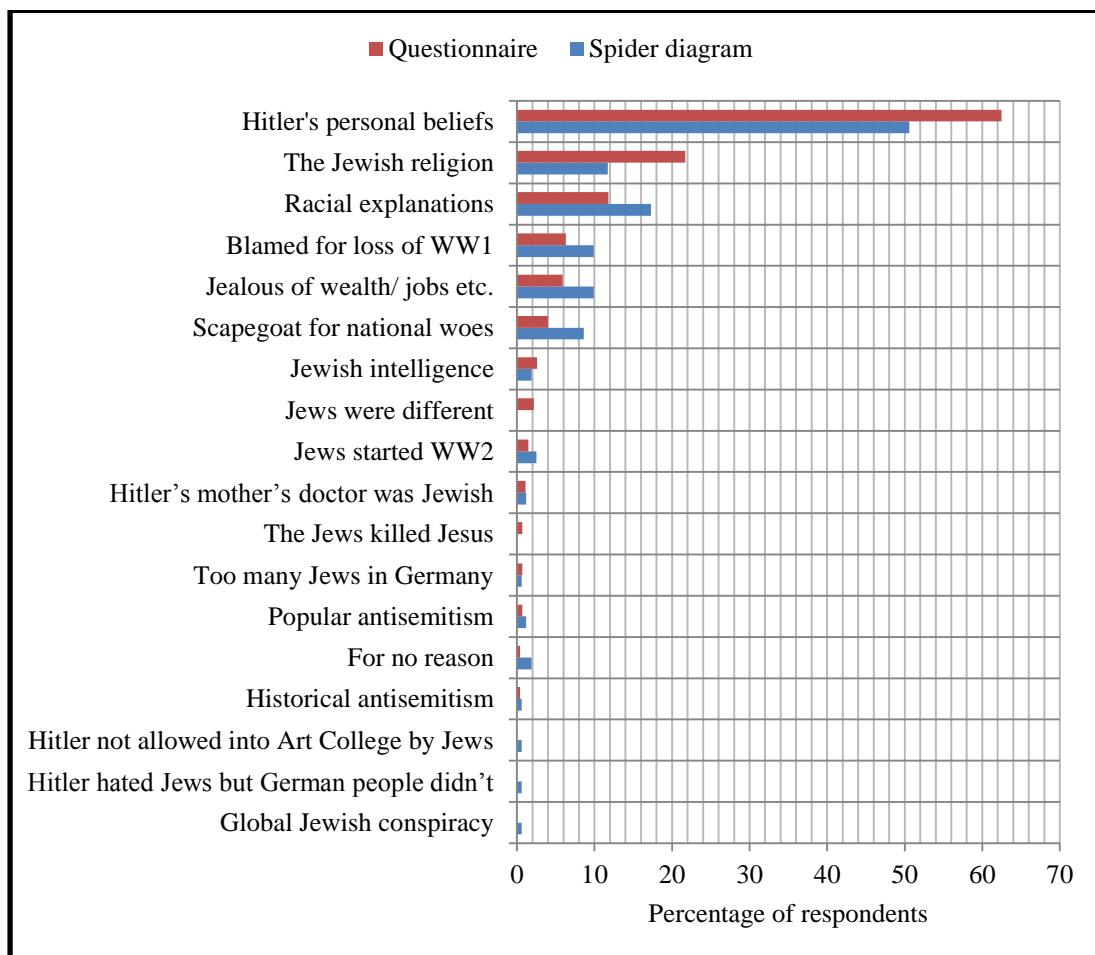
The findings of the questionnaire responses do not allow comprehensive or conclusive judgements about the levels of antisemitism which existed among the sample. Yet, it is undoubtedly the case that some of the answers given are a serious cause for concern. While it is important to not label historical ignorance as

antisemitism, it is equally crucial that genuine antisemitism is not protected or tolerated under the guise of ignorance. Perhaps most significantly, this research shows that despite the efforts of contemporary education, there is still the persistence of myths, prejudices and historical inaccuracies. It must be remembered that all respondents took part before formally studying the Holocaust in history and thus their responses might potentially be very different were they to be recorded in a year's time.

Fig. 10 below shows how the responses from both the spider diagram and the questionnaire can be grouped into eighteen categories. Some answers such as 'Hitler hated their religion' fitted into the first two categories and thus appear twice. The results show how central Hitler is in the minds of so many pupils but also demonstrates that a large number of causes were listed, ranging from the historically inaccurate (e.g., there were too many Jews in Germany) to the absurd (e.g., the Jews started World War Two).

**Fig. 10**

**Responses to Question Four (n.298)**



Within the responses, there were some comments which attributed a large measure of responsibility or blame to the Jews. One pupil wrote, 'they were picked on because they were taking up all of the jobs in Germany, leaving the Germans with no money'. Another pupil, when asked in interview, why the Nazis specifically targeted the Jews stated:

*Because Germany lost the War and the economy was in the bin, but the Jewish community was still prosperous and having an income, while most people in Germany who were not Jewish were living on the street, feeding on scraps.*

Others explained the Holocaust through Hitler's beliefs and actions but then explained these through the beliefs and actions of the Jews, often in a historically inaccurate or derogatory way (e.g., 'Hitler hated the Jews because they were richer than the rest of the public'). Even though this pupil is almost certainly not justifying Hitler's response to his perception of Jewish wealth, he is repeating ideas from Nazi propaganda that the Jewish community was disproportionately wealthy and the embodiment of extreme capitalism. Other pupils wrote comments such as 'Hitler was jealous of their businesses and money'. Answers such as these differ from ones which begin with 'Hitler thought...' or 'Hitler believed...', which do not suggest that the pupil accepts Hitler's thoughts or beliefs as facts. Clearly some pupils do appear to hold to the view that Jews were richer than non-Jews within Germany and that they were taking jobs and causing poverty.

The perpetrator-oriented explanations were predominantly Hitler-centric but the phrase 'Nazis' was used in 14.7% (n.40) of the 272 responses to the question, 'National Socialism' in 0.3% (n.1) and 'Germans' in 9.2% (n.25).

In relating these answers to gender, there appeared to be no discernible difference between boys' and girls' answers. Perpetrator-oriented explanations were given by 77.1% (n.108) of boys and 72.7% (n.104) of girls. Answers which ignored the perpetrators and explained the causes of the Holocaust through the victims represented 17.9% (n.25) of boys' responses and 19.7% (n.26) of girls'. Similarly, 67.9% (n.95) of boys' answers were Hitler-centric compared with 66.7% (n.88) of girls' responses.

Amongst both boys' and girls' Hitler-centric answers, a few pupils sought to explain the Nazi leader's antisemitism through his childhood experiences. One pupil wrote,

‘Hitler did not like them [the Jews] because his mother’s doctor was a Jew and Hitler believed that the doctor caused his Mother’s death’. A similar comment was as follows:

*It was because Adolf Hitler didn’t like them. There are many theories as to why he hated them. I think that the best one is that he got very close to his Mother and she got cancer. She died and the doctor looking after them was Jewish.*

It was perhaps surprising that only one pupil talked about Hitler’s rejection from Art College in Vienna, which quite a few pupils in the pilot research had mentioned as a key cause of Hitler’s antisemitism.

What did appear frequently in pupils’ answers, however, was the idea that the Jews were blamed for Germany’s defeat in the First World War. Comments such as ‘They were seen as the reason why World War I was lost’ and ‘Hitler thought it was their fault they lost the First World War’ were made by 6.3% (n.17) of respondents and in most of these cases, this was the only explanation given for the Holocaust. With the exception of one pupil, all of the comments regarding the ‘stab in the back’ myth were prefaced with phrases which highlighted that the belief was held by Hitler or the German people rather than the pupil, even though no pupil actively repudiated the claim.

Instead of focusing on how Hitler attributed the defeat in the First World War to the Jews, four pupils (1.5%) talked about how the Jews were blamed for starting World War Two (e.g., ‘the Jews were blamed for the causing of the Second World War’). It is important that teachers effectively tackle any potentially prevailing myths that might have emerged as a consequence of Nazi propaganda. Pupils who explained

the Holocaust through the ‘stab in the back’ myth or by the Jews causing World War Two, almost certainly will not think that the Holocaust was acceptable or justified, but they may believe that there was a measure of validity to Hitler’s propaganda claims. It is imperative that teachers highlight how the Jews were not responsible for Germany’s defeat in the Great War and that Jewish financiers did not start the Second World War.

In addition to referring to Nazi myths about the First and Second World War, a number of pupils were able to see how the Jews were used as scapegoats, not just for national conflicts, but also for the economy and German morale. One pupil commented that ‘Hitler needed a scapegoat to make Germans feel better’, while another wrote: ‘They were used as Hitler’s scapegoat. He blamed them for everything from corrupt government to bad weather’. While it was undoubtedly the case that the Jews were blamed for all of Germany’s ills and portrayed as both extreme capitalists and communists, pupils ought not to forget that Hitler chose the Jews for a reason, a reason fundamentally grounded in his ideas about race.

It seemed that a lot of pupils were trying to attribute logical or rational reasons for why Hitler and the Nazi regime may have hated the Jews. Pupils appeared to struggle with the notion that Nazi antisemitism was completely illogical and irrational. While respondents were by no means attempting to justify where the Nazis’ hatred would lead, many answers suggested that pupils found it difficult to accept that the Nazis would hate them for no reason whatsoever. It is perhaps for this reason that some pupils described the Jews as ‘taking all the money’, ‘being rich’ or ‘looking down on the Germans’.

In seeking to explain the causes of the Holocaust, some pupils also emphasised the importance of Aryan racial features to Hitler and the Nazi state. In the spider diagram exercise, two pupils commented on the regime's desire to create an Aryan race, which was mentioned seven times in pupils' questionnaire responses to 'why were the Jews treated like this?' Although many pupils misspelt 'Aryan' as 'Arian', it suggests that these pupils may have an appreciation of the fact that the Nazis did not see the Jews as a religious group but as a racial group. This would be supported by the fact that ten responses in the questionnaire commented on the Nazi ideal of blonde hair and blue eyes. The pupil's response below suggests that she understands Nazi antisemitism as racial rather than religious:

*Because Hitler didn't like Jews and he wanted to wipe out all of the Jews and he wanted everyone to have blonde hair and blue eyes and it was very rare to see a Jew like this.*

This answer, which exclusively focuses on ideas of race, is different from the following response which seems to recognise the Nazi's hatred of the Jews relating to both religion and race:

*The Jews were treated like this because Hitler did not believe in the Jewish religion and he only wanted people with blonde hair and blue eyes and most Jews were dark haired and dark eyed.*

Conversely, a number of pupils saw Nazi antisemitism in purely religious terms. The pupil below is an example of this:

*Because Hitler thought that Catholicism was the one right religion and that all other religions should be stamped out.*

The serious problem with this response is that the pupil no longer sees the Holocaust in Jewish terms. Jews were murdered because they were not Christian, but presumably according to this pupil, it could just as easily have been Muslims or Hindus.

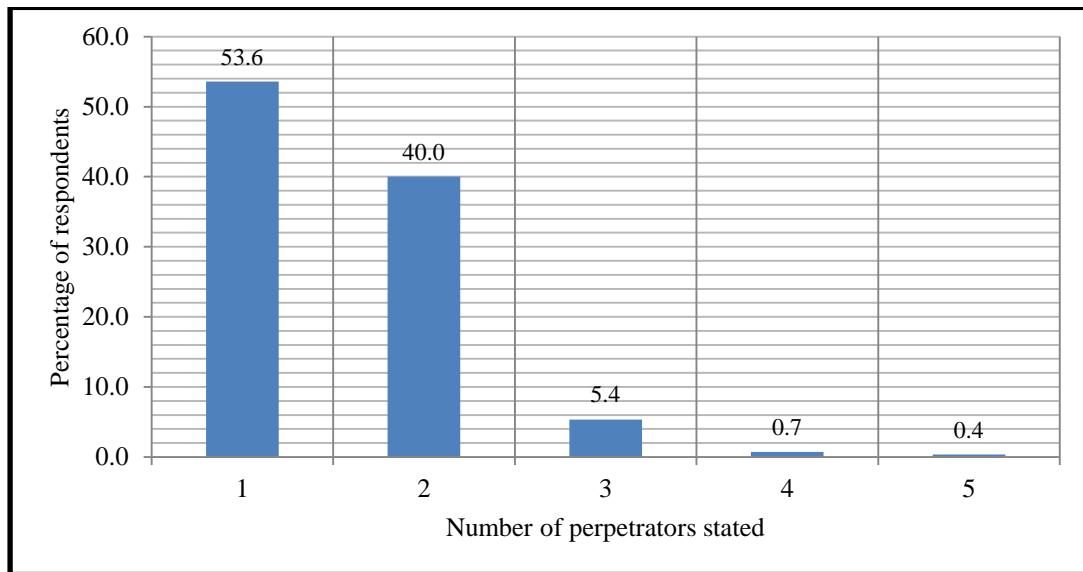
While the Nazis did not want to exterminate every person in the world that did not have blonde hair and blue eyes, it is helpful that some pupils do see the Nazi approach to the Jews as what Bauer describes as ‘biological antisemitism’ rather than religious persecution. It is vitally important that pupils understand that the Nazi regime perceived and treated the Jews as a race rather than a religion. It was for this reason that Jews could not convert to save their own lives and that the generally less-religious Jews of Western Europe were also transported across Nazi-occupied Europe and gassed. Nevertheless, it is equally important for pupils not to define contemporary Jews in their own understanding in crude racial and biological terms. Teachers need to take time to construct a valid and proper understanding of the Jews and to clearly explain how this differs from Nazi racial ideology.

It seems apparent that most pupils arrive at their history lessons with simplistic, often mono-causal explanations of the Holocaust, which revolve around the character of Adolf Hitler. A lot of these pupils have an erroneous understanding of Hitler’s antisemitism and some individuals appear to have been influenced by prevailing myths, contemporary stereotypes and vestiges of Nazi propaganda. Unsurprisingly, it seems that pupils do not explain the Holocaust with reference to an evolutionary decision-making process or appreciate the role of local initiatives or popular collaboration. If teachers are to provide a multi-causal and sophisticated understanding of the Holocaust, then they must first tackle many of the historical inaccuracies and over-simplifications that already exist in the minds of their pupils.

## **The Perpetrators of the Holocaust**

In seeking to find out pupils' preconceptions about who perpetrated the Holocaust, respondents were asked, 'who carried out this treatment of the Jews during World War Two?' In order to enable pupils to give a more sophisticated answer, three lines were provided upon which they could write their response. It was believed that if only one line had been given, then respondents may have assumed that a one or two word answer was satisfactory. Despite the three lines that were afforded to the pupils for this particular question, answers were typically much shorter than responses given to other questions. The average respondent wrote only 5.02 words for this question. The fact that only two other questions on pages two and three of the questionnaire received a higher completion rate strongly suggests that pupils did not necessarily consider the question difficult. Instead, the short answers and high completion rate indicate that many pupils were confident in answering this question, but that their knowledge and understanding was far too generalised and oversimplified.

An indicator of pupils' knowledge and understanding on this question was the number of perpetrators that they provided as shown in fig. 11.

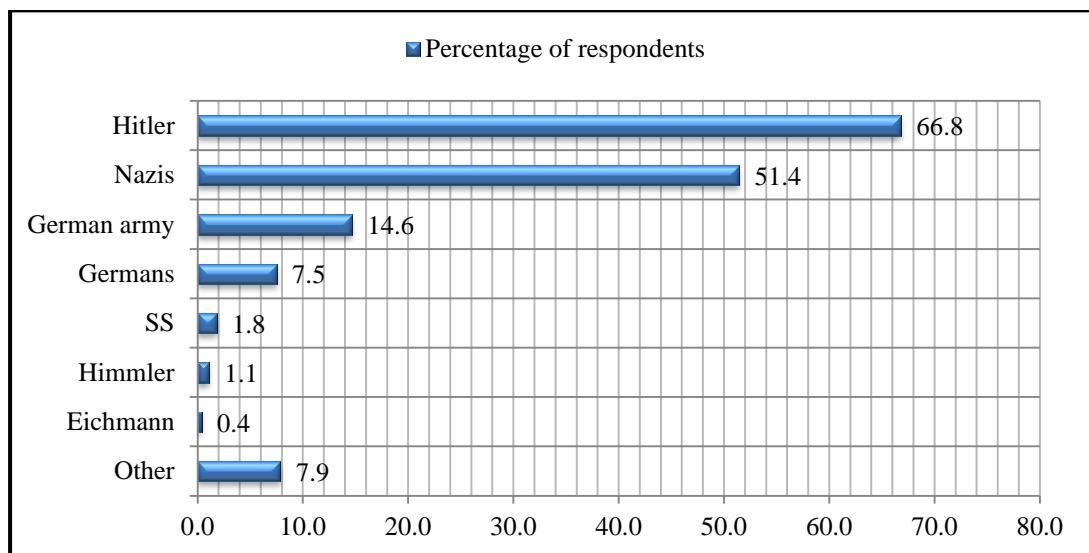
**Fig. 11****Number of Perpetrators Given for the Holocaust (n.282)**

The fact that over 93% of the respondents who answered this question only stated one or two perpetrators suggests that many pupils had a simplistic understanding of the issue. This was especially the case of the 27.9% (n.79) of pupils who gave Hitler as the only perpetrator of the Holocaust. This certainly supports the Hitler-centric approach which many pupils had adopted in explaining the causes of the Holocaust. In total 66.8% of all respondents gave Hitler as at least one of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. It is of course only appropriate that pupils understand Hitler's central role in the murder of Europe's Jews. Yet clearly Hitler did not personally or individually kill them and thus pupils who emphasise Hitler as a perpetrator need to be able to understand that other individuals and organisations were central in the administration and implementation of the Holocaust.

Just under half of respondents stated more than one perpetrator and less than 7% gave more than two. The most common responses are shown in fig. 12 below.

**Fig. 12**

**Responses to Question Five (n.282)**



Over half of pupils stated that the Nazis were perpetrators of the Holocaust. Some pupils appeared to understand the Nazi Party as synonymous with the German army, with the phrase ‘Nazi soldiers’ being used five times and ‘Nazi army’ on three occasions. Another pupil simply wrote ‘the Nazis (the army)’. This gives the impression that all members of the Wehrmacht were devoted Nazis. Despite the oath of loyalty that the army personally swore to Hitler, certainly much of the German High Command had a measure of autonomy and was not traditionally Nazi. These answers were categorised under ‘German army’ in the graph.

Some pupils made distinctions between the government and the army, while some were able to understand the difference between Hitler’s commands and the actual implementers of the killing:

*The government would be the main force but it would be soldiers actually going and finding Jews.*

*Hitler ordered them and then the generals oversaw that it happened*

*Hitler ordered it and his soldiers did it.*

Two pupils suggested that the army did not necessarily want to carry out the murders but were coerced by Hitler.

*Soldiers, but Hitler forced them to.*

*Although they did not want to, the soldiers had to treat them badly.*

The fourth most popular answer was ‘Germans’ or ‘the German people’. The extent to which the so-called ‘average German’ knew about the Holocaust is clearly subject to debate but there is a difference between knowing at least something about the Holocaust and being a perpetrator. Moreover, less than half of the German population voted the Nazis into power and while teachers certainly ought not to downplay the role of “ordinary” Germans in the Holocaust, they must also tackle the misconception that all Germans were somehow responsible, which seems unhelpful and historically questionable.

Amongst the eclectic mix of ‘other perpetrators’, individual pupils listed ‘the Japanese’, ‘Stalin’, ‘non-Jews’ and ‘the Hitler youth’.

The most sophisticated and historically accurate answers emphasised the role of the SS and leading figures within that organisation. Three pupils specifically mentioned Himmler and one mentioned Adolf Eichmann. No pupils talked about Reinhard Heydrich. While some pupils did not elaborate and simply wrote ‘the SS’, others began to demonstrate the relationship between Hitler and the organisations that implemented the murders:

*It was ordered by Hitler but these acts of murder were actually done by Hitler’s Nazi police organisations. The SS, SD and Gestapo.*

The most sophisticated and accurate answer given by any pupil really began to grasp the relationship between Hitler and the SS and even appeared to understand the relative autonomy of those within the SS itself:

*It was run by Heinrich Himmler but the day to day running was down to officers in the SS. Hitler was informed of what was happening.*

This was the only answer in any of the data which hinted at a pupil beginning to understand the freedom of the perpetrators and the significance of local initiatives which reported to Hitler. Most pupils appeared to see the Holocaust as Hitler micro-managing Jewish policy and giving out specific orders to those beneath him.

Although relatively few pupils specifically mentioned the SS, two different respondents mentioned the organisation in their answers to the spider diagram exercise and in both cases stated that the camps were run by the SS. In one answer a pupil was somewhat confused and wrote: 'Heinrich Himmler, head of the camps and Goebbels who was head of the SS'.

Generally, it appears that most pupils have little, if any, knowledge of the SS and see the perpetrators of the Holocaust as the Nazis in general. Similarly, most pupils had little, if any, knowledge of key individuals and instead focused on the importance of Hitler.

In light of the fact that the SS were so infrequently mentioned within pupils' answers, it is perhaps unsurprising that the *Einsatzgruppen* were almost entirely omitted in pupils' lists of perpetrators. Only one pupil mentioned them at the end of a slightly incoherent comment.

*The Nazi German and SS and they though not in camps, by the Einsatzgruppen.*

In addition to this, two pupils mentioned firing squads in their spider diagram responses but in both of these comments, the context was such that they were clearly not referring to the *Einsatzgruppen*. Although the *Einsatzgruppen* were a part of the SS, they were collectively responsible for over one million murders, the majority of whom were Jews. While it may initially seem strange that such a vital cog within the murder machine of the Nazis is almost universally absent from the prior knowledge and understanding of pupils, this is less surprising when cross-referenced with the research of the HEDP, which concluded that teachers typically ignored or did not know about this important aspect of the Holocaust.<sup>268</sup> The centrality of the camp system and its prevalence within Holocaust film and literature has perhaps come at the expense of pupils having any awareness of one of the most barbarous and murderous organisations ever known to humankind.

Perhaps equally problematic is pupils' seeming lack of knowledge regarding the role of collaborators throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Although twenty-one pupils described 'Germans' or 'German citizens' as Holocaust perpetrators, no respondent mentioned the involvement of collaborators from Nazi-occupied territories. Local perpetrators in Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine were crucial in administering and implementing the Holocaust and in some cases were vital in speeding up the killings and driving the policy of murder forward. Interestingly, one pupil wrote in their questionnaire response: 'SS and associated local militia'. This certainly gives the

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<sup>268</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 41 and 124.

impression that the respondent was aware of localised collaboration but it is the only comment of this nature given by any pupil.

More than simply being unaware of the vast number of Nazi collaborators, especially within Eastern Europe, pupils struggled to conceive that ordinary people within places like Ukraine would want to assist in the murder of the Jews. During the interviews, pupils were given a scenario whereby the Nazis entered a village in the east and rounded up the local Jews. They were then asked how local villagers would respond and whether or not they would help participate in the killings.

Almost universally, pupils thought that local villagers would not want to kill the Jews and that the only reason they would do so, would be if they were forced to participate by the Nazis. The concept of people voluntarily collaborating with the Nazis to murder Jews seemed impossible to many pupils. When asked, ‘given a completely free choice, might someone help murder the Jews?’ most pupils very quickly and very confidently said ‘no’ without feeling any need to say why. When asked ‘why?’, answers included, ‘they wouldn’t want the blood on their hands’ and they ‘couldn’t live with the guilt’. A minority of pupils approached the scenarios slightly differently and one or two of them said that it very much ‘depends on the person’ and were unwilling to generalise. One pupil said, ‘probably say no unless he didn’t like the Jews in the first place then he would say yes’. This respondent perhaps realised that there might have been virulent antisemitism in parts of the east, but most pupils’ answers showed no awareness of this and seemed incredulous at the idea that people would want to help participate or collaborate in the Holocaust.

In responding to the scenario that they were given, some pupils automatically put themselves into the situation. Respondents were given a fictional character living in

Eastern Europe and a set of circumstances and then asked whether he was likely to help the Nazis in their work against the Jews. One pupil responded, 'No I wouldn't, because like it's horrible'. Another pupil also said, 'No, I wouldn't'. Teachers need to be aware that pupils often reflect upon the past with contemporary ideas and outlooks; that they often place themselves in that situation and try to consider what they would have done. This provides a serious challenge in enabling pupils to appreciate the context and circumstances in which people were operating.

Overall, the results described in this chapter help to address the issue of what knowledge and what understanding pupils have about the Holocaust before they study it. It highlights common trends, omissions and misconceptions which are likely to have important implications for the field.

## Chapter Six

### Results: The Nature of the Holocaust

In addition to exploring what pupils know and understand about the causes and character of the Holocaust, it is also valuable to address their ideas on the nature of the Holocaust; what happened, where it happened and the extent of the killing that took place. In these areas too, pupils often had considerable knowledge, but also demonstrated trends in their misconceptions.

#### **The Treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust**

In seeking to discover what pupils knew and understood about the experiences of Jews during the Holocaust, respondents were asked in the questionnaire, ‘how were the Jews treated during World War Two?’. Only 3.0% (n.9) of pupils left this question blank, which was the second highest completion rate after the multiple choice question. While this may have been because the question was near the beginning of the questionnaire, it also suggests that pupils felt confident that they knew something about how the Jews were treated during the Holocaust.

Pupils were universally aware that the Jews had been persecuted and horrifically treated; no pupil suggested anything otherwise. Despite being given four lines on which to answer this question, some respondents preferred to give very short answers such as ‘very badly’ or in the case of one pupil, ‘very, very, very, very, very badly’. The majority of pupils provided an explanation of how they were treated and gave precise examples such as, ‘they would be sent to camps and killed’. The explanations given were typically prefaced by a general statement, which was then supported by either a development of it or an explanation of how they were treated.

Pupils' responses were frequently emotional in nature and the pathos and sentiment was often very evident. This was characterised by phrases such as 'horribly', 'appallingly' and 'disgustingly'. Similar sentiments were often expressed in the spider diagram answers with one pupil describing the Holocaust as 'ruthless, disgusting murder'. Out of the 283 answers to this particular question, 213 of them (75.2%) expressed an emotional sentiment; this was either sympathy for the Jews or disgust and abhorrence at the Nazis' actions. It is important that teachers remember that pupils bring emotions and feelings to the Holocaust as well as knowledge and understanding.

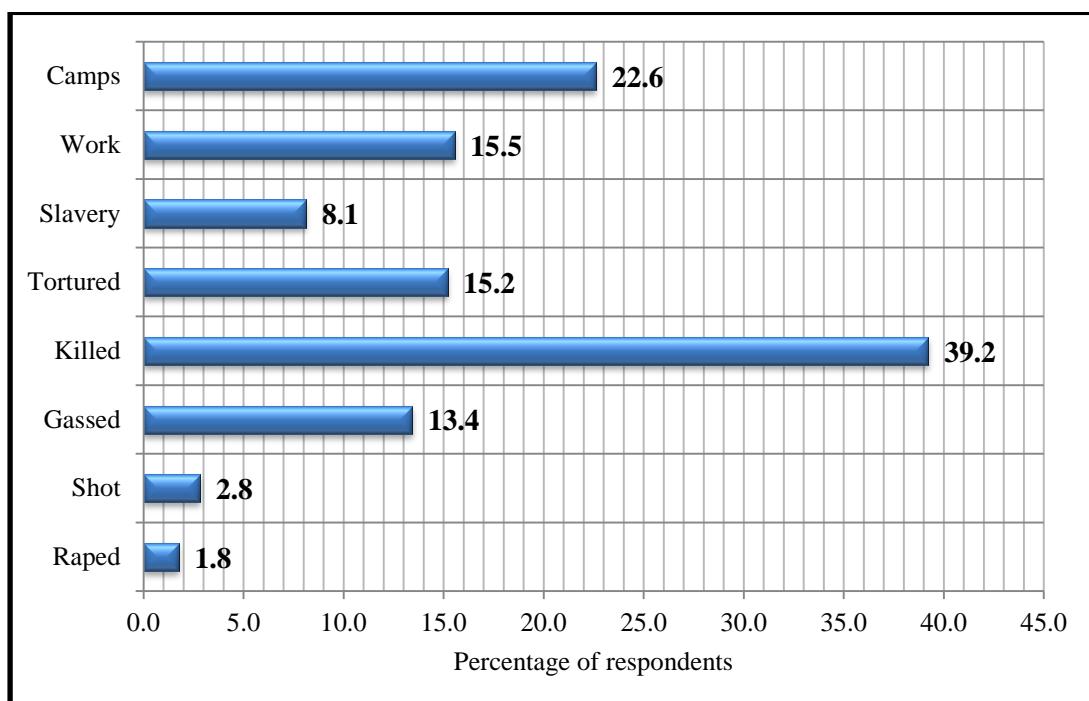
After making an emotional statement, pupils often followed this up with a generalised statement about their perceptions of what happened to the Jews:

*Terribly; they were murdered simply because they weren't like Hitler.*

*Horribly; they were kept hostage and killed for only being a Jew- nothing else.*

In a sense, pupils' answers to this question often represented their initial ideas about what the Holocaust was all about and provided a summary of what they perceived was its essence. While numerous responses focused on work, slavery or even being worked to death, as fig. 13 shows, the most common responses stated that the Jews were killed.

**Fig. 13      Responses to Question Two (n.283)**



Some responses did not focus on the murderous nature of the Holocaust and instead mentioned other aspects of Nazi antisemitism:

*They were treated badly, beaten and teased.*

*They were worked hard and treated badly.*

*Quite bad, not equal to everyone else.*

The high level of responses which mentioned either the camps directly or indirectly through work, slavery or gassing gave the impression that pupils saw the Holocaust as revolving around the camps. Few pupils indicated that many Jews were not murdered in camps but in mass shootings or died in the ghettos. Some pupils who made reference to shootings did so in the context of the camp system, for example, 'they were sent to camps to die, where they were gassed or shot'. There was a small

minority of answers which showed an awareness that not all Jews were killed in the camps:

*They were treated horribly and they were forced into hiding and also they were shot on sight.*

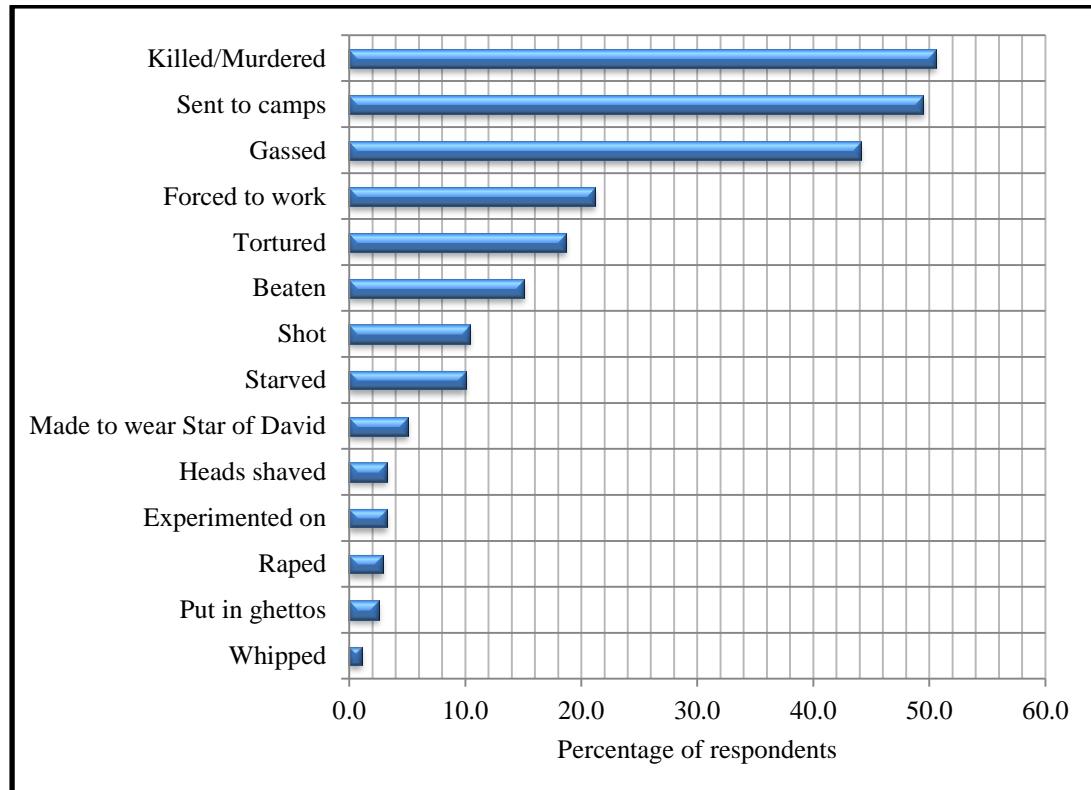
*Horribly, some Jews could get shot straight away. Some were taken to concentration camps to die.*

These sorts of answers were very uncommon and most answers referred to the camps either directly or indirectly. One pupil clearly did not understand the nature or severity of the camps when he commented ‘they were treated so badly that in the concentration camps they almost lived in poverty’, yet for the most part pupils seemed to have a sense of the horror and brutality of the way that the Jews were treated.

It was sometimes the case that pupils made comparisons and analogies when explaining how the Jews were treated. One pupil said that Jews were treated ‘like scum’, another ‘like dust’ and three pupils said that Jews were treated ‘like dirt’. It was more common for pupils to compare the treatment of Jews with the treatment of animals. Fifteen respondents stated that Jews were treated ‘like animals’ while another said it was ‘worse than animals’. Other comments referred to specific animals, such as rats (n.4), dogs (n.3) and swine (n.1). Another two pupils said they were treated like vermin. Similar analogies were made in the spider diagram responses with sixteen out of 298 pupils describing the way that Jews were treated as being like or worse than animals and six describing their treatment as ‘like dirt’.

In exploring pupils' knowledge and understanding of how Jews were treated they were also asked, 'what sort of things happened to the Jews during World War Two?'. Although this was not that different from the question, 'how were the Jews treated during World War Two?', pupils generally answered both questions, often using the first to express their feelings about the Holocaust and to provide a summary of it while using the second question to provide specific and precise examples of Nazi policy and brutality. The question purposefully asked what *sorts* of *things* happened rather than what *sort* of *thing* happened with the hope of eliciting multiple examples. This was generally successful and pupils that answered this question (94.6%) wrote more on average than they did for any other question, often describing three or four things that happened to the Jews.

**Fig. 14 Responses to Question Three (n.282)**



Understandably, pupils typically focused on some of the main aspects of the Holocaust such as the camps, the gassing and the process of forced labour. As seen in fig. 14, ten per cent of respondents (n.28) mentioned that Jews were starved, while two pupils specifically mentioned that they were starved to death. The portrayal of starvation appears in many Holocaust books and films including *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *The Pianist* and *Defiance*. A similar number of pupils (n.29) stated that Jews were shot, although none of these answers gave the impression that these were implemented by specific killing squads in the east. Conversely many pupils talked about Jews being either gassed or shot within the camps:

*They were made to work in a concentration camp where they were shaved, separated and didn't have enough warmth or food. They were then gassed or shot.*

*They were sent to concentration camps and were gassed, shot, diseased or died of starvation. They were forced to labour and serve on the Nazis.*

*They were taken to concentration camps where they were either gassed or shot.*

Some pupils did have an awareness of mass shootings and had perhaps seen some images of this but there still appeared confusion about where these shootings took place and why some Jews were gassed and others shot.

*Concentration camp- that was where they either got sent into gas rooms or where they got stripped and shot in front of everyone. Women got raped.*

*Fathers died in front of family. If you argued with a German they would shoot you.*

*They were forced to dig their own graves, they were then killed (gassed, died of viruses, shot, tortured to death or buried alive).*

One pupil had perhaps been influenced by the scene of Amon Goeth at Plaszow in *Schindler's List* when he wrote, 'many Germans during that period shot them for fun'. It could be easy for teachers to think that pupils do have knowledge and understanding of the mass shootings in the east and the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* because of the number of pupils who talk about Jews being shot. Yet a more detailed look at the pupils' responses strongly suggests that they do not have this level of knowledge. Most pupils appeared to think that the mass shootings took place in the concentration camps rather than in the clearings of forests across Eastern Europe, predominantly but not exclusively, before the first death camp was operational.

During the follow up interviews, pupils were specifically asked about the comments which they had made regarding the Nazis' shooting of the Jews. One pupil said that Jews would be taken outside of the camp and shot so that others wouldn't see what was happening. Some pupils, however, recognised that some Jews were shot without ever going to a camp:

Pupil 1: *I thought they got to a point in the war where Hitler just got fed up with rounding them all up and just got the SS to shoot them on the spot, line them up in the streets and just shoot them, rather than bother with the hassle of putting them in concentration camps.*

Pupil 2: *He got tired of the fuss and he would need the Jews to make the camps as he wouldn't get Germans to do it. And so when they ran out of the Jews through gassing they couldn't be bothered to make any new camps so they just shot them.*

Nevertheless, the comments showed significant historical error and an absence of the chronology of events, suggesting that Jews were shot because Hitler was 'fed up' with the camp system.

In the dialogue above, the first pupil also thought that Jews were shot on the streets in public, rather than taken to forests and largely murdered out of the public eye. None of the pupils had heard of the term '*Einsatzgruppen*' and when the actions and details of these groups were explained, the pupils said that although they had never heard of this before, they were not surprised in the light of what they already knew about the Nazi regime and the Holocaust.

In responding to the question regarding how Jews were treated, 5% of respondents (n.14) mentioned that Jews had to wear the Star of David. A number of studies discussed in the literature review suggested that awareness of this was quite high. This idea is strengthened by the fact that 59 pupils mentioned it in their spider diagram answers. One or two pupils drew a Star of David, presumably because they could not remember what it was called. Others referred to it simply as David's Star, St David's Star or a yellow star. Pupils frequently said that it was worn as a badge on people's clothes or as an armband. One pupil thought that all Jews had to paint a yellow star on their front doors. If many pupils already have some knowledge and understanding of this aspect of the Holocaust, it is something that teachers may be

able to build on, to help pupils develop a greater understanding of how Jews were ostracised and excised from society and how the treatment of the Jews radicalised.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, nine pupils mentioned how Jews had their heads shaved, something which is highlighted in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Perhaps more surprising was that an equal number of pupils stated that Jews were experimented or tested on. In the spider diagram answers, eleven pupils also referred to Nazi experiments. Sometimes there was little development of this in the written responses with comments simply being, ‘they were killed and experimented on’ or ‘they were used in experiments’. One pupil commented that ‘the strong and healthy were used in scientific experiments’. Some responses did stand out, however, due to their detail and development. Two responses gave precise examples of specific experiments:

*They did experiments on them, e.g., how many times a bone could repair itself.*

*Medical experiments were performed on twins – one experiment involved sewing two twins together until they bled to death (no painkillers).*

Two responses specifically mentioned the Nazis’ experiments with twins and two pupils specifically referred to Dr Joseph Mengele:

*Dr Mengele in Block II of Auschwitz Birkenau subjected twins to lots of experiments.*

*People like Dr Mengele experimented on children – horrific.*

In answering the question on the sorts of things that happened to Jews during World War Two, three pupils mentioned that they were whipped. In the spider diagram

answers, this arose on five occasions. Pupils referred to Jews being whipped in order to make them work or as punishment.

*The Nazis would beat them and whip them to make them work faster.*

*In the concentration camps, if they did not obey they were whipped.*

Like most other forms of punishment and torture, whipping did go on in the Holocaust, although the Nazi regime was not well known for its use of this particular method of inflicting pain. It is difficult to know whether pupils had acquired this idea from a particular source or whether they were just assuming that the Nazis whipped Jews within the camps.

Another interesting comment which recurred a few times was that Jews were raped during the Holocaust. In answering the question, ‘how were Jews treated during World War Two?’, 1.8% (n.5) of respondents mentioned rape in their answers. When answering the question, what sorts of things happened to the Jews during World War Two, 2.9% (n.8) included it in their responses. Although not mentioning rape directly, one further pupil stated that ‘women and girls were abused’. In the spider diagram, one pupil also stated that Jews were ‘tortured and raped’ while another said ‘they were treated as slaves and some got raped’. Out of the thirteen times that rape was directly mentioned by pupils in their questionnaire responses, four comments came from girls and nine from boys.

The subject of rape and sexual violence within the Holocaust is a controversial one.<sup>269</sup> While these themes have been central in the history of the Rwandan genocide, it has been the opposite in the stories of the Holocaust. New scholarship

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<sup>269</sup> Hedgepeth and Saidel (Eds.), *Sexual Violence*.

in this area suggests that women and girls were sexually abused more than the narratives would suggest.<sup>270</sup> There is evidence of members of the *Einsatzgruppen* raping young girls before killing them and within the ghettos, young girls were used as ‘gifts’ for the Nazis in attempts to stop or delay the deportations, with some *Judenräte* seeking female volunteers for this dreadful role.<sup>271</sup> There is no evidence or likelihood that pupils would be aware of such examples, although some may have known that women had to stand before German guards stark naked which was undoubtedly a form of emotional and sexual abuse. One or two comments given by pupils certainly suggested limited knowledge of this:

*People's dignity was taken from them, i.e. people had to parade around naked.*

*They were shaved bald, stripped naked and forced to wear thin clothes.*

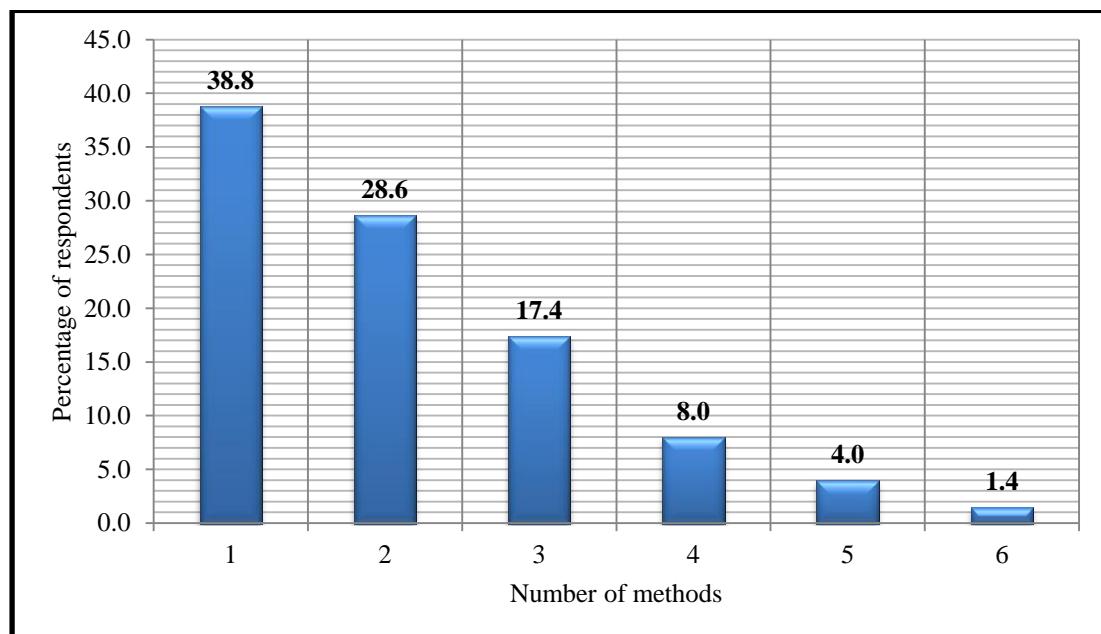
Despite the implied scenes from *Schindler's List*, it seems possible, perhaps even probable, that many pupils were simply assuming that rape and sexual abuse was experienced by the Jews during the Holocaust. As new research is showing, these assumptions are true, even if they did not form a central part of the Holocaust.

Linked to the questions about the treatment of the Jews was the question ‘what methods did the Nazis use to kill the Jews of Europe?’. Many pupils gave a wide range of methods, with four pupils providing a list of six different means of murder that were employed (see fig. 15).

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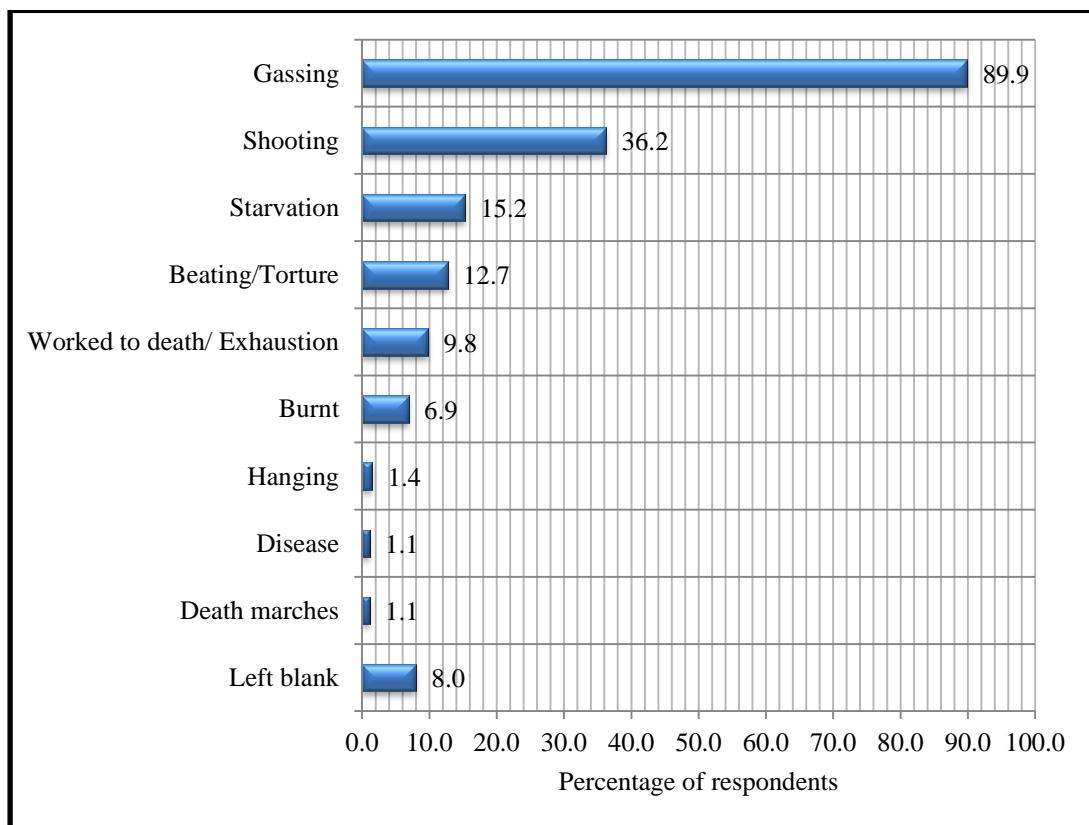
<sup>270</sup> Geissbühler, ‘The Rape of Jewish Women’.

<sup>271</sup> Bauer, *Re-thinking the Holocaust*, 159

**Fig. 15****Number of Nazi Killing Methods Listed by Pupils (n.262)**

It is possible that the 38.8% (n.107) of pupils that only stated one method that the Nazis used to kill the Jews may be of the belief that all Jews were killed in exactly the same way. If such a view is held then pupils are in danger of seeing the Holocaust in very simplistic terms and not understanding the very wide range of methods that the Nazis employed, often determined by the geographical location and perhaps more importantly, the particular stage of the war.

**Fig. 16      Responses to Question Seven (n.276)**



Out of the 107 pupils who only stated one method, 96 of them (89.7%) said that the Jews were gassed. In total, 248 out of 276 pupils (22 left this question blank) stated that the Jews were gassed, which represented 89.9% of all respondents. Although only 44.1% of pupils mentioned gassing in answering the question, ‘what sort of things happened to the Jews during World War Two?’, fig. 16 highlights the extremely high number of pupils who answered it in this question perhaps unsurprisingly suggests that the vast majority of pupils are aware that Jews were gassed in the Holocaust. This is confirmed by the fact that gassing was mentioned on 245 occasions by 205 separate pupils in their spider diagram responses.

Despite a large number of pupils mentioning gas, many pupils’ answers were not particularly specific; although that does not necessarily mean that they did not know any further details. Nevertheless, of the 248 pupils who mentioned gassing, 56

mentioned gas chambers. Out of the 205 pupils who mentioned gassing in their spider diagram responses, 52 mentioned gas chambers. Some pupils also talked about how Jews were tricked into thinking that they were taking showers when instead they were gassed. Other pupils talked about Jews being locked into rooms and then gassed, even though they did not use the term 'gas chambers'. Some pupils do appear to have a sense of how the Jews were gassed in the major death camps. The 'gas chamber scene' in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* shows how Jews went down to the basement of the building and undressed as though they were to have a shower before being herded into the gas chamber itself. In the spider diagram responses, 46 pupils talked about how the gassing was disguised as showers, one boy even stating that his understanding came from the film:

*Boy in Striped Pyjamas – some were told they were taking a shower and when they went in, instead of water coming out it was death by poisonous gas.*

Other comments also showed some awareness of this aspect of Nazi mass murder:

*Jews got tricked and put in a chamber and was gassed but thought it was a shower.*

*To avoid obvious revolt they tricked them with clever lies such as 'mass showers' etc.. Also when showering they were forced into a nude state.*

No pupils referred to the early experiments that the Nazis did with gassing and the use of exhaust fumes turned inside of the vehicle. Neither did they talk about the gas vans (*gaswagen*) which were used especially at Chelmno before the introduction of gas chambers.

In answering the question about Nazi killing methods, fifteen pupils referred to the gas as 'poisonous gas' and two as 'toxic gas'. One pupil stated that chlorine gas was used by the Nazis and one pupil said that they used mustard gas. These two particular gases were commonly used in the First World War and although experiments on the effects of mustard gas were briefly carried out on inmates at Sachsenhausen and Natzweiller, neither gas was used for the systematic murder of the Jews.

One pupil mentioned CO gas and in the spider diagram one respondent wrote, 'the room would be filled with gas, carbon monoxide perhaps (I'm not sure). They would all die'. It was certainly the case that at death camps like Belzec, Treblinka and Sobibor, carbon monoxide exhaust fumes were used to suffocate the victims, unlike in Auschwitz and Majdanek where Zyklon B gas was used.<sup>272</sup> No specific mention of Zyklon B gas was made by any pupils in any of the research. One comment did say 'cyanide gas', which is correct as Zyklon B released hydrogen cyanide. In the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* viewers see a man wearing a gas mask on the roof of the gas chamber putting the Zyklon B pellets into the room, although no pupils talked about the gassing process with this level of detail. Overall, it would appear that the majority of pupils know at least something about gassing, although the answers that developed the subject, all talked about gas chambers disguised as showers and appeared to have no real knowledge of other Nazi gassing methods employed in camps other than the likes of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Nevertheless, pupils did generally appear knowledgeable about the way that Jews were treated within the camps and many pupils recognised that the Nazis regularly

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<sup>272</sup> USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, 'At the Killing Centers'.

beat inmates to death as well as starving them to death and working them to death. While many Jews clearly did literally die of starvation or from being worked to death, it was also very common for Jews who were no longer perceived to be fit or healthy enough for work to be selected for the gas chambers. While some pupils were aware of the immediate selection process upon arrival, few suggested that they knew about the continual selection processes that occurred. Moreover, many Jews starved to death in the ghettos, although it seems probable that the pupils were making reference to the lack of food available in the camps.

Another method of killing that was mentioned by 6.9% of pupils (n.19) was that of Jews being burnt. This sentiment was sometimes phrased in different guises such as ‘set them on fire’ or ‘burned alive’. One pupil wrote that Jews were murdered in ‘gas showers or burning them at the stake’. Two pupils specifically mentioned ovens, one simply writing that word and nothing else, while the other wrote, ‘gas showers, ovens, illness in camps, shooting and murdering in general’. On both occasions when the term ‘ovens’ was thus used, pupils gave the impression that they saw it as a means of killing rather than the method employed to cremate the bodies. In the spider diagram answers, no pupils talked about the ovens or bodies being burnt. Three pupils, however, clearly did understand that the Nazis disposed of the corpses through burning although they were a minority:

*They put a group of Jews in a cell then gassed them; after they burnt their dead bodies.*

*They beat them until they died and burnt them.*

*They gassed them then burnt their bodies.*

It is unclear whether these pupils have knowledge of the crematoria or whether they were referring to the burning of bodies on pyres. A few pupils may have seen the famous photograph of the *Sonderkommando* in summer 1944 at Birkenau, burning corpses near Crematoria V. In Auschwitz-Birkenau such burnings were typically restricted to when the crematoria were malfunctioning or upon the receipt of too many bodies. In the summer of 1944 the latter reason was most likely due to the mass deportations of Hungarian Jews. In other camps such as Treblinka, Jews were burned in mass pits with their bodies placed on grates.

Contrary to the impression that many pupils gave in their responses, Jews were not burned alive, except in exceptional circumstances when ghettos were liquidated. It seems that some pupils appear to think that Jews were burnt as a method of killing rather than as a means of disposing of their bodies.

In one of the interviews, a pupil made reference to the scene from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* when Lieutenant Kotler informs the commandant's wife that Jews were being burnt (although he was using it to support a claim that people did not know about the Holocaust). In the film the lieutenant comments, 'they smell even worse when they burn, don't they?' and the camera then shows black smoke coming from over the trees. Although this is supposed to make reference to the bodies being burnt, pupils may see it and think that it refers to Jews being burnt alive as suggested in some of the answers. In the final scene of the movie when the commandant's wife disturbs her husband during a meeting because she cannot find Bruno, the document that is clearly shown on the commandant's desk states Crematorium IV and has a plan. The commandant is also saying that the 'weekly capabilities would be almost trebled'. It is unlikely that thirteen to fourteen years

old would infer from this that Jews were burned after their deaths rather than as the cause of death.

Another method of killing that a few pupils mentioned was the death marches. One respondent wrote, ‘often Jews would die when the Nazis started retreating and had to march back’. Another pupil answered the question about Nazi killing methods by writing, ‘gas, death march, shooting’ while a third pupil wrote, ‘they gassed them and marched them’. Although these three pupils seem to have some knowledge of the brutal death marches towards Germany, they represented only 1.1% of those who answered this question and less than 1% of the entire sample. The death marches were not mentioned at all in the spider diagram answers. The lack of knowledge in this area is closely connected to how pupils preconceive Holocaust chronology and their confusions over how the killings ended

Overall, pupils do have some knowledge and understanding about how the Jews were treated, although there is large variation between pupils and some areas where misconceptions appear to be common. There are also very evident gaps in pupils’ knowledge; the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the mass shootings in the east being one cardinal example. Pupils’ thinking also seems to be very much focused around the camp system and in particular the murder of the Jews in the death camps.

### **The Chronology of the Holocaust**

In their answers to various questions and certainly throughout the spider diagram, pupils often mentioned different aspects of the Holocaust without providing a sense of where it fitted within the bigger picture. It is understandable that many pupils approached their answers in a way which reflected the order that thoughts arrived in their minds, rather than in the order that events transpired. Consequently, some

attempt was made to see how pupils viewed the Holocaust and how they understood its chronology and composition.

In the first round of interviews, pupils were told that Hitler came to power in 1933 and that the Second World War did not start until 1939. They were then asked, 'how do you think Jews were treated during that period?' Almost universally, pupils stated that Jews were persecuted and treated badly:

*They weren't as badly treated as they were but I'm pretty sure they were looked down on.*

*Some people wouldn't want to associate with them.*

*They were kind of being excluded from society.*

Other descriptions of the way that the Nazis treated the Jews during the pre-War years included: 'awfully', 'badly', 'pretty harsh' and 'terrible: the worst people have been treated'. One pupil was of the opinion that Jews were not treated any differently before the war so that Hitler's intentions could be disguised. In replying to his peer's comment that the Jews were not treated well, he stated, 'no, I think they were treated fine so they didn't suspect a war would come'. This unusual position was rebuffed by the two other interviewees. Overall, the majority of pupils had a definite sense that life for the Jews in Nazi Germany was difficult.

*I think it was evident that life was becoming more difficult for them really, right from the beginning people could tell that Hitler was out to get them.*

One conversation between pupils mentioned the role of the SA and how they attacked Jews on the streets and held antisemitic rallies. One pupil then said: 'I think it stepped up when he became Chancellor', showing an awareness of Nazi

antisemitism before 1933. Conversely, one pupil believed that the Nazis were nice to everyone, including the Jews until Hitler was able to achieve a significant measure of popularity. This suggests that the pupil believes that antisemitism was not popular or prevalent at this time if Hitler felt the need to keep it secret:

*Because I think at the beginning he was really nice to everyone, even the Jews, and saying that like, they were special, giving like free holidays and things like that then because people started to really like him and agree with him, that's when he started saying things about the Jews and about how they were stealing Germany's jobs and stuff like that.*

A minority of pupils, however, explicitly expressed that the levels of state antisemitism gradually increased between 1933 and 1939:

*It got worse and worse and worse.*

*The horrificness spread over time.*

*Probably gradual, probably a gradual development in what ended up in the Holocaust.*

A number of respondents were also able to offer some examples of the sorts of things that Jews experienced in the pre-War years. The most common of these was reference to Jewish shops being vandalised, burnt or boycotted:

*By Jewish shops, like a solider would stand outside like saying, warn people don't go inside this shop because they're Jewish people.*

*They would go round vandalising and defacing Jewish shops and Jewish property.*

The familiarity of pupils with the German boycott of Jewish goods in April 1933 and the smashing of Jewish-owned property in November 1938 was also evident from the spider diagram answers:

*Their shops were often smashed up and branded with racial remarks about Jews.*

*There was one night when loads of people broke in and ransacked Jewish shops called something like the Night of the Crystals.*

In some of these spider diagram responses, it was made clear that pupils generally understood and perceived these events as taking place before the War:

*Before the concentration camps, Jewish people were made to wear the Jewish Star. Jewish shops and businesses were destroyed.*

*In Germany, Jewish shops were hit and got before the war. Soldiers roamed the streets, beating up any Jews they could find. Very dangerous conditions caused many Jews to flee to areas such as Britain.*

Other answers, however, showed that although pupils might have some knowledge about the way Jews were treated, they were confused about the chronology of events:

*Outside of the concentration camps, the ones that weren't killed were denied a lot of things like trading in shops or anything like that.*

In total, nine pupils, out of 298, mentioned *Kristallnacht* and most of them explained that this was an event where Jewish synagogues were smashed and their windows broken. In addition to this, a minority of pupils in both the interviews and

in their written responses mentioned a range of other antisemitic experiences which the Jews endured in the pre-War years:

*Maybe before Hitler even became in power when it was kind of normal, of course they were singled out a bit, but in those six years, they were probably put in like different schools, different communities.*

*They had to wear a star on all their clothes and they would not be allowed into cafes, cinemas or restaurants etc..*

*The Jews had to move to different schools and were not allowed to go swimming, ice skate, drink from public water fountains and had to wear a star to represent Jews.*

One discussion showed that some pupils had numerous preconceptions about the experiences that Jews faced in Germany between 1933 and 1939:

Pupil 1: *They had to start wearing wristbands, eh, armbands to symbolise they were Jews. And they had to have their shops and homes destroyed or taken over.*

Pupil 3: *They were given a curfew.*

Pupil 2: *And didn't they like gave times when they were allowed out of their houses, they weren't allowed to sit on certain benches.*

Pupil 1: *They had to move to the ghettos.*

Incidentally, the curfew restricting the movement of Jews was purposefully announced on September 1, 1939.<sup>273</sup> Moreover, the decree that Jews had to wear a

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<sup>273</sup> British Library, *Voices of the Holocaust*.

yellow Star of David was given in October 1939 and only applied to Jews living within the occupied territories of Poland. German Jews did not have to wear this symbol until September 1941.<sup>274</sup> Similarly, the establishing of ghettos was also decreed in September 1939 and again only applied to Jews living in the General Government (German-occupied Poland).<sup>275</sup> It would appear that while some pupils generally have a sense of many of the experiences and policies that were inflicted on the Jews living in Germany before the War, some pupils confuse them with the policies employed towards Polish Jews at the end of 1939. It is difficult to assess the extent of this as it was more apparent from the interviews than the written tasks. Comments made by respondents frequently assumed that all Jews were treated the same and while pupils regularly referred to Jews in Germany, there was never a distinction between policies directed at Polish Jewry. These misconceptions suggest that some pupils know that a range of things happened to the Jews but are not always familiar with where and when they occurred. This is perhaps especially the case with the Star of David, where a number of pupils in interview suggested that Jews living in pre-War Germany had to wear one on their arms or on their clothes.

Pupil 3: *They had to wear a Star of David on a wristband.*

Interviewer: *When were they made to do that?*

Pupil 3: *When Hitler came to power.*

Although there was often error or confusion in some of the pupils' answers, a few clearly demonstrated that there was deterioration in the way that the Jews were treated and recognised the gradual increase in persecution.

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<sup>274</sup> USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia: 'Jewish badge'.

<sup>275</sup> Yad Vashem, 'The Ghettos'.

*First he gave them the Star of David, then he took away their home and property, then he moved them to the ghettos, then he took them to the concentration camps. That was well into his reign of power. Then after that they were killed.*

Despite their relative familiarity with some of the laws passed for Jews in the General Government, no pupils, in either the interviews or their written answers, mentioned the Nuremberg Laws, which were passed against German Jews in 1935, depriving them of their citizenship and the right to marry “Aryans”. Perhaps most importantly, the Nuremberg Laws defined Jews as those having three or four Jewish grandparents, a dictum which would soon determine the fate of many lives across Europe.<sup>276</sup>

It seems very noteworthy that pupils were apparently ignorant of the Nuremberg Laws and the Nazi racial definitions of Jews. In the light of this it is perhaps unsurprising that so many pupils stated that Hitler and the Nazis persecuted the Jews purely because of their religion and religious observances.

The relationship between how pupils understand the causes of the Holocaust and how they understand the treatment of the Jews in pre-War Germany is connected yet further. Respondents stated on a number of occasions that Hitler always intended the Holocaust and that the mass murder of Europe’s Jews was part of a plan that pre-dated the commencement of the War by some considerable way. One pupil wrote that Hitler had ‘planned it for a long time’, while another suggested that Hitler had come up with the idea of the Holocaust in 1918. If pupils perceive that Hitler took office in January 1933 with the precise plan of extermination already

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<sup>276</sup> USHMM, Holocaust Encyclopedia: ‘The Nuremberg Race Laws’.

conceived, then they will view the Nazi treatment of the Jews during the years 1933 to 1939 in the light of that. They will understand why the Nazis ordered the boycott of Jewish businesses, why synagogues were burnt down and they will latch onto the ideas of Jewish armbands and curfews. They may struggle to reconcile with their thinking, however, the notion that Jews were encouraged to leave Germany and that a Central Office for Jewish Emigration was set up in Vienna in August 1938. Yet rather than understanding that the Nazis were not orchestrating some preconceived master plan and that at the time this was their way of answering the so-called “Jewish question”, some pupils may think that the Nazis simply introduced policies like this so that they needed to murder fewer Jews later on. In other words, pupils may acquire new facts about the Holocaust but interpret those facts in the light of pre-existing ideas. Until the misconceptions regarding the way that the fate of the Jews was determined are deconstructed, pupils will struggle to correctly understand new material, but will rather distort its meaning to suit existing frameworks of thought.<sup>277</sup>

The misconception that Hitler had pre-planned the details of the Holocaust also has huge implications for the way that pupils understand the chronology of events that transpired between 1939 and 1945. Certainly the camp-centric approach of pupils, which was highlighted in their answers on how the Jews were treated and what sorts of things happened to them, fits in with the idea that Hitler was implementing a master plan. It is impossible to say for sure how strong these connections are and the extent of their relevance, but it seems probable that pupils’ thinking in one area of the Holocaust will have potentially serious ramifications on how they see other

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<sup>277</sup> See Donovan and Bransford, ‘Introduction’; Lee, ‘Putting Principles into Practice’, Lee, ‘Walking Backwards into Tomorrow’.

parts. Pupils will not want contradictory ideas in their thinking, e.g., Hitler planned the Holocaust and Hitler didn't know what to do with the Jews. Thus it seems that misconceptions may shape the way that new knowledge is received. This supports the theory that pupils' preconceptions often cohere even if they are not necessarily correct. For new knowledge to be received, it often needs to be assimilated into existing understandings which may well mean the deconstructing of existing barriers which prevent the new knowledge from achieving cognitive coherence.

Some misconceptions, however, arise from a lack of knowledge and within pupils' thinking there appears to be significant gaps in the chronology of the Holocaust. Perhaps one of the most notable omissions of significant knowledge is regarding the existence of ghettos. When asked 'what sort of things happened to the Jews during World War Two?' only seven, out of the 279 respondents who answered this question, mentioned that they were put in ghettos, even though for many Jews, they never made it out of the ghetto alive. Moreover, no pupil stated that ghettos were a method employed by the Nazis to kill the Jews. Although the ghettos were not designed to be the means of systematic mass murder, thousands upon thousands died within their walls.

In the spider diagram, ghettos were mentioned by eleven, out of 298 pupils although it appeared that pupils had different understandings of the term. One respondent wrote, 'they were suppressed into small run-down, hostile pens called ghettos', while another said that Jews were 'moved into huge apartment blocks called ghettos'. It appeared that one pupil perhaps perceived a ghetto to be some sort of SS or police office when he stated: 'I think the ghetto was where they questioned people and tortured them to get answers'. Other pupils appeared confused about the

differences between ghettos and camps, sometimes giving the impression that they were the same thing or that ghettos were the living quarters within the camps.

*I know that Auschwitz is in Krakow in the ghetto.*

*They were sent to concentration camps where they worked and were later killed. They were given a ghetto to live.*

In this latter example, it is possible that the pupil had not confused ghettos with camps and that the chronological order was just the wrong way round.

Despite the infrequency with which ghettos were mentioned by the pupils, one or two of those who did refer to them demonstrated some considerable knowledge. One pupil even stated: 'there was an uprising in Warsaw ghetto in 1943'. This was the only occasion when a specific ghetto was named. In a few cases, pupils clearly understood that Jews were taken from their homes to the ghettos before being taken from the ghettos to the camps. In these examples therefore, there was a clear and accurate sense of chronology:

*Kicked out of their houses and put in ghettos.*

*They were drove out of their homes and moved into huge apartment blocks called ghettos where they would live under close surveillance until they were executed or sent to concentration camps.*

*After 1940 they were put into ghettos. After living in the walled ghetto they were taken to labour camps.*

Some of the comments given during the interview suggested less precise knowledge of the ghettos and a less secure grasp of the chronology of events:

Pupil 1: *They had to move to the ghettos.*

Interviewer: *When was that do you think?*

Pupil 1: *1935*

When answering a question concerning where Jews typically have lived over the last two thousand years, one girl replied: ‘ghettos’. Similarly, a different set of pupils were asked in interview about liberated Jews and where they would live after the war. One response was that they ‘would be put into small ghettos’.

In the follow-up interviews, eight pupils were specifically asked about the ghettos. None of them knew what a ghetto was in relation to the Holocaust. Pupils were shown two photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto and did not know what the photographs showed (see appendix 3.2). When asked about ghettos, two respondents talked about the usage of the term in relation to American films. None of the pupils were aware that Jews had been made to live in ghettos and none of them had ever heard of the Warsaw Ghetto. Before asking respondents about the ghettos, a discussion had taken place about the order of the Holocaust. Pupils made it very clear that they perceived all Jews to have been taken from their homes and sent straight into the camps.

Overall, there appears to be considerable ignorance and confusion about what ghettos are, when Jews were living in them and their relationship with the camps. Consequently, many pupils appear to have a slightly vague and nebulous sense of the chronology of the Holocaust.

To some extent this was supported by the results of the task that pupils were given during their first set of interviews. During each of the first round of interviews, all

pupils were asked to work as a group to put the five events in chronological order. This exercise was conducted on twelve different groups, each consisting of three pupils. The events were as follows:

- A. Jews removed from being citizens of Germany
- B. ‘The Night of the Broken Glass’ – Jewish shops smashed and synagogues destroyed
- C. First ghetto established for the forced concentration of Jews
- D. Mobile killing squads first start their mass shooting of Jews
- E. The Nazis first use gas to kill Jewish victims

The pupils found this task relatively challenging and often disagreed amongst themselves. Pupils sought to reason with each other as to where each event belonged within the chronology. Using their existing knowledge and understanding and applying these in a logical way, pupils were generally able to get most of the answers in the right order, although only two groups (2 and 7) succeeded in getting all five correct. Most pupils recognised that things were likely to have become worse and worse for the Jews and thus they generally put at the start either the removal of citizenship or the Night of Broken Glass. Pupils also recognised that the gassing of the Jews took place at a later point than the other events.

Table 6 breaks down the results by event and shows the twelve groups’ combined range, median and modal answer for each of the individual events. This indicates pupils’ relative familiarity with them.

**Table 6      Responses to Chronology Activity**

	<b>Range of responses</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Modal answer</b>
Responses to A	4	1.7	1
Responses to B	2	1.9	2
Responses to C	3	3.1	4
Responses to D	1	3.4	3
Responses to E	1	4.9	5

Often it was the case that a group would get options A and B or C and D the wrong way round thus only getting one or three of the answers correct. With the exceptions of interview groups five and eight, all the pupils were only ever one place away from the correct answer. Group eight was the only one which appeared

to have no idea at all, suggesting that Jewish citizenship was only removed after they had been gassed.

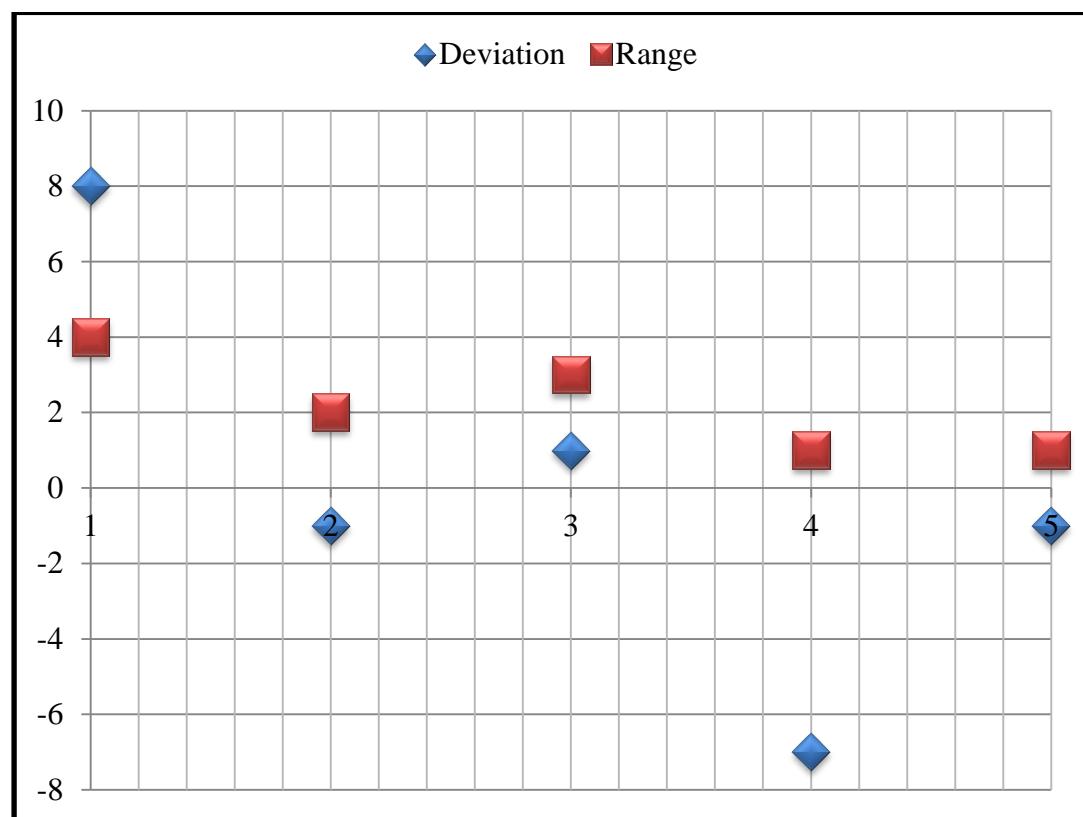
With the exception of group eight, pupils were generally confident that the removal of Jewish citizenship and the Night of Broken Glass took place early on. This showed that although pupils did not always know about these events, for example, the Nuremberg Laws were not mentioned in any of the pupils' written answers; they had preconceived ideas that the treatment of the Jews became worse over time. They were also confident that the gassing occurred sometime later, with one pupil commenting to her fellow interviewee: 'I don't think they started to gas them till quite later on in the war', to which the reply was: 'that's definitely last'.

Where pupils were particularly confused was regarding the establishment of the first ghetto and the first mass shootings by mobile killing squads. More groups thought that mass shootings occurred before the establishment of the ghettos rather than after. Only three groups in fact were able to put the establishment of the first ghetto in the correct order, with one group asking: 'what does it mean by ghetto?'. When discussing these events, pupils generally seemed confused by the ideas of ghettos and mobile killing squads, supporting the idea that pupils are ignorant about these important aspects of the Holocaust.

Fig. 17 shows the range of answers that were given and the proximity of the answers given to the correct answer. To work out this proximity, the chronological order of each event was multiplied by the number of groups (12). For example, Jews being removed from being citizens of Germany was first in order and thus one was multiplied by 12. The Nazis first using gas to kill Jewish victims was fifth in order and thus 5 was multiplied by 12 to give 60. All the pupils' scores were averaged

out by event and then the proximity was the difference between the two. If the proximity score was a minus figure it meant that pupils generally thought that the event occurred earlier than it did. If the event had a positive figure it meant that pupils generally thought the event occurred later than it did. Consequently, it appears that some pupils were not confident that the removal of German citizenship from Jews was the first event of the five. They also had a tendency to place the mobile killing squads earlier.

**Fig. 17** Responses to Chronology Activity



Overall, the findings suggested that when they had to think about it and when given an appropriate framework, most pupils could and in fact did understand that the Holocaust evolved and radicalised. Pupils generally appreciated that conditions for the Jews typically became worse and worse, starting with when Hitler came to power and continuing throughout the Second World War. Nevertheless, pupils are

very ignorant of the ghettos and the *Einsatzgruppen* and do not really understand the decision-making processes and the context in which the so-called “Final Solution” emerged. No pupils mentioned the relationship between the invasion of the USSR and the shift in the Nazis’ policies and practices towards the Jews. Instead pupils tended to see conditions for Jews worsening throughout the 1930s, followed by the establishment of camps and the gassing of Jews. Not only does this fit into the idea that Hitler always intended and planned the Holocaust, but it suggests that many pupils may see the Holocaust as an event rather than a process. This was indicated by some of the comments that pupils made:

*The Holocaust was one event in which 6 million Jews were killed by gas chambers. Even children were killed.*

*The Holocaust was a time in the Second World War when the Nazis captured Jewish people from neighbouring countries and put them in concentration camps where they were killed.*

*They were sent to concentration camps where some worked and they were all gassed inside a chamber. This is now known as the Holocaust.*

These pupils’ definitions certainly suggest, and in the first example, explicitly state, that the Holocaust was a single event, which was the killing of Jews by gas in camps. This over-simplification and what one might call ‘eventicisation’ (turning a process into an event) of the Holocaust is largely due to pupils’ ignorance of how decisions were made and the horrific gradualism of the Holocaust, characterised by the ghettos and *Einsatzgruppen*. This conceptual misconception, highlighted by Lee

in ‘Putting Principles into Practice’,<sup>278</sup> is in this case at least, principally due to their lack of knowledge of the Holocaust. Consequently, many pupils see the Holocaust as the event whereby Jews were taken from their homes and sent to camps to be gassed. This was seen in the following statements:

*They would be taken from their homes and thrown in the back of a lorry to be taken to a concentration camp.*

*They were captured and taken from their homes to concentration camps.*

*Taken from their homes, possessions taken, made to wear uniform.*

While some Jews were taken from their homes directly to the camps, this was unusual. Jews were either rounded up in their villages and murdered in mass shootings or were placed in ghettos before deportation to the camps. Even in Hungary where Jews were not deported until the Nazi invasion in the spring of 1944, ‘destruction ghettos’ were quickly established so that even there, Jews were not directly transported from their homes. The mass murder of Hungary’s Jews was implemented with greater speed and efficiency than any other part of the Holocaust. Yet, even in this tragic chapter, it was clearly a process rather than an event, notwithstanding the antisemitic laws and policies which were prevalent in Hungary before the Nazi invasion.

It is perfectly possible for pupils to understand that the persecution of the Jews radicalised and yet still see the Holocaust as an event. Pupils did this by viewing the pre-war persecution as the background to the Holocaust, which was the event when Hitler took all the Jews from their homes to be gassed in the concentration camps.

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<sup>278</sup> Lee, ‘Putting Principles into Practice’.

Many pupils know about the Night of Broken Glass, for example, and pupils ought to consider whether the 90 or so Jews who were killed in November 1938 count as victims of the Holocaust. Moreover, tens of thousands of Jews died in the ghettos before any Jews were gassed. Only by challenging pupils' existing frameworks will their misconceptions be deconstructed enabling them to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the chronology and process of the Holocaust.

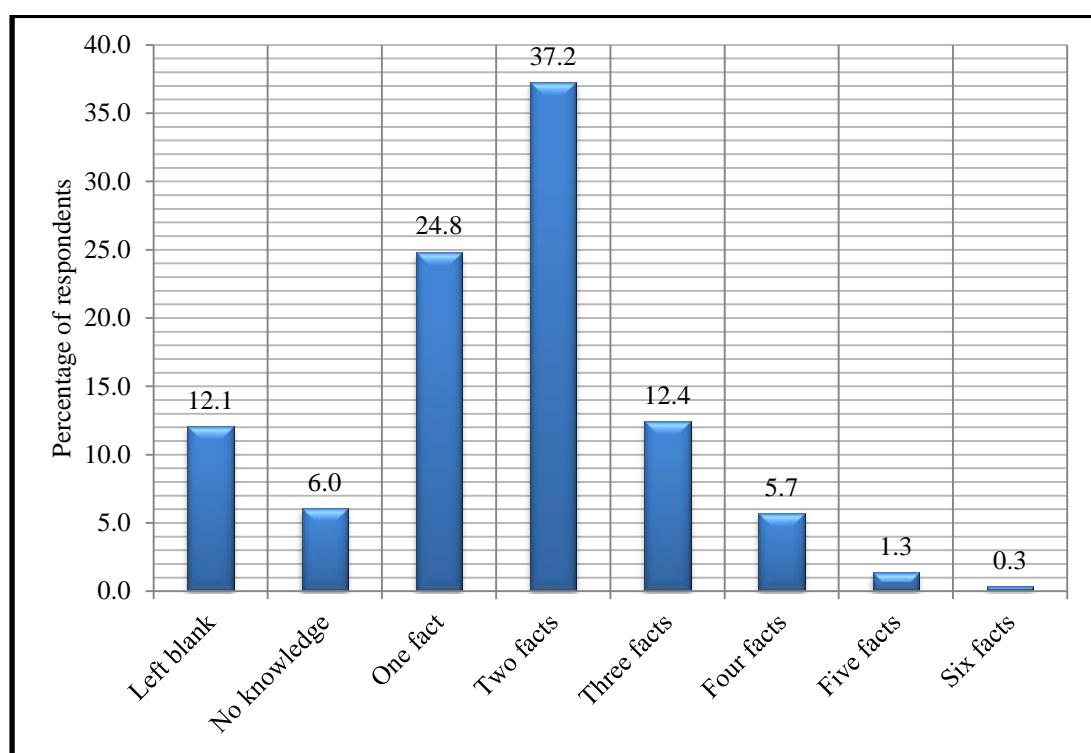
### **The Camps**

The knowledge and understanding that pupils have of the camp system was demonstrated by pupils' answers to two questions on page three of the questionnaire (questions eight and nine). Before the questions, pupils were given the following statement: 'During World War Two, many Jews were sent into camps like Auschwitz and Dachau'. The reason for giving pupils this information was to help them understand the questions about the camps and to generate further thoughts and ideas. Both Auschwitz and Dachau were used because one was a death camp (Birkenau) and the other a concentration camp. Although Dachau typically held political and religious prisoners, there were large numbers of Jewish inmates throughout its history and it was considered to be one of the most well-known camps. Pupils were then asked, 'what do you know about any of these camps?' and 'describe what you think would happen to Jews upon arrival at a camp'.

As in most areas of Holocaust knowledge, there was a wide range of answers with some pupils seeming to know nothing about the Nazi camp system and others able to produce a number of accurate and detailed statements. Generally, however, respondents were confident answering these questions and most pupils (81.9%) were able to give at least one historically accurate statement. On average, pupils

wrote 14.09 words and 14.76 words per answer respectively for the two questions on the camp system. Perhaps the general extent of their knowledge is demonstrated by the fact that 57.0% of respondents provided at least two or more facts. Despite ignorance of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the ghettos, the majority of respondents had meaningful knowledge of the camps. While some of the facts were relatively vague and may only have been true of certain camps like Auschwitz, fig. 18 refers to correct details regarding the camp system.

**Fig. 18      Number of Facts Known about the Camps (n.298)**



That said, some pupils stated that they did not know anything about either Auschwitz or Dachau and the camps generally. In answering the question ‘what do you know about any of these camps?’ some answers included: ‘nothing’, ‘I don’t’ and ‘I don’t know anything’. One pupil wrote: ‘I’ve just heard of Auschwitz’, suggesting that this was the first time they had come across the term. Two pupils gave factually incorrect statements, one being, ‘they were Polish cities’ (although

Oswiecim was a Polish town) and the other that ‘these camps were places where they worked for small amounts of money’. This second statement is perhaps the most interesting as the pupil appears to have no concept of the brutal nature of the camps, the forced deportations and the barbaric treatment of the Jews who were used as slave labour.

Other unusual comments included two different pupils describing the camps as Holocausts:

*I think they were Holicoses.*

*They were called Holocausts.*

Although only two pupils did this, thirteen pupils had used the phrase ‘concentration camps’ as the name given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during the Second World War. This suggests that a minority of respondents may see the Holocaust and concentration camps as the same thing or, at the very least, synonymous. The lack of knowledge that most pupils appeared to have about other aspects of the Holocaust may further help to explain why some pupils confuse the two as the same thing.

Many pupils also appear to see all of the camps as identical in nature and perhaps this was inadvertently encouraged by the statement preceding the question. Only one pupil responded that ‘it would be dependent on what camp it was’. Generally pupils saw the camps as a homogenous entity where the weak were killed and the strong were made to work:

*They had to work and when they got too weak to work a full day they were killed.*

Some pupils stated that Auschwitz and Dachau were two of the main camps, no doubt influenced by the statement citing them as examples:

*These two must have been the main camps.*

*They were two of the most terrible camps.*

It was clear from pupils' answers that many of them knew something about Auschwitz. While Dachau was specifically mentioned by three pupils in their answers, 35 out of the 261 respondents who answered the questions on the camps, referred to Auschwitz. This included comments such as:

*I think that Auschwitz was one of the biggest and most feared concentration camps in Germany. I don't know about Dachau.*

*Auschwitz is always described as the worst.*

*Auschwitz is one of the most famous camps and is still there today. You can take tours around it.*

A further 27 pupils referred to Auschwitz in their spider diagram responses, all of whom did so before completing their questionnaire. The sorts of answers given about Auschwitz were very similar and were typically quite vague and generic:

*Auschwitz was one of the main camps. Millions were killed here.*

*The Jews were held in concentration camps like Auschwitz.*

Some pupils stated that Auschwitz was in Germany while others said it was in Poland. One pupil even wrote, 'Auschwitz is the most famous camp located in Poland. Many mistake it to be in Germany'. Ironically, as a result of new borders drawn up on October 26, 1939 by the Border Commission within the Ministry of the

Interior, Auschwitz was part of Upper Silesia and was thus part of the German Reich.<sup>279</sup> This area is now modern day Poland and so in a sense pupils are right if they say that Auschwitz was in Germany or Poland.

Auschwitz appears to be the only camp with which a number of pupils are familiar. Nevertheless, one pupil mentioned ‘Birkenau death camp’ in a spider diagram response and another pupil mentioned Bergen-Belsen in the questionnaire, specifically in reference to Anne Frank’s death there. Two mentions were made of Dachau in the spider diagram responses, the second of which came from a pupil who was unusually able to name a number of camps:

*Death and concentration camps included Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen, Treblinka and Majdanek- run by the SS.*

What was also unusual about this response was that the pupil distinguished between the different sorts of camps that existed. Generally pupils always referred to ‘concentration camps’ or just ‘camps’. Table 7 shows the frequency with which different camps were mentioned by the 298 respondents in both the spider diagram and the questionnaire. The reason why some figures exceed the sample size is because some pupils referred to concentration camps on more than one occasion.

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<sup>279</sup> Steinbacher, *Auschwitz*, 16-7.

**Table 7      Mentions of Different Types of Camps**

	<b>Spider Diagram</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>
<b>Concentration Camp</b>	302	354
<b>Death Camp</b>	15	5
<b>Labour Camp</b>	3	1
<b>Transit Camp</b>	1	0

Even in the answers which specifically mentioned ‘death camps’ or ‘labour camps’, only a minority explicitly stated that there were different sorts of camps:

*Two formats for concentration camps – labour camps like Bansen and straight death camps such as Auschwitz and Dachau.*

*Difference between transit, labour and concentration camps.*

*The Jews were also made to work – manual labour- there were different camps for different punishments, e.g. gassing, labour.*

One pupil saw the camps as a hierarchy where one would eventually end up at Auschwitz:

*They were camps where the killing happened. Some camps were just to work then you’d move up the ladder till you hit Auschwitz where you would probably die- Anne Frank went through lots of camps.*

Despite the errors contained in this statement and despite the fact that Anne Frank actually moved from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen and not the other way round, this

pupil does have a sense that not all camps were the same and that not all camps served the same purposes for the Nazi regime.

Most pupils did not distinguish between the different sorts of camps and most pupils could not name any camps, with the exception of Auschwitz. Unsurprisingly, no pupils showed awareness that Auschwitz was the name for a number of camps including Birkenau, Buna-Monowitz and various sub-camps. The homogeneity of the camps is often re-enforced through existing literature and films and in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, for example, there is the sense that Auschwitz is one camp where Jews both worked and were gassed.

The influence of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was particularly prevalent throughout pupils' answers on the camps. Some respondents specifically recognised and acknowledged this influence, one pupil writing: '*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was based on Auschwitz; they were in the middle of nowhere'. The isolation of the camp is certainly emphasised in the book (more so than the film) and four pupils wrote about how the camps were intentionally positioned in such remote places.

*Auschwitz was far away from people. It was in the middle of nowhere.*

Another boy stated that the camps were far away from Germany, which was true of the death camps but not of many other camps like Dachau, Buchenwald or Sachsenhausen.

While remoteness and isolation of location was the reason for some camps' geographical location, contrary to a few pupils' comments, this was not in fact true of Auschwitz. The decision to develop Auschwitz was not due to it being in the

‘middle of nowhere’ but rather because of IG Farben’s decision to base their new factory there; a decision which appears to have been made on the basis of abundant raw materials such as lime and coal as well as the opportunity to gain tax exemption on investments in the east under the Eastern Fiscal Assistance Law of December 1940.<sup>280</sup> Moreover, Himmler only visited Auschwitz for the first time, ten days after hearing the news of IG Farben’s plans.<sup>281</sup>

Yet, perhaps more problematic, is the apparent influence of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in leading some pupils to place an over-emphasis on the Nazis presenting the camps as ‘holiday camps’. This was mentioned on five occasions (1.7%) in the spider diagram and on nine occasions (3.0%) in answering the question ‘what do you know about any of these camps?’ Within the film, there is a fairly prominent scene where Bruno sees his Father showing other SS troops a propaganda video of the camp. Bruno makes reference to this later on during conversations with Shmuel. Some pupils made generalised references to this such as ‘they were advertised as quite nice places yet when they arrived they were quite the opposite’, while others made more explicit references to the scene in the film:

*These camps were advertised on TV as very happy and comfortable but in reality they were rough and the Jews were sent there to get tired and die.*

*I know that the camps were perceived to be good on the videos, that is why so many Jews volunteered to go there, but in fact they were horrible, dingy and often cramped.*

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 50.

The idea that the camps were ‘advertised on TV’ is obviously historically inaccurate on many levels. Moreover, it is problematic to assume that lots of Jews ‘volunteered to go’. While some Jews did voluntarily put themselves forward for deportation from the ghettos to what they thought would be labour camps in the east, this was not so once word of their fate travelled back to the ghettos through the underground movements.

In the follow-up interviews, pupils were asked about this particular scene from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and whether or not videos like this would have been made in real life. One girl said that it was part of Nazi propaganda:

*They were saying that the war’s going great and that the Jews should volunteer themselves to come out of hiding and come to the camps. Look at the videos we’ve shown them; they’re all perfect.*

Another pupil believed that Nazi propaganda was about actively encouraging Jews to go into the camps. This particular boy seemed to think that the Nazis were encouraging Jews to come to Germany so that they could put them in camps.

*He [Goebbels] was employed just to make films to show Nazi policies were favoured throughout Germany and in other countries. So the Jews might say, let’s go to Germany, there’s work camps, we’ll definitely get meals, we’ll definitely get accommodation.*

The scene in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, from which these various misconceptions may have largely originated, is based on the fact that in the summer of 1944 the Nazis did make a propaganda documentary on life in Theresienstadt whereby they presented the camp in a very positive light. It was inspired by the

successful hoax that was conducted that year to beautify the camp for the visit of the Danish Red Cross but was never released. The film was certainly never an attempt to trick the Jewish population of Europe, most of which had been murdered by the summer of 1944.

Two pupils discussed another aspect of the camp system which was picked up from the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The discussion emerged when given a scenario about whether Jews would agree to be *Sonderkommando*.

Pupil 1: *I think a lot of people did obey the orders for their protection and I think they did it for extra food and things like that.*

Pupil 3: *In The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas there was, when they were going into the gas chambers, there was a man who was saying...*

Pupil 1: *I think he was a Jew as well.*

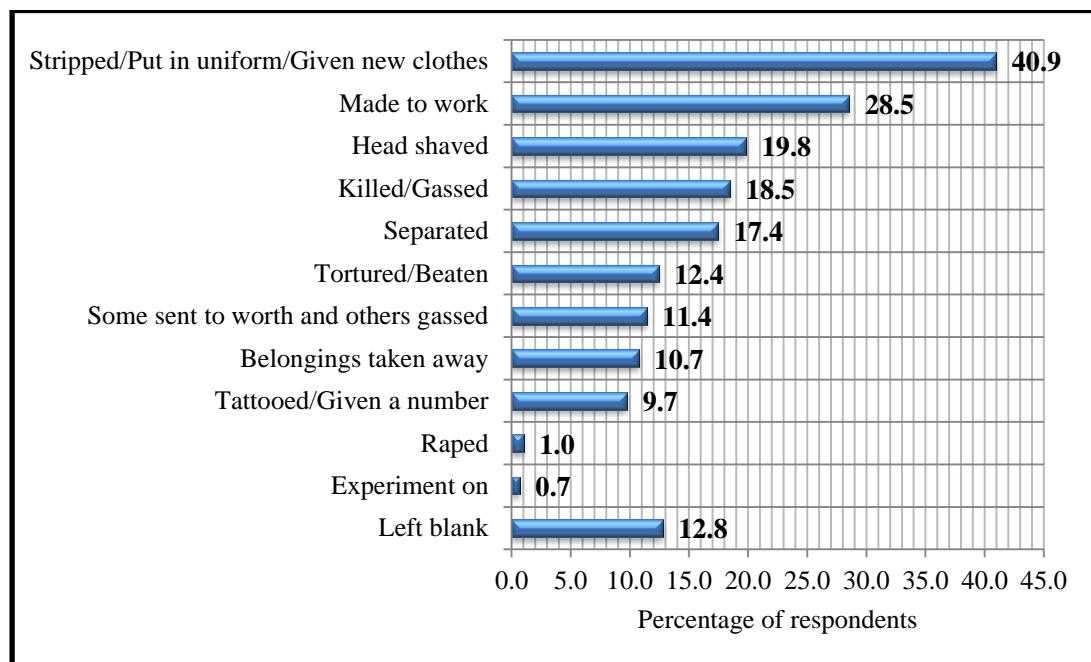
Pupil 3: *Yeah, he was saying, it's just a shower and you're just having a shower.*

The pupils in this interview appeared to understand that some Jews may have assisted the Nazis in order to protect themselves. It is difficult to know whether the makers of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* were presenting those who helped to shepherd the Jews to their deaths in the final scene as *kapos* or *Sonderkommando*. In either case, the *Sonderkommando* were responsible for disposing the corpses, not helping with the killing and the highest tier of *kapos*, which had a role in the day-to-day running of the camps (although not the gassing) were the *Lagerältesters* who

wore civilian clothes. (Those who helped push the Jews towards the gas chambers in the film were all wearing camp uniform).

Despite the areas of confusion and the prevailing misconceptions, most pupils made meaningful and accurate statements about the camps and camp life. This was especially in response to the question, 'describe what you think would happen to the Jews upon arrival at a camp'.

**Fig. 19                    Responses to Question Nine (n.298)**



Again, the influence of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* seems impossible to ignore. The most common response shown in fig. 19 made reference to inmates changing their clothes and having to put on new uniform, which was frequently described as 'pyjamas' (3.6%, n.10), 'striped clothing' (2.7%, n.8) or 'striped pyjamas' (6.3%, n.19). Examples included:

*They got separated from their family; they had to shave their hair off and told to wear striped pyjamas.*

*They would be stripped from all their clothes and belongings. Get their uniforms (striped pyjamas), shave their heads and get put to work straight away.*

In addition to inmates' uniforms frequently (and erroneously) being described as 'pyjamas', eight pupils were also able to state that their uniforms were blue and white stripes. Three pupils also mentioned this in their spider diagram responses. It seems unlikely that so many of the pupils' responses to this question would have focused on inmates' uniforms were it not for *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

In answering this question, some respondents were able to describe a number of the possible experiences that Jews faced upon arrival at a camp:

*They would be stripped of their things and would be possibly tattooed or burnt a number onto them. They had to wear striped clothes and maybe on arrival they might have been killed.*

*They were taken to huts where there was barely any room and they had their head shaven and given special clothes and made to work.*

The pupil making the first comment mentions the idea of prisoners being given a number, which was either tattooed or burnt onto them. This was referred to by 29 pupils (9.7%), with most respondents stating that the Jews were tattooed. In reality, Auschwitz was the only camp where Jews were given a number and it was only those who were assigned to work in the camp who received a tattoo. Those sent straight to the gas chambers were never given a number.<sup>282</sup> No pupils drew the

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<sup>282</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The Holocaust." *Holocaust Encyclopaedia*.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/?ModuleId=10005143>. Accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

distinction between those sent to work and those sent to the gas chambers and neither did any pupil state that the numbering system was only used at Auschwitz. It seems almost certain that because Auschwitz is the most well-known camp, pupils apply the practices there to the entire camp system. In the final scene of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the Jews who are being sent to their deaths have numbers on their uniforms.

Fifty-nine pupils (19.8%) also stated that Jews had their heads shaved upon arrival at the camps. Throughout the research, no pupil mentioned that the Nazis used their hair for the production of wigs, rugs and carpets. Moreover, only two pupils offered reasons as to why the Nazis shaved inmates' heads:

*They would be stripped and changed into striped pyjamas and would have their heads shaved so they would all look the same. They would basically have their identity stripped.*

*They had their heads shaved to show they were part of the camp and they would be changed into dull clothes.*

Many pupils, when answering what would happen to Jews upon arrival at a camp, either stated that Jews would be made to work (28.5%, n.85) or be killed or gassed (18.5%, n.55). Obviously, whether or not someone was gassed on arrival at a camp depended very much on the nature of the camp and the reason they had been sent there. One pupil remarked:

*It would be dependent on which camp it was. They would be put on a crowded train to take them to a concentration camp.*

Interestingly, 11.4% of pupils (n.34) noted that some Jews would be made to work and others would be sent straight to the gas chambers. Linked to an understanding of the selection processes that took place (both for deportation and upon arrival after deportation), is an understanding that Jews were often separated. This was explicitly acknowledged by 52 pupils (17.4%). Some pupils noted that Jews were separated by gender and others by whether or not they were fit enough to work:

*They would be gender-sorted and the males would be forced to work.*

*They would be divided into male and female groups and were murdered straight away or were sent away into dorms and served as slaves then eventually killed.*

*They would get sorted into men and women and young children and then set to work or immediately killed.*

*The Jews were sorted into two groups; the weak who were immediately gassed and the competent who were sent to work.*

The selection processes described were very characteristic of what happened to new arrivals at Auschwitz where there were both labour camps and gas chambers. Pupils seem unaware that in camps like Treblinka II and Belzec, the selection processes had taken place in the ghettos and that absolutely everyone who arrived there was destined for certain death. In the case of many camps, the Jews arriving were either for work or death – a decision which had already been made. By not knowing about the ghettos and the process whereby Jews were deported from the ghettos to camps, many pupils make the mistake of generalising; they often appear to think that all

camps were like Auschwitz, with both labour facilities and gas chambers and that the decisions as to who should die were only ever made upon arrival at a camp.

Overall, pupils do have some knowledge about the camp system and are aware of some of the common experiences which Jews faced such as their belongings being taken, their heads shaved and the general nature of their treatment. Many pupils, however, don't necessarily appreciate the complexity of the camp system and the different sorts of camps that existed. Generally, they recognise that many were forced into dreadful slave labour, often dying in the process and that many were gassed either immediately or after they lost their ability to work.

### **Resistance**

In the pilot research, pupils had been given a series of statements about Jewish resistance and asked to say whether they were true or false. The data suggested that most pupils believed there to have been minimal resistance and that the Jews simply obeyed orders and went to their deaths. Upon reflection, these statements were removed from the final research instrument because they typified the simplification and generalisation of Jewish resistance, which has too often characterised studies of this topic. Consequently, an approach was taken which reflected the more sophisticated nature of resistance and pupils were given different scenarios to discuss in their interviews.

The first of these was regarding the role of the *Sonderkommando*, whose function and tasks in the camps were explained to the pupils. Respondents were given a scenario with a specific character in it and asked how they believed he would respond. Most pupils thought that Jews would obey all of the commands that they

were given because otherwise they would be killed, including performing the role of a *Sonderkommando*:

*If he didn't then they'd kill him.*

*Probably obey. Because if he didn't, he'd die.*

No pupils talked about the *Sonderkommando* uprisings in Birkenau, Treblinka or Sobibor or even appeared to think any uprisings were possible or likely. This may have been because pupils did not understand that *Sonderkommando* were frequently killed in order to conceal what was taking place. Instead pupils gave the impression that resistance was pointless:

*I think he would know that even if he did disobey them, his life wouldn't mean anything, like it wouldn't inspire a whole revolution. It would just mean his death and things would go on the same.*

It was frequently remarked during the interviews that an individual's decision as to whether or not they would resist depended heavily upon who they were and certain variables such as their personal levels of courage and whether or not their family were still alive:

*Well it depends on what kind of person he is like. Most people in that kind of situation wouldn't because they would be too scared. They would be going against the whole of the Nazi government and they might end up with them too. But you might stand up to them if you were particularly brave.*

*And then, surely, maybe like, he felt as if, he could have felt, I have nothing better to do. I've lost my family, it's going to happen to me, I want to rebel. I want to show them what they're doing is wrong, kind of thing. But he*

*might have a reason to live, he may still want to see his family for the last time and stuff, so he may not want to, it just depends on his scenario.*

Throughout the discussions, no pupils mentioned the virtues of resisting simply because it was the right thing to do or due to the honour and nobility attached to such actions. Pupils tended to see resistance in very black and white terms. Typically in their eyes, the worth and value of resistance was only seen by whether the individual personally benefited by the action or whether it involved saving the lives of his family.

During the follow up interviews, pupils were specifically asked about different forms of resistance. Their answers demonstrated that they did not consider non-violent resistance as particularly helpful. When asked about forms of resistance such as the continuation of religious or cultural practises, pupils were generally very dismissive:

*Well there is only really one way to resist.*

*I think the only form of resistance would have been violence and aggression.*

*It's not really going to help them in any way.*

The level of violent resistance by the Jews during the Holocaust increased as knowledge of the real meaning of the deportations entered into the ghettos. Some pupils recognised that Jewish resistance was likely to intensify as the treatment of the Jews became increasingly worse and awareness of the Holocaust grew:

*I don't think they did at first but when they found out what's going on, then probably a little bit of resistance.*

Other pupils seemed to think that Jews could somehow negotiate with the Nazis or at least test the waters to see whether some sort of discussion was possible:

*At first the Nazis persuaded them like, you know that new sheet you want for your bed, maybe if you do this we can get it for you but even if you said, 'no thanks, I'm alright', then they'll say, 'if you don't do that we'll kill your wife or kill you'.*

Only when pupils are aware of the way that the Nazis treated the Jews and the brutality of the treatment that they faced, will they be able to appreciate the extremely difficult context in which resistance took place. Pupils' ignorance about the ghettos is particularly relevant here. Despite uprisings in a number of the death camps, including Treblinka, Sobibor and Birkenau, the majority of resistance occurred in the ghettos and on occasions when individual ghettos were being liquidated. The urban environment, the links that existed with those outside of the ghetto walls and the often strong underground movements, made the planning and implementation of an armed uprising much more possible. In addition to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, there were numerous other armed revolts, for example in the Bialystok Ghetto in 1942 and in the Czestochowa Ghetto the following year. Yet if pupils do not know about the existence of the ghettos, it is no surprise that they have such limited awareness of either the range or extent of Jewish resistance. If pupils believe that Jews were taken from their homes and sent on trains to the camps, it is no wonder that they perceive resistance to be almost impossible. One boy said: 'I think it's pretty hard to resist when you're surrounded by them'. While resistance in the ghettos was also extremely difficult and almost always self-sacrificing, it was nevertheless easier to organise resistance there than in the camps themselves.

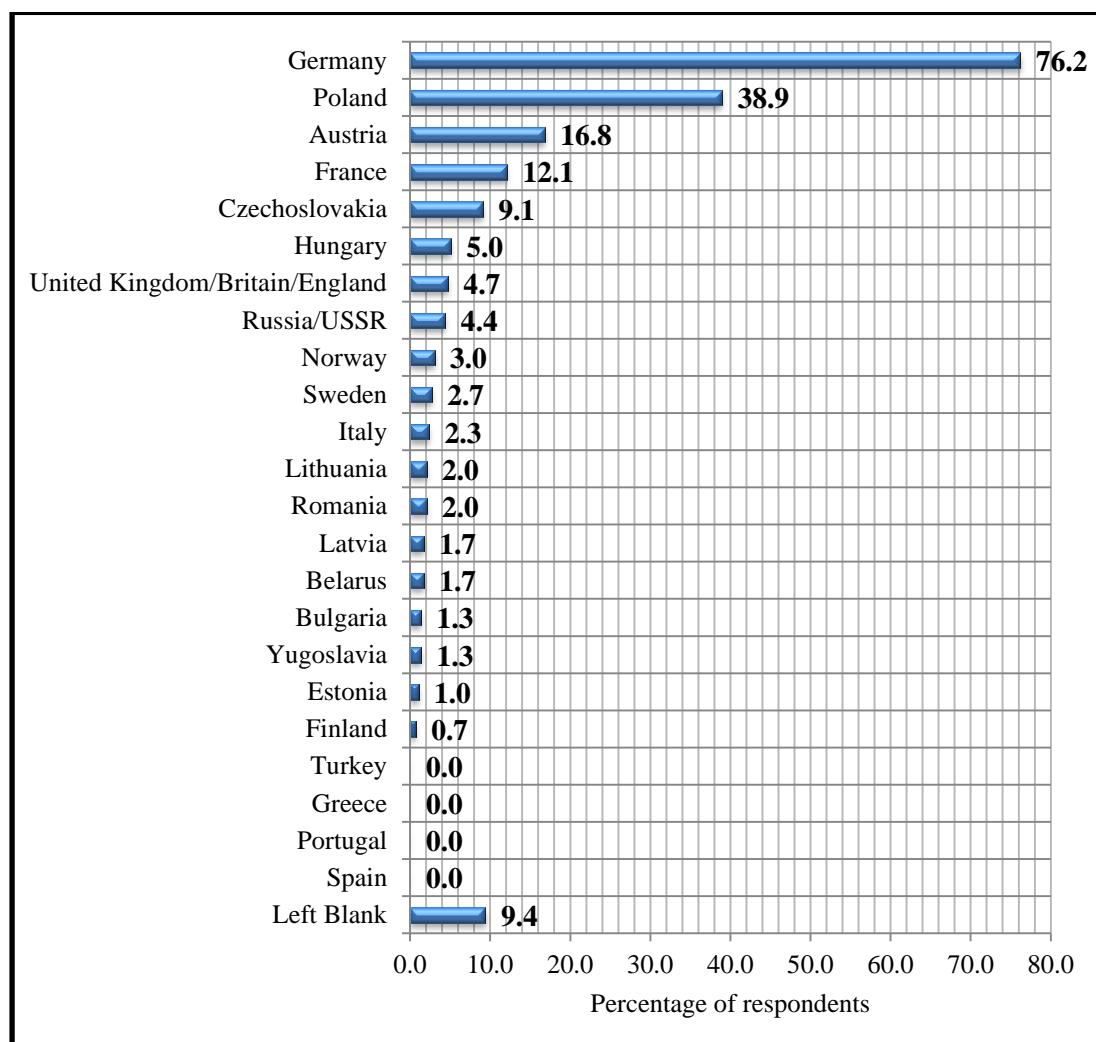
## The Scope of the Holocaust

The research sought to investigate whether or not pupils had a sense of the scope of the Holocaust. In other words, if they understood that this was not a localised event restricted to a few thousand Jews in Germany, but a European-wide phenomenon, which stretched across the whole continent and led to around six million Jewish deaths.

In order to explore the knowledge and understanding that pupils had about the geography of the Holocaust, the questionnaire contained a map of Europe in 1939 and the question, ‘where in Europe did the killing of the Jews take place?’. The wording of the question was phrased so that pupils were asked specifically where the killing took place, rather than from where Jews were taken to be killed. For example, French and Italian Jews were sent eastwards to be murdered, but France and Italy were not places where Jews were killed. Moreover, the question did not ask where the camps were located but rather where the killing took place. This enabled pupils to mention places like Estonia, Lithuania and Ukraine where *Einsatzgruppen* murdered thousands of Jews. The relatively few occasions that such locations were mentioned supports the idea that pupils’ knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust is very much focused on the camps. In fact the seeming ignorance of the murders in the east are demonstrated by the fact that more pupils believed that Jews were killed in Norway, Sweden and even the United Kingdom, than in places like Lithuania and Estonia. In fig. 20 all the countries that were shown on the map given to the pupils are listed.

Fig. 20

Responses to Question Twelve (n.298)



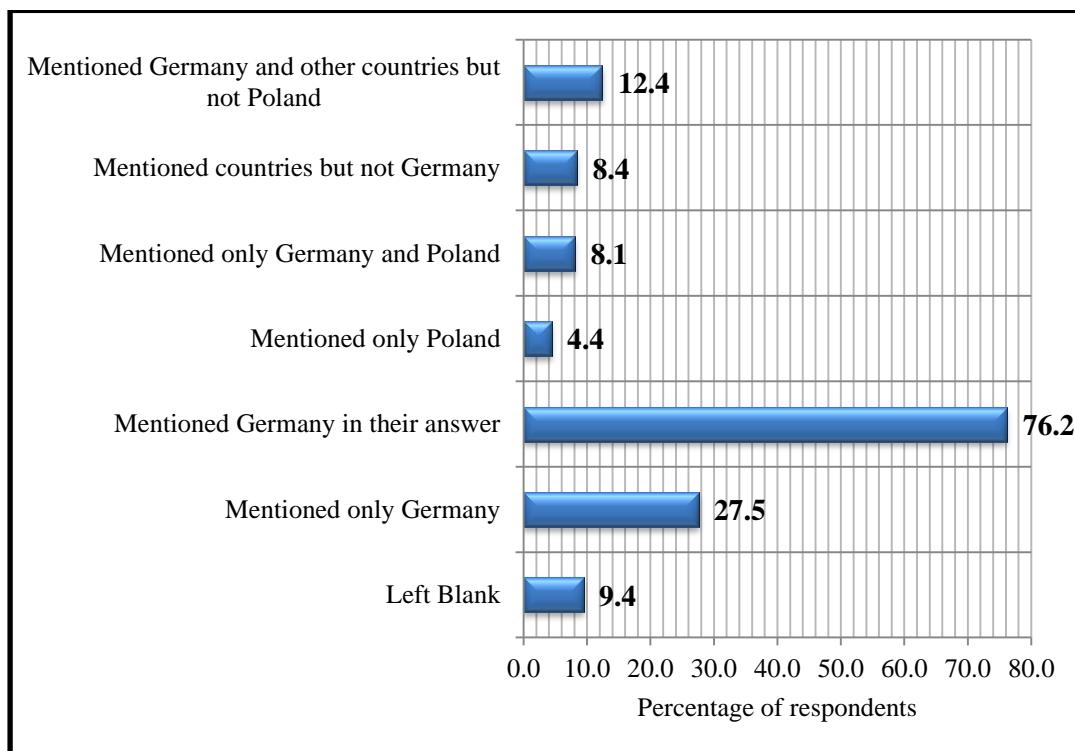
**Fig. 21****Trends of Responses to Question Twelve (n.298)**

Fig. 21 shows further trends in pupils' responses. Clearly the most striking finding is the large number of pupils who focused on Germany. In many senses this is unsurprising as the Nazi regime was based in Germany and the Nazi party were a German party. Moreover, a large number of concentration camps were based in Germany, even though camps also existed in other Nazi-occupied territories such as France, Austria, Yugoslavia and Estonia. The death camps, which solely existed for the process of mass murder, were all in modern-day Poland, although some were located in what was known as Greater Germany. Clearly thousands of Jews did die in Germany. In Buchenwald for example, it is estimated that the SS murdered 11,000 Jews<sup>283</sup> and thousands more died in places such as Bergen-Belsen and Dachau. It is absolutely wrong to suggest anything other than the fact that

<sup>283</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The Holocaust." *Holocaust Encyclopaedia*.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/?ModuleId=10005143>. Accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

thousands upon thousands of Jews were murdered in Germany, some of whom died during the death marches away from the advancing Soviet forces. It is perfectly acceptable therefore that 76.2% of pupils thought that Germany was where the killing of the Jews took place.

The problem lies with the fact that 27.5% (n.82) of pupils and thus 36.1% of all those who mentioned Germany in their answer, did not suggest that the Jews were murdered anywhere else. This means that these pupils probably held to one of two beliefs: either the Nazis sent Jews from all over to Europe to Germany that they might be gassed or that the only Jews that the Nazis murdered were German Jews. It is very possible that many pupils hold to the second of these misconceptions considering that two thirds of the sample believed that Jews made up over 20% of the German population. If this was the case, then Germany would only have needed a population size of 30 million people for there to have been six million Jews in Germany. In reality, the German population was over twice that size, but the Jewish population represented less than 1%. Teachers need to recognise that when they teach the Holocaust, there may well be pupils in their class, perhaps quite a few of them, who believe that the Nazis murdered six million German Jews in Germany.

Nevertheless, 38.9% of pupils (n.116) stated that the killing of the Jews took place in Poland with thirteen pupils suggesting that the killings took place nowhere else. Undoubtedly the majority of Jewish deaths were in modern-day Poland although it is important pupils recognise that this was not the only country where the Nazis murdered Jews.

The third most listed country was Austria, perhaps because pupils were aware of the Anschluss and Hitler's Austrian background. It is possible that France was

mentioned by 12.1% (n.36) of pupils because its occupation is very well known, possibly due to its location in Western Europe, its proximity to England and its invasion on D-Day. It seems likely that Czechoslovakia was listed by 9.1% (n.27) because of its border with Germany (pupils were given a map of Europe).

It was surprising to observe the number of pupils who thought that the killing of the Jews took place in the Britain. One pupil wrote: 'in the south-east of England and the south of Germany was where the main camps were but the Jews probably killed, probably shot, wherever they found if needs be'. Conversely, one pupil recognised that Britain was one of the few places in Europe where Jews were safe:

*Concentration camps were built all around Germany, but all that Germany occupied in Europe in World War Two would have been searched for Jews too. So mainly in Germany but also in Poland, France, the Netherlands and Belgium too. Of course, the Germans never occupied the UK.*

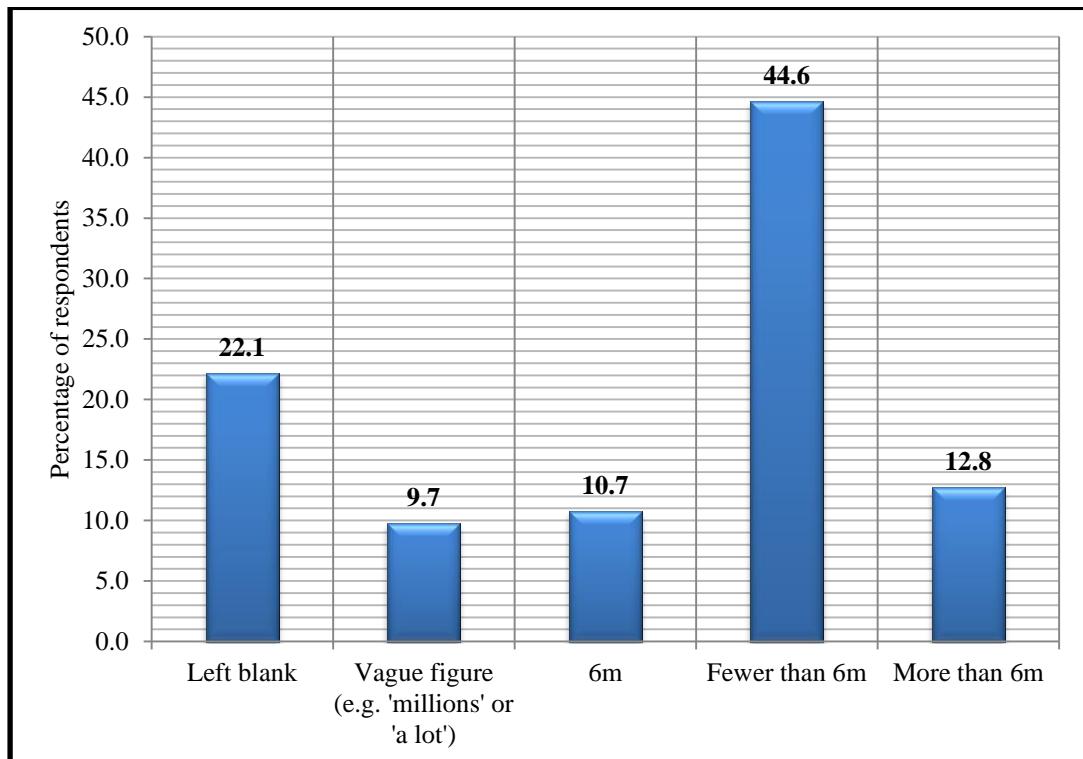
Although at least three Jews were deported from Guernsey to Auschwitz, it seems almost certain that most pupils who stated that Jews were killed in Britain were referring to the mainland and perhaps believed that the Nazis established concentration camps there. This is an important misconception which teachers will need to address.

In addition to specifying individual countries, some pupils made comments such as 'everywhere', 'wherever the Nazis took over' or 'all the countries bordering Germany'. Quite a few pupils prefaced their comments with 'I'm not sure' or wrote 'Germany and probably also...'. Overall, pupils' answers demonstrated a lack of confidence in answering this question and their geography of the Holocaust, especially in the light of their ignorance of the *Einsatzgruppen*, seemed rather

insecure, more often based on deduction than knowledge and common sense, rather than certainty.

Another question on the scope of the Holocaust was concerning the number of Jewish deaths. Pupils were asked, ‘approximately how many Jews were murdered during World War Two?’ It was interesting to see how many pupils were familiar with the figure ‘six million’ and whether or not the ignorance of the *Einsatzgruppen* murders made pupils state a lower number. Conversely, the popular misconception that Jews represented over 20% of the German population may have led pupils to think that the Jewish death toll was higher than six million.

Out of the 298 pupils in the sample, 22.1% (n.66) did not answer this question. While it must be taken into account that the question was the penultimate one on the questionnaire, the final question was answered by 38 more pupils. In fact this question had the lowest answer rate with the exception of the first question on the questionnaire which asked for the specific name given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during World war Two. This would suggest that many pupils did not know the number of Jews that were murdered at the hands of the Nazis.

**Fig. 22****Responses to Question Eleven (n.298)**

The results shown in fig. 22 demonstrated that very few pupils had an accurate sense of the scale of the Holocaust with only 10.7% (n.32) of respondents stating six million. The range of answers also suggested the span of pupils' misconceptions, with the lowest answer being thirty deaths and the highest being one billion (given by two pupils). Moreover, the lowest five answers totalled 9,790 while the top five answers added together came to an incredible 2,400,000,000. Out of the 189 pupils who gave specific figures, the mean answer came to 18,849,209. This would perhaps seem surprising in the light of the fact that far more pupils gave answers lower than six million in comparison to those who gave answers in excess of it. The reason for this extraordinarily high mean is because those who gave figures higher than six million often provided figures *much* higher, thus inflating the mean. Those who gave figures lower than six million could not go into minus figures, whereas those exceeding six million could really go as high as they liked. In that sense, a

much greater range of possible answers existed for those pupils who believed the number of Jewish deaths was in excess of six million. The extent of this is seen by the fact that the mean is 6,317, 938 if the top five outliers are ignored.

Using only the mean to assess pupils' knowledge of the number of Jewish deaths is therefore incredibly misleading. Although with the top five outliers removed, the mean figure is close to the actual answer, this does not mean that most pupils were close; in fact the contrary is true. The mean that is close to the correct answer is caused because those stating that deaths were in excess of six million have gone much higher than six million. In fact more pupils thought that Jewish deaths were ten million or higher (n.33) than they did six million (n.32). The extent of this is also shown by the fact that twenty-five pupils thought that Jewish deaths were twenty million or higher.

Extreme misconceptions existed at the other end of the spectrum too with 56 pupils believing that Jewish deaths were fewer than one million. Thirty-nine of that 56 believed that the death toll was 100,000 or fewer. It seems very plain to see that most pupils lack a sense of how many Jews were murdered by the Nazis with nearly half of the sample believing that it was lower than the actual death toll. As over a quarter of respondents appear to think that the Jews were only killed in Germany, it is perhaps unsurprising that so many pupils underestimated the number of deaths. If pupils had a grasp of the deaths in the ghettos, the mass shootings in the east, (often of hundreds or thousands at a time) and the fact that millions of Jews were sent straight to the gas chambers and never even worked for the Nazis, then they may have recognised that the death toll must have come to a large number. Clearly those who were giving figures such as 200 million or even one trillion, did not have any

grasp of European (or global) population sizes, which may not necessarily be a fair reflection of their understanding of the Holocaust.

In order to show the dispersion from the mean and to highlight the range of answers, the standard deviation of the responses was calculated. The standard deviation of the sample (in this case, only those who gave precise figures, which was 189 pupils) came to 10,344,2563 with the variance of the population being 10,700,364,014,444,000. This shows the huge margin of error from both the mean and the correct answer of six million.

It seems apparent that the geographical and numerical scope of the Holocaust was often seldom realised by pupils, who arrived with misconceptions that either considerably fewer or considerably more Jews were murdered than really were, and that these murders predominantly took place in Germany and did not take place in the Baltic states, Ukraine and Russia.

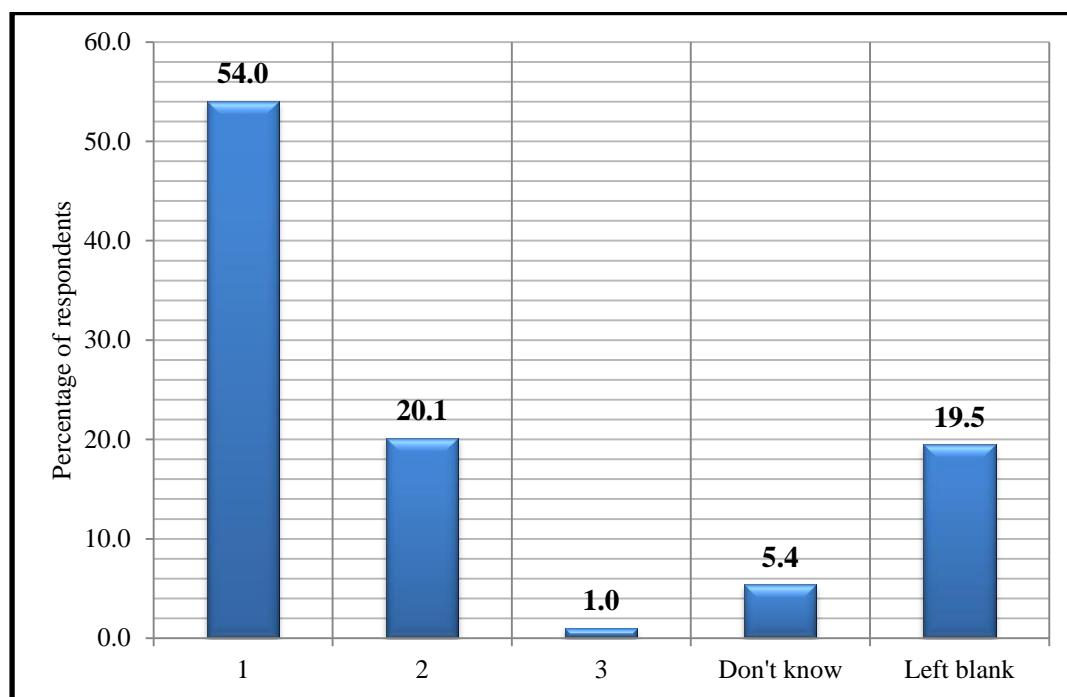
### **The Ending of the Holocaust**

In order to explore pupils' knowledge and understanding of how the Holocaust ended, respondents were asked in the questionnaire, 'why did the Nazi killing of Jews end?'. This question had a relatively low completion rate with 19.4% of pupils (n.58) leaving it blank and the average pupil only writing around eight words. In addition to this, 5.4% (n.16) wrote things such as 'don't know' or 'not sure' but did not provide an explanation as to why the killing ended. Moreover, only one pupil wrote about the ending of the Holocaust in their spider diagram responses.

The answers that pupils provided demonstrated some serious misconceptions and suggested that this is perhaps the area of the Holocaust where pupils know and

understand the least. Many respondents had little bits of knowledge about the ending of the war or Hitler's death but their understanding of these facts in relation to the ending of the Holocaust was often patchy at best and woefully confused at worst. Fig. 23 shows the number of reasons stated for the ending of the Holocaust.

**Fig. 23      Number of Reasons for the Ending of the Holocaust (n.298)**



It is evident that many pupils are unsure about why the Holocaust ended, with nearly one in four pupils failing to give an explanation. Yet out of the 224 pupils who did provide a reason, 71.9% (n.161) gave only one explanation. In many senses, this is not particularly problematic because ultimately the Holocaust ended as a result of the Nazis losing the War and as a consequence of the Allied advance towards, and then into, Germany. Yet, out of the 161 pupils who gave only one answer, only 91 of them (56.5%) gave the allied victory, the Nazis' defeat or the ending of the war as their explanation. In total, only 53.6% (n.160) of pupils, stated in some form that the Holocaust finished because the war ended.

The pupils that did emphasise the liberation of the camps and the military defeat of the Nazis, sometimes referred to the Allies generally, or more frequently, named one or two of the Allied forces:

*The Americans saved them.*

*The Americans came and took over.*

*Because the British troops won the war and all the camps were freed.*

*They were overthrown by the Russian army.*

**Fig. 24      Mention of Allied Forces in Question Ten (n.298)**

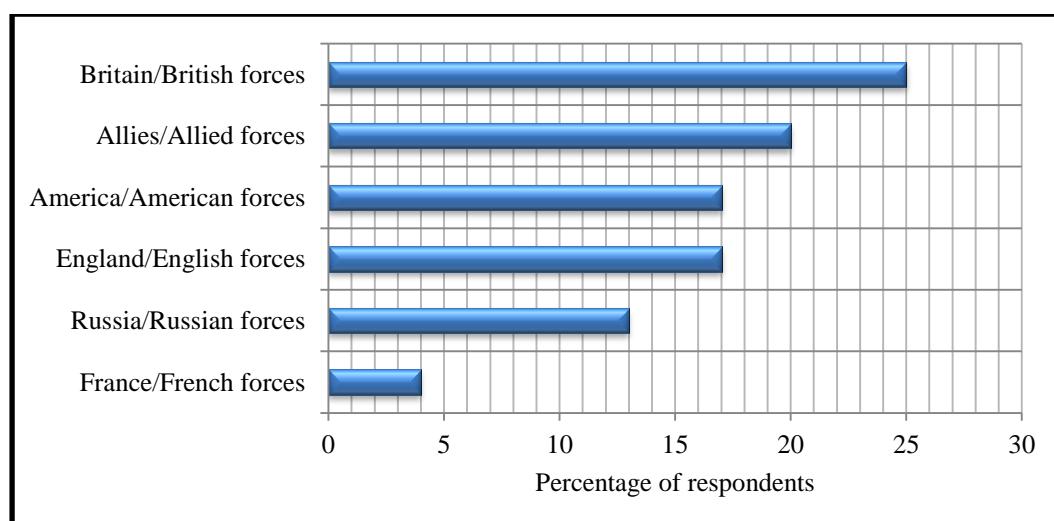


Fig. 24 shows the emphasis on British and English forces which is probably due to the fact that the research was carried out within England. It seems likely that the responses would have had different emphases if conducted in America or Russia. Only one pupil stated that the Soviet forces were approaching Germany from the east and British and American troops from the west:

*Camps in Poland were overrun by the Red Army and those in the west by the British and the Americans.*

Pupils' knowledge of the military liberation of the camps was also demonstrated through the answers that they gave in their interviews. Interviewees were shown a photograph of Jews celebrating the liberation and asked to explain what was going on in the picture and then why the people in the second photograph looked so happy (see appendix 3.1). Almost universally, pupils recognised that the war was over, Allied forces had set them free or they had just heard the news that Hitler was dead.

Yet despite the fact that the victory of the Allied forces or military defeat of the Nazi regime was dominant in the interview answers and represented over 50% of pupils' answers in the questionnaire, this statistic can be misleading. Some pupils for example, stated that the killing of the Jews ended because Hitler killed himself and thus the war ended.

*It ended because Hitler allegedly killed himself and the Allies took control.*

*Hitler killed himself and the Nazis were wiped out by Joseph Stalin.*

*Because Adolf Hitler killed himself so the Nazis were blown by this loss and signed a peace treaty.*

*Hitler died and England were pushing forwards, the main reason was probably because Hitler killed himself, ending the war.*

Many pupils do not have a correct understanding about the relationship between the end of the war and Hitler's suicide. Instead of understanding that Hitler killed himself because the Nazis had lost the Second World War, some pupils, like those who provided the examples above, appear to think that Germany lost the Second World War because Hitler committed suicide. This misconception may mean that pupils fail to appreciate how Hitler and the Nazis considered themselves to be at war

with the Jews and how the mass murder continued, despite the need for men and resources on the front line. It is important that pupils understand how economically counter-productive the Holocaust had become by the end of the war and yet how it continued with determination, as demonstrated by the fate of Hungary's Jews.

The emphasis on Hitler's death was demonstrated by the fact that 24.4% (n.73) of pupils listed Hitler's death as a reason for the ending of the Holocaust. Out of these 73 pupils, 30 of them (10.0%) gave Hitler's suicide as the only reason for the cessation of the Nazi mass murder of the Jews. This is a problematic misconception and pupils need to understand that Hitler's death had no significant impact whatsoever on the ending of the Holocaust. By Hitler's death on April 30, almost all the camps had been liberated and even Stutthof concentration camp, the last camp to be liberated on May 9, had been evacuated in January 1945.

In addition to pupils being unsure about the relationship between the military defeat of the Nazi regime and Hitler's death, some pupils were also confused about the motives of the Allied forces. Twelve pupils, (4.0%) suggested that the Allies were fighting, not so much to end the Nazi-occupation of Europe and to topple the regime, but specifically to stop the Holocaust. These pupils were under the impression that the Allied discovery of the camps were the reason why they invaded Europe, seeking to put an end to the mass murder of the Jewish people:

*It was wrong so people (like Britain) invaded and shut down the camps.*

*The British and Americans realised what was happening and invaded them and freed many Jews.*

*This ended because British aircraft spotted these camps and sent troops to shut them down.*

This last comment may have been a reference to the British reconnaissance photographs of Birkenau taken on August 23, 1944. Although there continues to be a debate about whether or not it was possible or indeed sensible to bomb Birkenau,<sup>284</sup> it is misleading for pupils to believe that the Allies invaded Europe in order to save the Jews. Historian Richard Breitman has argued that the British did know about the annihilation of Soviet Jews as early as 1941 from decoded messages<sup>285</sup> and as Bauer says, ‘The British could have done nothing, even if they had wanted to, to save the European Jews from annihilation, but clearly they didn’t want to’.<sup>286</sup> Certainly by 1943 at the latest, the Allies were aware of the death camps through intelligence from the Polish underground to the Polish government in exile in London. Ultimately, however, as Bauer also points out, the Allies ‘would have argued that the best way to help the Jews was to win the war’.<sup>287</sup>

Clearly many pupils did not appreciate the complexity and indivisibility of the Holocaust and the Second World War. Moreover, some pupils appeared to have little sense of how the War ended or its overall outcome. Four pupils thought that the Holocaust ended because the Nazis made a peace treaty with the Allies:

*They signed a peace treaty. Hitler shot himself and so they decided to stop.*

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<sup>284</sup> Kitchens, ‘The Bombing of Auschwitz Reexamined’; Levy, ‘The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited’; Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue*; Erdheim, ‘Could the Allies have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau?’.

<sup>285</sup> Breitman, *Official Secrets*.

<sup>286</sup> Bauer, *Re-thinking the Holocaust*, 217.

<sup>287</sup> Bauer, *Re-thinking the Holocaust*, 220.

*There was a war which led to an agreement which ended the killings.*

One pupil thought that the Holocaust ended because Hitler went to prison. Two pupils appeared to give the impression that the conscious decision to stop the Holocaust was made by the Nazis because they lost the war:

*Other countries were horrified by it and they had lost the war.*

*I'm not sure but it could have been because other countries were coming into attack or help or because the war had ended and Nazis realised they were doing wrong.*

This second answer demonstrates another misconception that some pupils held. This was that the Holocaust ended because the Nazis had a change of heart and recognised the errors of their ways. Eleven pupils expressed sentiments to this effect. Some pupils' answers clearly referred to a change of heart from the Nazis:

*Because they realised that what they were doing was wrong and evil.*

Others suggested that the German people realised the Holocaust was wrong and thus stood up to Hitler:

*People realised it was wrong and Germans stuck up towards Hitler.*

It was difficult to know the precise meaning of answers such as, 'thought it was wrong' and 'because people realised how wrong it is'. Some answers even suggested that the Allies persuaded the Nazis to stop the Holocaust or convinced them of the errors of their ways:

*Hitler committed suicide and people from other countries told the Nazis that it was wrong.*

This comment shows the significance that pupils appeared to attach to Hitler's role in the Holocaust and why perhaps so many pupils emphasised that the mass murder ended because of the Nazi leader's death. Quite a few pupils saw Hitler's death as the trigger for ending the Holocaust because it led to the ending of the war, the signing of a peace treaty or in some cases a change of heart from the Nazis:

*Because when Hitler died all the men thought it was wrong.*

Such a comment gave the impression that this pupil believed that the Nazis were under some sort of Hitler-inspired spell and potentially attempted to absolve them from guilt by presenting them as those who were simply obeying orders. It is a very serious misconception if pupils think that the Nazis, both collectively and individually, did not willingly perpetrate the mass murder of the Jews. It is important that teachers emphasise to pupils that the Nazis did not have a change of heart and continued their evil acts until they were defeated by military force.

Another misconception, which some pupils demonstrated, was the belief that all of the Jews were killed. In other words, that the Holocaust ended because there were no more Jews left for the Nazis to murder. Comments to this effect included:

*They were all killed in the end, except the runaways.*

*Because they had all been killed.*

*Because they had no more Jews to kill and Hitler lost the war.*

Despite the fact that the minutes of the Wannsee Conference stated that Estonia was 'free of Jews' as they had all been murdered, the Nazis did not succeed in murdering all of Europe's Jews. Gilbert states, 'as well as 300,000 survivors of the concentration camps, more than a million Jews survived Hitler's efforts to destroy

them... In all, 1,600,000 Jews who were living in Europe in 1939 were still alive when the war ended in 1945'.<sup>288</sup>

Other misconceptions that individual pupils made included, 'because they escaped', 'because the Prime Minister called it to an end' and 'because the Jews started to protest and they didn't do what they had been asked to do'. This final comment shows a lack of realisation regarding the nature of the Holocaust and the extremity of the situation that they faced. A similar sentiment was offered by another respondent who wrote: 'they realised they are wrong to kill them and people started to debate against it and stood up for their selves'. One pupil seemed to misunderstand that the Nazis were the government when he wrote: 'the Nazis stopped killing the Jews because the government said they were no longer allowed to kill the Jews'.

Two pupils in their questionnaire answers and one girl at interview also mentioned the role of the Red Cross, suggesting that they were responsible for stopping the Holocaust:

*The Red Cross came in and invaded the camp.*

*Because the Red Cross came along.*

As in the answers to so many of the questions, the influence of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was once again present:

*I think it ended when one of the Nazi children died in the poisonous gas in the Jew camp.*

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<sup>288</sup> Gilbert, *Holocaust, Maps and Photographs*, 57.

This answer strongly suggests that the pupil concerned has assumed that *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was a factual account of the Holocaust. It highlights an extreme misconception, which can radically damage a pupils' understanding of the Holocaust.

Overall, it seemed that pupils had a wider range and a more extreme collection of misconceptions regarding why the Holocaust ended than on other aspects of this subject. It is difficult to know exactly why this might have been. Perhaps it is because the subject is dealt with less frequently in literature and films.

Although many teachers do not include the experiences of survivors after the War in their study of the Holocaust it was felt that this was an important topic and that pupils' ideas about this area were worthy of consideration.<sup>289</sup> Consequently, interviewees were asked where the Jews that had survived the camps would go to after the War. The most common response from pupils was that they would simply go home. Some pupils, either through their own thought processes or by prompts such as: 'where is home?' or 'do they still have a home?', recognised that for survivors, it was not as simple as just going back to where they had come:

Interviewer: *Where do you think these people are going to go now they've been released? What's going to happen to them?*

Pupil 2: *Go back to their homes.*

Pupil 1: *Yeah, back to their homes.*

Pupil 3: *Their home streets somewhere, go find a job.*

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<sup>289</sup> According to the HEDP research only 409 out of 900 teachers stated that they taught this topic in their study of the Holocaust. (p.124)

Interviewer: *Where do you think home is for them?*

Pupil 3: *They don't have a home; they destroyed it.*

Some pupils suggested that the Jews would not want to go back home to their country of origin in the light of the things that they had experienced:

*If you lived in Germany and then you were sent away and obviously the Nazis were there, I don't think you'd actually want to go back to Germany in the end because that's where all the horrible stuff has been going on.*

Conversely, other pupils thought that Jews would want to go back home to try and find their families. While survivors clearly did and do continue to trace the fate of relatives, it was never as simple as returning to the town or village where they had once previously lived. Pupils who are unaware of the ghettos, the mass deportations and the movement between camps, may fail to recognise this.

In light of the fact that many pupils perceive the Holocaust to have only taken place in Germany, it was understandable that some respondents thought that the Jews would want to leave Germany:

Pupil 1: *They will probably try to leave Germany.*

Pupil 2: *Yeah, they'll probably leave Germany because they are worried.*

Yet only a few interviewees talked about Jews going to Israel after the War. Incidentally, more pupils talked about Jews living in Israel before the War than after it. Nevertheless, a few pupils did recognise that many Holocaust survivors went to Israel:

*Did they go to, I'm not sure, was it Israel and then there was that thing between them and the Palestinians and I think the Americans, because the Jews had never actually had like a homeland.*

Only one pupil, when asked where the liberated Jews might go, recognised that they needed assistance from the Allies:

*They might need looking after until they can live on their own again.*

It seemed that a lot of pupils failed to appreciate how close to death so many survivors were and that they were not physically able to simply walk out of the camps and travel across Europe to reclaim their homes and rebuild their lives. Only once pupils were told that their homes had been destroyed and their families murdered did pupils begin to recognise the severity of the plight that faced survivors. One pupil responded by suggesting that the Jews may thus 'live in communal buildings', while another said that might 'stay in a hospital'. A third interviewee stated: 'the British might supply them with a house or they might just have to find a job to get money'. It seems that pupils' initial preconceptions regarding Holocaust survivors are simplistic and optimistic. They imagine that with the end of the War simultaneously emerged the ending of all their problems. Only when pupils were forced to think more deeply did they recognise that things were not that simple.

### **The Significance of the Holocaust**

Although the importance of the Holocaust is almost universally accepted within British education, pupils were asked whether or not they perceived it to be of

significance. Almost all pupils stated that the Holocaust was very significant, often citing lessons, either historical or moral that need to be learnt:

*It shows how unjust the world can be, so it makes people aware of what people can be capable of, and also make them more wary of people like Hitler coming back.*

*These things that happened in the past, apartheid. If we didn't know they happened then we probably wouldn't know they were wrong now so we'd all be probably doing them now so it's good to reflect on them.*

*Because we can think about what happened and we can learn not to do anything like that again.*

In addition to emphasising the so-called “lessons” of the Holocaust, some pupils suggested that the subject ought to be studied in order to remember those who had been killed:

*People should remember what happened.*

*Because a lot of people died and it's important to remember them.*

Some pupils suggested that the Holocaust was particularly important for Jews, while others indicated that for non-Jews perhaps the Holocaust was less important:

*It is particularly important for those that are Jewish as so many of their race was wiped out.*

Interviewer: *So the Holocaust happened quite a long time ago now, do you think that it is still important?*

Pupil 1: *Maybe for a few people.*

Pupil 2: *Like for the Jews.*

Contrary to the conversation above, another group of pupils stated that the Holocaust was of as much importance for non-Jews as for Jews:

Pupil 1: *And as much as it is for Jews, it's just as important for other people to realise that could have happened in other places.*

Pupil 3: *And other religions as well, just like comparing it to, because that could have been my family background.*

Only one pupil believed that the Holocaust was not important and that subsequently it should not be studied in schools. The other two interviewees disagreed with the girl's comments:

Interviewer: *Do you think it is still important and relevant today?*

Pupil 2: *No.*

Pupil 1: *Yes.*

Pupil 3: *Yes, because so many people were killed.*

Interviewer: [To Pupil 2] *Why do you not think it is relevant?*

Pupil 2: *Because what's happened, happened and I don't know why we should know about it now.*

Interviewer: *So do you not think that it's a big deal particularly?*

Pupil 2: *No.*

Pupil 3: *I do.*

Interviewer: *Why do you think it's a big deal?*

Pupil 3: *Because lots of people died and lots of people should know about that.*

The belief that the Holocaust is not important was only expressed by one girl in the interview above. Throughout the discussion however, she remained unrelenting in her position.

Interviewer: *But if we think about the Nazi killing of the Jews, why is that important or why is it not important?*

Pupil 2: *It really isn't that important.*

Pupil 1: *It is because, I don't know. It could affect other things that happened in history so it could affect all other things.*

Interviewer: *Do you think that the Holocaust should be studied in schools?*

Pupil 2: *No.*

Pupil 1: *Yes, only when you're old enough to understand it.*

The sort of response that pupil two gave during the interviews, highlights that teachers cannot afford to take for granted that all pupils will sympathise with the idea that the Holocaust is important or worthy of study. When the excerpts above were viewed in the light of the whole interview, it was evident that the pupil who did not believe that the Holocaust was important had very limited knowledge about the subject. It is possible that once pupils have begun to acquire knowledge about the Holocaust then they will increasingly see its significance and its worth on the curriculum. Yet at the start of teaching about the Holocaust, teachers cannot afford

to assume that everyone in their class will want to study this topic or even see any value or worth in doing so.

Certainly all other interviewees were strongly in favour of the Holocaust being taught about in schools. The reasons given as to why it should be taught about were similar in nature to the answers given as to why the Holocaust is important. However, two interviewees stressed that learning about the subject in the classroom was more beneficial than to do so through films and literature.

Pupil 2: *There are so many books and movies about it, which, it's not a clear thing in books and movies about why it was and why it was happening.*

Pupil 3: *And if you watch it in a film it could be over-exaggerated or under-exaggerated. Learning it in class would make it more clear viewing if the movies were over-exaggerated or under-exaggerated.*

Although there was almost a universal consensus that the Holocaust should be on the curriculum, a very large number of pupils emphasised that it should not be taught at an early age. Such comments were not in response to a question about when the Holocaust should be studied but rather if the Holocaust should be studied in schools. It seems that many pupils found the subject difficult to grasp and at times disturbing, as characterised by one pupil who said that he had run out of the class in tears when he had first seen *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

Pupil 1: *Some of it, some of the scenes are quite sort of...*

Pupil 2: *Graphic.*

Pupil 1: *Quite graphic, you know, difficult to digest so I think it's very important to be studying it at a higher age.*

Pupil 2: *I found it really upsetting. When I first watched it I literally ran out the room crying – that was a few years ago now though.*

Some pupils stated that the Holocaust should not be taught until pupils were old enough to understand it:

*It depends on your age, whether you understand it.*

One discussion highlighted some of the problems with studying the Holocaust at primary school, with the pupil who had done so suggesting that this was not necessarily beneficial:

Pupil 1: *I studied it when I was in year five [aged 9-10].*

Pupil 3: *Really?*

Interviewer: *Do you think that's too young?*

Pupil 1: *Yeah.*

Pupil 3: *And they don't know enough about the world yet to understand.*

Pupil 1: *And they don't know very much and like understand it; if you're trying to explain it in as much detail as you would to us, then they wouldn't take in as much.*

Pupil 3: *And also, if a teacher was trying to teach year five children about it, then they'd probably do it in more simplified terms and then they wouldn't, and then the children might not get the full impact of what actually happened. They might just think it was just some event that happened they learnt it so young and then they'd suddenly realise it was a huge deal.*

Conversely, some pupils thought that studying the Holocaust at an early age was advantageous and would provide long term benefits, although they generally represented a minority opinion.

Interviewer: *Do you think the Holocaust should be studied in schools?*

All pupils: *Yeah*

Pupil 2: *Yeah, I think it should, I think it should be studied at like an early age.*

Pupil 1: *Yeah, like little children...*

Pupil 2: *No I'm not saying like primary school [pause], but maybe, because we only did a bit in year eight, but we don't know much.*

Pupil 1: *I did it in year five...*

Pupil 2: *But I think, so we can understand a bit more about it when we're younger.*

Pupil 3: *Yeah, because they do say, like you learn, you learn easier and things when you're younger and I think that if you get to*

*grips with the Holocaust then you may find it easier to handle when you're older, when you're like working on it in your GCSEs.*

In general terms it seemed that pupils were enthusiastic about talking and studying about the Holocaust; they seemed to recognise its importance and wanted to find out about it. This bodes well for teachers, who may find that pupils are keener to learn about the Holocaust than some other parts of history.

This links into the aims of the National Curriculum for history, which states that students should consider 'the significance of events, people and developments in their historical context and in the present day'.<sup>290</sup>

Yet it is not simply pupils' interest in the Holocaust that has implications in the classroom. Their ideas, beliefs, knowledge and understandings also have important consequences for practitioners, educators, policy makers and curriculum designers. The knowledge and understanding that pupils bring to the classroom before they study the Holocaust should help to inform the decision-making processes within the field of Holocaust education.

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<sup>290</sup> Department for Education, 'Secondary National Curriculum until 2014'.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Implications of the Research**

The three principal research questions in this study were as follows:

1. What knowledge do thirteen and fourteen year-olds in English schools have about the Holocaust?
2. What understanding do they have about the Holocaust?
3. What are the implications of these preconceptions on curriculum design and teaching?

The data suggests that there is a very wide range of knowledge and understanding that pupils appear to bring with them before they study the Holocaust. Yet despite the variation, there are common themes which emerge in what they know and in what they do not know; what they seem to understand and also how they seem to understand it.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

Table 8 attempts to summarise these and draw together some of the popular ideas that respondents demonstrated. It is arranged according to the same themes which were outlined in table 1.

**Table 8      Summary of Key Findings**

Area	Key Findings
Sources of pupils' knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various sources of information, but especially films and literature</li> <li>• <i>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i> appears to have a huge impact of children's ideas</li> <li>• <i>Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl</i> is particularly influential</li> <li>• <i>Schindler's List</i> has minimal impact</li> </ul>
Jews, Jewish identity and pre-War Jewish life and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variation in how pupils perceive Jews and Jewish identity</li> <li>• Some see Jews as a religious group; some as racial identity and others as a combination of factors</li> <li>• Minimal knowledge of pre-War Jewish life and culture</li> <li>• Some acceptance of antisemitic stereotypes</li> </ul>
The causes of the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hitler-centric explanations</li> <li>• Some explain the causes through the actions of the perpetrators, others through the “differentness” of the Jews</li> </ul>
The perpetrators of the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplistic and Hitler-centric perspectives</li> <li>• Ignorance of <i>Einsatzgruppen</i>, collaborators and the geographical spread of events</li> </ul>
The treatment of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on their murder and being sent to camps</li> </ul>

Jews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge of gassing with some recognising that Jews were forced to work</li> <li>Minimal knowledge of ghettos</li> </ul>
The chronology of the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many pupils recognised that things got worse although no real sense of when or how</li> <li>Many believe the Jews went from their homes to the camps</li> <li>No understanding of the relationship between the War and the Holocaust</li> <li>Some pupils see the Holocaust as an event rather than a process</li> </ul>
The camps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The area where pupils appear to have the greatest knowledge</li> <li>Generalised understanding of routines, conditions and experiences</li> <li>Very limited knowledge of different types of camps</li> </ul>
Resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils seem ignorant of the extent of resistance</li> <li>Resistance is seen in black and white terms with no real appreciation of its different expressions</li> </ul>
The scope of the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on Germany and minimal knowledge of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, with the exception of Poland</li> <li>Ignorance of the mass shootings in the east</li> <li>Most pupils do not know that six million Jews were</li> </ul>

	murdered with many thinking it was far fewer
The ending of the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confusion over why the Holocaust ended with an emphasis on Hitler's death</li> <li>Some understanding of Allied liberation of camps although this is often mixed with errors in thinking</li> </ul>
The significance of the Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The vast majority of pupils see the Holocaust as having significance and relevance for today</li> <li>Pupils see it as relevant for different reasons</li> </ul>

### **Summary of Key Misconceptions and Potential Solutions**

In addition to pupils' knowledge and understandings being of importance, the misconceptions that they hold are also of great significance and have many implications for the field. Table 9 attempts to summarise these erroneous ideas as well as suggesting some possible solutions that practitioners may wish to employ to deconstruct and tackle them.

**Table 9      Summary of Common Misconceptions and Potential Solutions**

Misconception	Potential Solution
<i>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i> is an accurate historical representation of the Holocaust.	Ensure that the film/book is used critically and not accepted as an accurate representation. Explain how it differs from the historical accounts.
Jews were ubiquitous in Germany. They were rich and took all the best jobs.	Inform pupils that Jews made up less than 1% of Germany's population in 1933 and were well integrated into German society and culture.
Hitler hated the Jews because of their religion and consequently implemented the Holocaust.	Ensure that pupils are taught that both religious and secular Jews were targeted by the Nazis' racial policies and virulent antisemitism. Explain the complex machinery that was necessary to conduct killing on such a vast scale and the important contribution of various individuals, organisations and collaborators.
The Holocaust was an event.	Highlight the evolutionary nature of Nazi antisemitic policy and how major policy decisions must be understood in the context of the War.
All the camps were used for	Examine with pupils the different types

extermination and contained gas chambers.	of camps; why they existed and when they were functioning.
Fighting against the Nazis was the only type of resistance that mattered. The Jews did not resist.	Emphasise that resistance involved maintaining a spiritual and cultural identity. In addition to this, there were many armed uprising in the ghettos and in camps.
A number of Jews were killed in camps in Germany.	Pupils need to know that six million Jews were murdered in ghettos, camps and through mass shootings. In addition to Germany, Eastern Europe was the centre of most of the killing.
The Holocaust ended because Hitler died.	Ensure that the ending of the Holocaust is included on the syllabus. Explain that Hitler committed suicide in the final days of the Second World War. By this time, the camps had been liberated, although many Jews had died on the death marches.

### Theoretical and Methodological Implications

This research was based upon the belief that thirteen and fourteen year-old pupils have preconceptions about the Holocaust. While some colleagues suggested that pupils would know nothing about this topic before they studied it, or at least

incredibly little, the pilot data gathered suggested that this was not the case. This research has demonstrated that pupils do arrive with a range of ideas, beliefs and understandings about the Holocaust, that some of these are helpful, others less so and that there are common patterns and trends in much of their thinking. It also supports the argument that pupils first come across the Holocaust before they formally study it in class. As Schweber anecdotally remarked:

I suspect that most kids... first learn about the Holocaust, slavery, and other atrocities in history accidentally, randomly, because they happened to be standing by the monkey bars in the school playground on a Thursday morning.<sup>291</sup>

The findings also corroborate with the empirical studies of Donovan and Bransford<sup>292</sup> and Lee<sup>293</sup> respectively, who explored how students learn and how preconceptions influence their thinking. The evidence appears to support the Donovan and Bransford's proposition that 'new understandings are constructed on a foundation of existing understandings and experiences',<sup>294</sup> as well as the remark of Pendry et al. that 'pupils fit new knowledge into existing frameworks'.<sup>295</sup>

One of the most important ways that this study has contributed to the field is that it has employed a methodological rigour which has been absent from many studies, which have too often used small and unrepresentative sample sizes or been anecdotal rather than systematic. Moreover, it has explored a number of areas

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<sup>291</sup> Schweber, "What happened to their pets?", 2074.

<sup>292</sup> Donovan and Bransford, 'Introduction'.

<sup>293</sup> Lee, 'Putting Principles into Practice'.

<sup>294</sup> Donovan and Bransford, 'Introduction', 4-5.

<sup>295</sup> Pendry et al., 'Pupil Preconceptions', 20.

which have not previously been researched such as the influence of contemporary films and literature, for example, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, as well as pupils' understanding of the Holocaust's chronology, scope and significance.

Upon reflection, it was felt that the methodology employed provided a real insight into the pupils' ideas. The open-ended nature of the spider diagram allowed for a very wide range of answers and suggested what was particularly prevalent in pupils' thinking about the subject. Moreover, the general avoidance of closed questions in the questionnaire provided a wealth of very useful quantitative data which answered some important and specific questions. This was insufficient by itself to provide either the requisite richness or sophistication of answer. The interviews were able to do this much more effectively and thus more complex themes like defining Jews and discussing resistance were successfully considered. By analysing this data, the areas which required clarification, greater detail or stronger evidence were further explored in a second round of interviews, with some of the same pupils. This worked very effectively and was a valuable methodological approach.

The research was also grounded in the theory that history is more than simply knowing or acquiring a set of propositions about the past. In other words, it is also very much about the evidence that we have for those propositions. While some pupils have very weak evidence to support their claims about the past, with some careful probing it is often the case that they can explain why they believe in that proposition, even if the reason is not particularly credible. The research showed that books and films, along with other sources such as previous education, have had a huge impact on pupils' thinking and were often used to support their preconceptions. It was not uncommon for pupils to explain Nazi treatment of the Jews through the prism of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* as though the experiences

in this fictional story were typical throughout the period. This is not particularly surprising, but it does highlight the importance of recognising and when necessary, challenging, the basis upon which some pupils' preconceptions rest.

One significant finding from the research was the many examples of how pupils' preconceptions of the Holocaust work together to inform their understanding. The myths and erroneous beliefs which pupils hold, do not exist in isolation but are based upon various influences and help to form not simply isolated facts (so-called) but an entire belief system about the Holocaust which is mutualistic and interconnected. The preconceptions that pupils hold about the Holocaust either support each other or challenge each other. For example, pupils' almost universal lack of knowledge about the ghettos supported their erroneous belief that there was minimal resistance, which is most probably based on the common sense belief that it was almost impossible to resist in the camps. Their knowledge of the Holocaust to date, picked up from films, literature, family and the media, typically focused on Auschwitz and the camps and thus their framework of thinking is held together and consequently they had no reason to think anything different. If pupils acquire knowledge which challenges this thinking, it may well have repercussions on their other conceptions. Further research into this would be particularly interesting.

Other examples are manifold. Pupils' notion that Hitler was absolutely central in planning and implementing the Holocaust supports the idea that his death led to the end of the killings. Their belief that there were so many Jews in 1933 Germany explains why many pupils fail to appreciate that millions of Jews were murdered in other parts of Europe. Moreover, the narrow scope that they gave to the Holocaust supported their popularly held view that there were far fewer than six million Jewish deaths.

There were examples from the research where pupils' preconceptions did not fit together and where there was evidence of a clear struggle in their minds as they sought to grapple with two seemingly contradictory ideas. One pupil wrote for example:

*Hitler was Jewish but he hated all the Jews – I don't know why.*

In this example, the pupils' framework of thinking did not fit together. In the mind of this individual it seemed that only one of the statements was likely to be true. Hitler either hated the Jews and wasn't Jewish or he didn't hate the Jews and was Jewish. It is far easier for a teacher to tackle this misconception than say, the mutually-supporting misconceptions about resistance and the ghettos. If evidence is put before the pupil showing that Hitler was not Jewish then that fits into their other ideas and there is a sense of coherence. If, however, a practitioner teaches that large numbers of Jews did resist the Holocaust then pupils will adjust their framework of thinking accordingly. Pupils are likely to believe that there was lots of resistance in the camps as opposed to thinking that the majority of resistance was carried out in the ghettos or by partisan groups in the forests. Although pupils may have acquired new, and correct information about the Holocaust (i.e., that Jews often did resist), they may well integrate that into their schemata of thinking in an incorrect way.

This highlights the importance of a holistic approach to pupils' preconceptions and the importance of understanding how existing ideas and beliefs about the past can support each other, irrespective of whether or not they are correct. This resonates with the arguments of Lee who suggested that pupils' understanding of the past could cohere and function as a framework, despite not being correct. Only by appreciating these connecting structures and the range of interlocking

preconceptions, can Holocaust education tackle ignorance and misconceptions effectively and build upon existing knowledge. Such findings also support the arguments of Driver, Guesne and Tiberghien, who suggested that while pupils' answers may initially appear incoherent; there is typically an internal, although often less scientific, coherence in the way that they think.<sup>296</sup>

The existence of pupils' coherence in their thinking obviously has important practical implications on the order in which different parts of the Holocaust are taught about. Although a chronological approach may well be the most appropriate, especially in the light of pupils' apparent confusion in this area, it is nevertheless important for teachers to be flexible so that they are aware how different areas of the Holocaust relate to each other. For example, if a teacher is explaining the persecution of Jews in Germany during the 1930s, they may wish to explain that the Star of David was not introduced in Germany until 1941 and that the policy of deportation suggests that Hitler had not necessarily intended to murder all of Europe's Jews as soon as he took office in 1933, as some pupils are prone to believe.

Further research of a qualitative nature is needed into whether or not pupils do seek coherence in their thinking and how this relates to pupils' preconceptions. Moreover, studies are needed on how pupils' preconceptions of the Holocaust relate to the learning process and the extent to which these preconceptions can help or hinder in the acquiring of new knowledge and understanding.

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<sup>296</sup> Driver, Guesne and Tiberghien, *Children's Ideas*, 3.

## Practical Implications

The results of this research demonstrate extremely clearly that pupils do not come into their studies of the Holocaust as empty vessels. It is very evident that ideas have been acquired, knowledge has been accumulated and understandings have been developed. Perhaps the most important implication of this for teachers preparing to teach about the Holocaust is that they need to be aware that their pupils are bringing with them a range of often complex, prior conceptions, which need to be investigated, explored and understood. Ignoring the “baggage” which pupils bring with them is very likely to be detrimental to a child’s education and limit their understanding of the Holocaust as their new knowledge may not cohere with their existing preconceptions.

### *Curriculum Planning*

It ought to be the case that what goes on in the classroom influences, and is influenced by, empirical research and scholarship. Alex Maws, Head of Education at the Holocaust Educational Trust writes,

‘Holocaust studies’ and ‘Holocaust education’ sound like two concepts which are likely to be very closely related to one another. But, regrettably, the reality is that practitioners in both of these fields too often operate in relative ignorance of each other.<sup>297</sup>

If Maws’s analysis is correct, then it seems probable that much of curriculum planning is disconnected from research. With the increase in teacher training in Holocaust education, some steps have been taken to tackle this problem. The work

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<sup>297</sup> Andrews, Gray and Maws, ‘Responses to B.J. Epstein’, 172.

of the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Centre for Holocaust Education at the Institute of Education, may play an important role in helping teachers to see the value of such a connection.

In the light of this, it seems that the findings on pupils' preconceptions can have a very valuable impact on both the design and delivery of Holocaust education. Success in the delivery begins with effective and thoughtful design, both in terms of curricula and content. Edwards and O'Dowd wrote:

In themselves students' prior understandings do not resolve the many problems of Holocaust education lesson planning; however, we would like to suggest that they can be used to inform the process in ways that are helpful. Students' specific areas of conception and misconception can be taken as signposts that can be used to give direction to the setting of learning objectives and the selection of content.<sup>298</sup>

Consequently, when designing a history curriculum, efforts should be made to provide a holistic Holocaust education, which removes ignorance, challenges misconceptions and builds and develops existing knowledge and understanding. The research suggested that pupils arrive with ideas about the Holocaust that they have acquired from previous education and certainly from subjects other than history such as religious studies and English. This concurs with the findings of the Holocaust Education Development Programme in 2009. As a result of this, pupils would benefit from a Holocaust curriculum which took into account what they had already studied in other subjects and ideally what they had covered in their primary school education (although this may be a little more difficult to find out). If, for

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<sup>298</sup> Edwards and O'Dowd, 'The Edge of Knowing', 20-1.

example, pupils have studied Judaism and Jewish identity in religious studies, then perhaps less time is needed to explore these ideas in history. If, however, pupils have not studied these themes elsewhere then it is important that teachers take time to explore this area of the Holocaust and to deconstruct prevailing myths and misconceptions. Moreover, if history teachers are aware that all their pupils will have studied say *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* or *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in their English lessons when they are planning the history curriculum, then they may be able to design their programme of study accordingly to ensure that they can build on existing knowledge but challenge common misconceptions and problems which might have arisen from the use of these books or films.

The research on pupils' preconceptions has suggested that there are some areas of the Holocaust where pupils appear to lack any real knowledge or awareness. Some of these areas are crucial to know about if an accurate and well-rounded understanding of the Holocaust is to take place. One such area appears to be pre-War Jewish life and the history of the Jewish people. When preparing a Holocaust curriculum it is thus important that pupils understand exactly who the Jews are and something of their culture and identity. Simply teaching about historical antisemitism may fail to give pupils a balance in their thinking and it is helpful if the Jewish contribution to pre-War life is included.

The ignorance that pupils seemed to have regarding the ghettos and the evolution of Nazi policy is something which teachers ought to also ensure is dealt with in a scheme of work. As it appears that many pupils seemed to think that Nazi policy towards the Jews simply shifted from persecution to extermination, it is important that these areas of ignorance are tackled. This means that teachers explain the Nazis' deportation policies towards German Jews in the late 1930s and how the

outset of War in September 1939 meant a change in this policy towards Polish Jewry. Pupils need to understand that mass extermination by gassing did not take place until after Operation Barbarossa and that for many Jews in the east; the method of extermination was shooting. Awareness of the work of the *Einsatzgruppen*, Operation Reinhard and the subsequent liquidation of the ghettos needs to be understood if pupils are to appreciate the evolution of Nazi Jewish policy, the decision to murder all of Europe's Jews and the centrality of the death camps, in what was euphemistically referred to as the "Final Solution" to the Jewish question. If teachers want to provide a holistic Holocaust curriculum, which tackles ignorance, develops initial understandings and builds on existing knowledge, then practitioners need to move away from an Auschwitz-centric approach which is at the exclusion of other key elements of the Holocaust and which fails to place Auschwitz and the extermination camps in the context of a decision-making process and the evolution of Nazi policy towards the Jews. This research on preconceptions suggests that many pupils already have a relatively detailed knowledge and understanding of the camps although they seem unfamiliar with the different types of camps. This concurs with the research of Totten who remarked, 'some students confused 'concentration camps' with 'death camps' or 'at least didn't distinguish the two'.<sup>299</sup>

While undoubtedly, the camps and of course Auschwitz ought to be included in a Holocaust curriculum, there probably needs to be a greater balance and contextualisation than often currently exists. Perhaps less time should be spent on conditions within the camps and more focus being directed on the nature of the camp system and other aspects such as the shootings in the east. If pupils are

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<sup>299</sup> Totten, 'The Start is as Important', 72.

ignorant of the ghettos, the chronology of the Holocaust and the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* then these areas need to be covered. According to the findings of the HEDP, many teachers do focus on Auschwitz, possibly at the expense of other key areas. When given a list of thirty five possible topics that could be covered in a study of the Holocaust, Auschwitz-Birkenau was ranked second highest, while the *Einsatzgruppen* and Operation Reinhard ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> respectively. Potentially problematic is that ‘Jewish social and cultural life before 1933’ and ‘the contribution of the Jews to European social and cultural life before 1933’ came 31<sup>st</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> when these are also areas of ignorance amongst most pupils, according to this research.<sup>300</sup>

An awareness of what pupils do and do not know is thus incredibly valuable when planning a Holocaust curriculum. According to the HEDP research, those who teach the Holocaust to pupils in years nine, spend on average 7.2 hours of lesson time on the subject.<sup>301</sup> The depth and breadth of this topic means that most teachers cannot cover every aspect of the Holocaust that they would wish and thus have to make decisions about what is included and what is omitted. An appreciation of pupils’ existing knowledge will enable teachers to allocate the amount of time that they spend on each part of the Holocaust with more precision, confidence and effectiveness. Practitioners must be careful, however. The areas where pupils in this sample have meaningful and accurate knowledge are unlikely to be identical to the pupils that they are teaching. It is thus important that they take the time to explore their own pupils’ preconceptions, perhaps some weeks before they even start teaching the Holocaust, in order to allow them time to adjust their curriculum,

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<sup>300</sup> Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust*, 124-5.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 40.

planning and preparation accordingly. This research will not mirror the areas of knowledge and ignorance found in every year nine classroom across England but it may help teachers acquire an awareness of some of the trends which seem to exist in pupils' thinking.

### *Teaching in the Classroom*

The implications of this research do not simply apply at a macro-level in terms of designing and planning curricula and syllabi. Many of the findings appear to have specific implication on how practitioners teach about the Holocaust in the classroom, ranging from the content they include to the resources that they use. Upon seeing the number of misconceptions which seem to stem from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, teachers may wish to refrain from using this particular representation. By opting to read the book or show the film there is certainly a danger that the teacher, who is perceived to be the source of knowledge, is seen to be validating the story's accuracy. This may help to explain why so many pupils appear to accept the fictional story as a trustworthy source.

Care must also be taken when using *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Johnson is correct in saying:

No one will deny that Anne Frank's story impresses on the mind of the reader the tragedy of a Jewish child during Nazi oppression; however, it is misleading to teach the Holocaust from the framework of Anne Frank's diary alone.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Johnson, 'Teaching the Holocaust', 69.

Teachers also need to realise that according to the data, many pupils had the notion that lots of Jews were in hiding and respondents lacked understanding of the evolutionary process of the Holocaust. Only when these misconceptions are tackled will pupils be able to grasp the way that Nazi policy sought to put the majority of Europe's Jews in ghettos before deporting them to the gas chambers. It will also help pupils to understand why Jews seldom hid, as they had no conception of what their fate was going to be. This is perhaps especially, but certainly not exclusively, important when teaching girls, who seem to be more likely to have come across the book or dramatisation of Anne Frank's diary.

In the light of how influential certain sources appear to be, it seems that practitioners who are wholly committed to discovering pupils' prior knowledge and understanding ought to know something about the sources of their thinking. Consequently, they should read the book and watch the film of representations such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Only then will they be able to appreciate some of the major influences on their pupils' thinking and deconstruct erroneous ideas.

One of the most important findings of this study was regarding the thinking of many pupils' regarding the reasons as to why the Nazis specifically targeted the Jews. In the research it became apparent that a number of answers exposed the belief that the Nazis targeted the Jews because of their religion, rather than because they were considered to be an inferior and threatening race. This supports the comment of Short, Supple and Klinger, who remarked:

It would be quite wrong to leave children with the impression that every Jew who perished at the hands of the Nazis was committed to Judaism. On the

contrary, they need to know that in Nazi ideology “Jewishness” was an inherited racial trait. One could not escape from it by renouncing the faith of one’s ancestors, embracing the faith of one’s Christian contemporaries or marrying out of the faith.

Pupils who perceive that the Nazis simply persecuted the Jews on religious grounds have an erroneous understanding which teachers need to tackle. It is necessary that they address this issue and highlight that the Nazis wanted the Jews’ extermination and not their conversion.

Pupils who believe Nazi persecution of the Jews was due to their religion may conclude that all Jews who suffered at the hands of the Nazis must have been religiously devout and perhaps acted differently or did not assimilate into European life. While there was certainly a lack of assimilation among some Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, this was not the case for the Jewish communities of Western Europe, many of whom were less religiously committed and more integrated into European society. Pupils who hold this prior conception may struggle to grasp Gilbert’s comments that:

The Jews of Germany had been among Europe’s most assimilated, most cultured, most active contributors to the national life of the state in which they lived. Hundreds of thousands of them had become an integral part of German society.<sup>303</sup>

Teachers need to recognise that pupils have very little knowledge of the way that Jews lived and that taking the time to deal with the complexities of their past will enable a better understanding of the Holocaust.

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<sup>303</sup> Gilbert, *The Holocaust*, 35.

If having an understanding of the Jews and Jewish identity is necessary for an accurate understanding of the Holocaust, then teachers will need to tackle many of the existing misconceptions that exist. Some of the existing errors in pupils' conceptions have direct implications for the way in which they perceive many other aspects of the Holocaust, including the reasons for why it happened. This concurs with Short, Supple and Klinger, when they noted:

It is... essential that teachers spend some time, prior to starting work on the Holocaust, exploring and challenging any misconceptions their pupils may have either about Jews or about Judaism.

Irrespective of whether the aims of the practitioner are to combat racism and antisemitism or to provide the pupils with a historically accurate knowledge and understanding of the past, neither of these aims will be achieved if pupils do not understand the fundamental reasons behind why the Nazis persecuted and murdered the Jews. The Holocaust was not implemented by religious zealots or mere nationalistic opportunists; instead it was carried out by an extreme, racially-motivated group of ideologues who were implementing biological antisemitism. If pupils do not understand this, then they cannot really understand the Holocaust. Teachers must therefore address this issue and challenge misconceptions in this specific area.

There are many other aspects of the Holocaust on which teachers need to focus if they are to dismantle and challenge existing misconceptions. Teachers need to take time to explain the nature and motives of collaborators and ensure that pupils do not leave with the idea that there must have been something wrong with the Jews if people were so keen to help the Nazis murder them.

Moreover, practitioners must recognise that their pupils' existing knowledge of the Holocaust will influence their understanding and ideas about resistance. By developing a sense of the chronology and evolution of the Holocaust, pupils will be in a better position to see the difficulties attached to resistance. They will also be able to understand why many Jews remained optimistic (perhaps in some cases, delusional) about their fate, still believing in the impossibility of Nazi mass murder. Too often, pupils simply see the Jews as passive and helpless victims. It is important that teachers emphasise the significant efforts of the resistance movement, such as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Auschwitz Protocols, even though by and large they were often limited in their success.

In addition, the misconception that the Allies invaded Europe and defeated Nazism for the sake of the Jews, highlights the importance of pupils understanding the Holocaust in the context of the Second World War. In the same way that the Holocaust ought not to simply be bolted onto World War Two syllabi, so the Second World War ought not to be bolted onto the study of the Holocaust. Pupils must understand the Holocaust in the context of the War. The invasion of Poland, the invasion of the Soviet Union and the Allied advance on Germany are integral parts of the chronology and events of the Holocaust. It is also important that teachers highlight the fact that some Jews did survive and the circumstances in which this happened.

Other individual misconceptions which need addressing include the Hitler-centric approach of many pupils. A European-wide programme of mass murder involved countless individuals, from desk-bound killers to those who actually carried out the dastardly initiatives. As a result of their Hitler-centric approach, pupils may have a tendency to ignore the popular antisemitism that existed within Germany and

certainly in much of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at this time. Edwards and O'Dowd also found evidence to suggest that some students 'attributed the personality of Hitler as a prime cause' of the Holocaust.<sup>304</sup> It is therefore very important that the role of Hitler is fully explained and the relationship between Hitler and the bureaucratic machinery of state is described. Pupils need to have their Hitler-centric ideas challenged so that they realise and recognise that Hitler did not or could not have murdered six million Jews without a vast number of people and organisations that were incredibly willing to obey orders and develop their own initiatives at local level. Only by appreciating the mammoth quantities of manpower and planning that needed to go into the Holocaust will pupils begin to see that while Hitler may have been driving policy, his role at local level was certainly limited.

By focusing solely on Hitler, pupils may perhaps fail to appreciate the extent and magnitude of the Holocaust, something which is supported by the large number of pupils who believed that the Jewish death toll was considerably fewer than six million. It is also important that teachers deal with the misconceptions that exist regarding the ending of the Holocaust and focus pupils' thinking on the harsh reality of survivors' post-War life. The wealth of reasons as to why the killing of the Jews ended means that a careful consideration of the Holocaust in the context of the Second World War would be very valuable for pupils.

Although this research principally looked at pupils' substantive preconceptions of the Holocaust, it was evident that further consideration of pupils' attitudes, experiences and outlooks would be a valuable study. Some of the comments that certain pupils made during the research highlighted the need to tackle prejudicial

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<sup>304</sup> Edwards and O'Dowd, 'The Edge of Knowing', 23.

beliefs or religious, racial and ethnic ignorance. This was seen by comments such as: ‘the Jews were very different’, ‘the Jews earned more money than Germans’ or ‘the Jews were all rich’. The answers that a few pupils provided demonstrated that ignorance and prejudice existed in the minds of a minority of pupils and unless these are dealt with then pupils will not fully understand the horrors of the Holocaust. The research of Short<sup>305</sup> and Short and Carrington<sup>306</sup> during the early 1990s highlighted the ignorance and prejudice which often existed in pupils’ thinking. These findings suggest that there continues to be a lack of understanding about Jewish identity and even antisemitism in the classroom.

It is thus important for teachers to explore the cultural and social values that pupils bring with them into the classroom. A failure to tackle these misconceptions may lead to adolescents integrating their Holocaust education into their existing prejudices and re-enforcing, rather than challenging the problems. If a practitioner has made efforts to familiarise themselves with the pupils’ prejudices or ignorance then they can help to ensure that these problems are tackled and challenged effectively, addressing specific issues and enlightening pupils about say, the size of the Jewish population in Germany or the extent to which Jews were integrated into much of European society.

Teachers need to understand that many of the preconceptions which were found amongst the sample of 298 pupils, may not be found in their classes. Although the research highlighted some common trends in thinking, each pupil has had a unique

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<sup>305</sup> Short, ‘Teaching the Holocaust’.

<sup>306</sup> Short and Carrington, ‘Antisemitism and the Primary School’.

set of experiences which has shaped and moulded their preconceptions accordingly.

Conway stated that:

It remains crucial to recognise that each student is an individual with personally constructed schemata which may overlap with, but which will be unique from those of their peers.<sup>307</sup>

In the light of this comment, teachers need to see scholarship and research as a guide rather than as a set of hard and fast rules about the way that pupils think. Undoubtedly, in each class teachers will find preconceptions which have not previously been written about and will similarly find that some of the trends found in this research may not be present in many or perhaps even any of their pupils. Moreover, pupil preconceptions are likely to stay the same. With new books, films and other sources of Holocaust representation emerging, it seems likely that the trends in pupils' preconceptions will evolve and adapt accordingly. For example, the popularity of *Schindler's List* appears to have now been replaced by *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Yet it is possible that another, equally, if not more popular book or film will emerge and replace this story as one of the key sources of pupils' initial ideas about the Holocaust. This means that research on pupils' preconceptions cannot stand still but must continue to explore and track pupils' thinking as society changes. Teachers need to recognise this and thus the process of exploring pupil preconceptions must be something that takes place every time the Holocaust is taught about as a topic in schools.

This does not mean that preconceptions are simply explored in the first lesson on the Holocaust and then teachers get down to the business of teaching. Exploring

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<sup>307</sup> Conway, 'What they think they know', 10.

preconceptions and teaching the Holocaust ought not to be detached concepts; rather doing the latter effectively involves doing the former consistently. As pupils ask questions, make comments and write about the subject, teachers must continue to understand the ways that pupils think; what preconceptions they hold and how they integrate any new knowledge into their existing ideas.<sup>308</sup>

Although it is very important to acknowledge that pupils bring a wide range of preconceptions into the classroom and that trends in pupils' thinking will not stand still, it is nevertheless the case that this research has highlighted in considerable detail many interesting patterns in pupils' thinking about the Holocaust which ought to have important implications on practice. It is also a logical and rational assumption that if large numbers of pupils in the sample have particular misconceptions, for example, on why the Jews were persecuted or why the Holocaust ended, then many of these same misconceptions are likely to exist in other classrooms and schools across the country. The pupils in the sample were largely representative and while one must be careful about the generalisability of the findings, the conclusions from this research ought to at least highlight to teachers the sorts of misconceptions that they may want to be looking out for amongst their own pupils.

### **Limitations of the Research**

While every effort has been made to create a methodologically robust research design, have a demographically representative sample and analyse the results with thoroughness and care, it is important to remember that this research – like almost

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<sup>308</sup> See Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) The Assessment for Learning Strategy.

any within the social sciences – possesses limitations which ought to be acknowledged.

Perhaps the most important of these is the appreciation that the results gathered and the implications drawn from them cannot be universalised. In other words, it would be wrong to assume that the knowledge and understandings of the sample in this study will mirror those held by a different sample of 298 pupils of the same age from schools in England. After all, when put within the context of 13 and 14-year-olds nationally, the sample size was very small indeed and thus great care must be made about the applicability of the conclusions that can be drawn. Moreover, the sample itself was not wholly representative. The schools used were all situated in the south of England for example and the results have been analysed generally rather than by particular demographics. Consequently, it is possible that pupils in a Muslim-majority school in the north of England or in an almost exclusively White-British school in Norfolk or the West Country may demonstrate quite different patterns in their knowledge and understandings from those held by the sample used in this study.

It is also important to recognise that this research did not primarily focus on the sources of pupils' preconceptions and that much more work is needed in this area if academics and practitioners are going to be able to really understand *why* pupils have acquired these ideas about the Holocaust. Knowing what they know and understand is therefore only part of the issue.

Another limitation on the research is the involvement of subjective human agency. When analysing and classifying the data, responses were categorised on the basis of how they were interpreted, which is a fallible process. In other words, I may have

misunderstood a respondent's answer to a particular question and drawn conclusions which were not an accurate representation of their ideas about the Holocaust. Interpreting the data could often be a difficult process, especially when attempting to assess whether or not the response appeared to be antisemitic. Although I sought to be transparent and explicit in highlighting how categorisations and classifications were constructed, this does not prevent error of judgement or ambiguity in respondents' comments.

### **Implications for Future Research**

It is undoubtedly the case that there continues to be a lack of empirically-grounded research in Holocaust education and significant scope exists for further studies. It is recognised that this research is based on a relatively small sample size and it is hoped that the forthcoming research, which is due to be carried out by the Centre for Holocaust Education at the University of London's Institute of Education, will go a long way in addressing the need for a large scale study of students' knowledge and understanding of the subject. It is very important that a major study, involving a much larger number and wider range of pupils from across the whole country takes place. It will be fascinating to explore their findings and to see whether it supports or challenges the conclusions of this thesis.

Yet there are other, more specific areas where follow up research is also needed. The findings have suggested that pupils' preconceptions may be coupled together in order to maintain coherence. This particular study has not sought to really explore this issue in any detail and a qualitative study of pupils' thinking and the relationship between preconceptions would be particularly interesting. If it were the case that pupils' thinking is connected in such a way, then further studies on how

erroneous and yet coherent ideas are best deconstructed in an effective fashion would be extremely valuable.

This research has demonstrated that pupils in this study arrive with a range of preconceptions. If this is the case more generally, then knowing what these are would be helpful. Awareness of the preconceptions is a step in the right direction, but it is equally important for practitioners to know from where these ideas have arrived. Future research can build on these findings. Only by knowing the sources of preconceptions can a teacher really begin to understand pupils' preconceptions as opposed to simply knowing them.

This research has found that within the sample, there are some significant misconceptions, including the reasons why the Nazis persecuted the Jews, the location of the Holocaust and why it ended. If these are common patterns of thinking then teachers would need to know about them and resources would need to be developed which specifically take them into account.

Overall, it seems evident that this research has a number of implications, both theoretical and practical, which have the potential to influence the way that curriculums and lessons are designed and which may shape the approach that practitioners have towards their pupils' thinking.

## **Conclusion**

When thinking about this research and the years that it has taken to complete, I am forced to consider the value and importance of this study. Thankfully I am confident that this research has contributed in a meaningful way to the field of Holocaust education. This has in no small part been due to its successful

dissemination. In 2011 my pilot study was published in *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, while “Exploring Children’s Ideas about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools” was published in *Educate*.<sup>309</sup> In 2013, the *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* published an empirically-grounded paper from this research project titled, ‘Exploring Pupil Perceptions of Jews, Jewish Identity and the Holocaust’.<sup>310</sup> A further paper summarising all my findings is currently due to be published in the next issue of the *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*.

I took part in the Institute of Education’s doctoral poster conference and presented a paper titled, “The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas: A Blessing or Curse for Holocaust Educators?” at *The Future of Holocaust Studies Conference* at the Universities of Southampton and Winchester in July 2013.<sup>311</sup> This is due to be published next year in *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*. I also shared my findings at a Holocaust educators training day organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust in London. All of these have been well received with educators at the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust writing to me to thank me for how my research has informed their teaching about the Holocaust. Leading scholars such as Saul Friedlander and Geoffrey Short have also emailed me to commend my contribution to the field. In January 2014, Palgrave Macmillan published my first book, *Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education*, which draws upon my literature review as well as a wealth

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<sup>309</sup> Gray, ‘Exploring Children’s ideas’.

<sup>310</sup> Gray, ‘Exploring Pupils’ Perceptions’.

<sup>311</sup> Gray, ‘The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas’.

of other material to offer a scholarly critique of the existing corpus of research in the field.<sup>312</sup>

This piece of doctoral research has practical implications for teachers and curriculum designers and if the findings are applied correctly, it ought to improve the quality of the teaching of this important subject. Although the preconceptions that pupils hold today are likely to shift and evolve in the years ahead, this study has hopefully shown how an exploration of pupils' preconceptions can take place, why it is important and what profitable results it can produce. Ultimately, it is hoped that this research will have a positive effect on practice and improve the teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

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<sup>312</sup> Gray, *Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education*.

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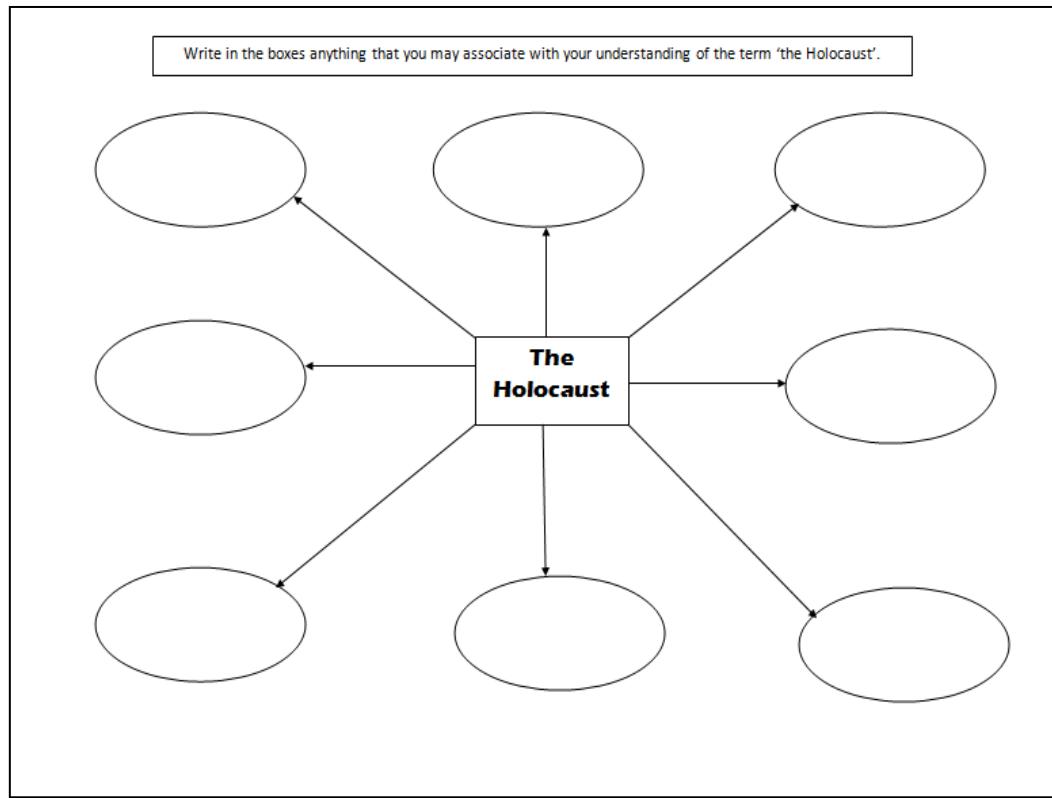
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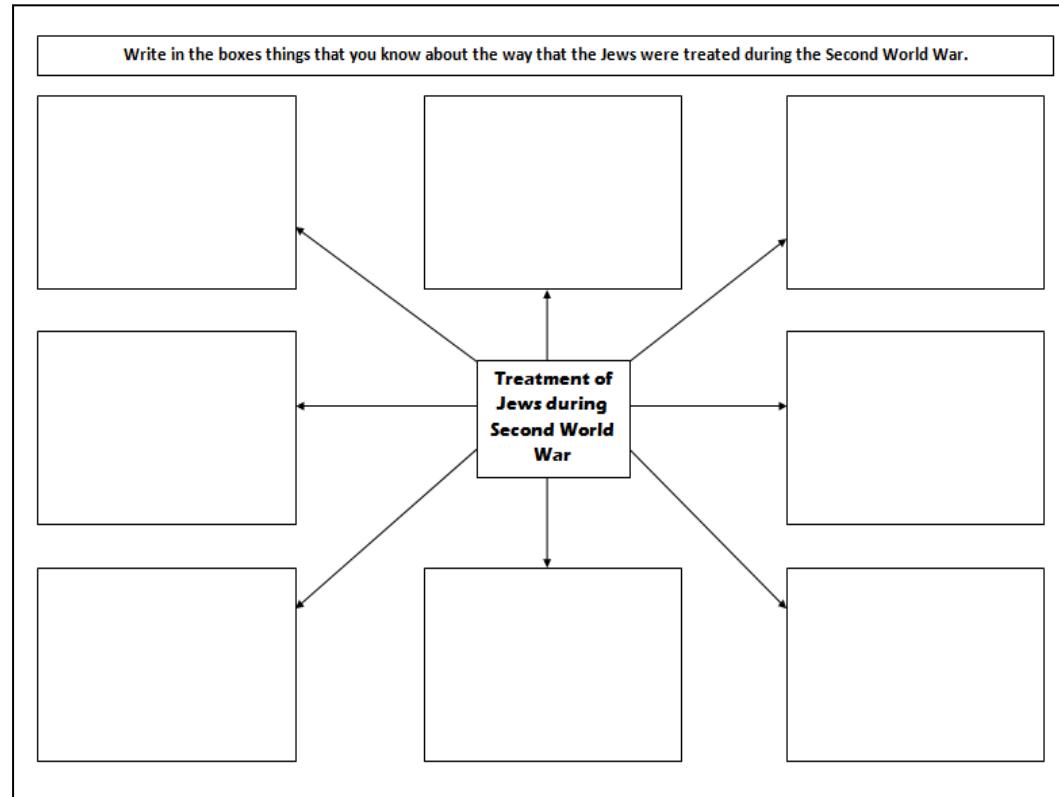
## **Appendices**

- 1.1 Pilot spider diagram instrument
- 1.2 Final spider diagram instrument
  
- 2.1 Draft questionnaire
- 2.2 Draft questionnaire
- 2.3 Final questionnaire
  
- 3.1 Interview programme
- 3.2 Photographs used in follow-up interviews
  
- 4.1 Information sheet for pupils
- 4.2 Consent form for pupils
- 4.3 Information sheet for parents and guardians
  
- 5.1 Spider diagram examples
- 5.2 Transcript Analysis

### 1.1 First spider diagram instrument (pilot)



### 1.2 Final spider diagram instrument



## 2.1 Draft questionnaire



**What was the Holocaust?**

The Holocaust was \_\_\_\_\_

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**Who carried out the Holocaust?**

The Holocaust was carried out by \_\_\_\_\_

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**Why did the Holocaust take place?**

The Holocaust took place because \_\_\_\_\_

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Approximately how many Jews were murdered during the Second World War?



Comment on the photograph



Comment on the photograph



Comment on the photograph



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**What percentage of the 67 million people living in Germany in 1933 were Jewish?**

(Tick one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 21-30%
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 1-10%	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 31-40%
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 11-20%	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 40%

**The Nazis built camps which were specifically for the killing of Jews. Where were these located?**

(Tick one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/> Germany	<input type="checkbox"/> Russia
<input type="checkbox"/> Austria	<input type="checkbox"/> Hungary
<input type="checkbox"/> Poland	<input type="checkbox"/> They were in lots of countries

**Which of the following camps were built for the specific purpose of killing Jews?**

(Tick all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Bergen-Belsen	<input type="checkbox"/> Chelmno
<input type="checkbox"/> Sobibor	<input type="checkbox"/> Treblinka
<input type="checkbox"/> Sachsenhausen	<input type="checkbox"/> Buchenwald
<input type="checkbox"/> Belzec	<input type="checkbox"/> Dachau

**Which of the following statements are true?**

(Tick all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Most Jews were tricked by the Nazis into thinking that they would be resettled or become workers
<input type="checkbox"/> The Jews did not resist the Holocaust
<input type="checkbox"/> There were uprisings and rebellions in a number of ghettos and camps
<input type="checkbox"/> There were Jewish resistance groups in Europe who worked against the Nazis

## 2.2 Draft questionnaire



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Name:

Age:

School:

Gender:  M  /  F

Have you ever studied the Holocaust before in History lessons, including primary school?

Yes / No

(Please circle one)

If yes, can you explain what you studied?

Have you ever studied the Holocaust before in subjects other than History such as RS or Citizenship?

Yes / No

(Please circle one)

If yes, can you explain what you studied?

Have you ever learnt about the Holocaust outside of school, for example, through reading a book, watching a film, visiting an exhibition, talking to friends or relatives etc.?

Yes / No

(Please circle one)

If yes, can you explain how and what you learnt about the Holocaust?

What name is given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during World War Two?

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What percentage of people living in Germany in 1933 do you think were Jewish?

(Tick one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 21-30%
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 1-10%	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 31-40%
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 11-20%	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 40%

How were the Jews treated during World War Two?

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Why were the Jews treated like this?

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Who carried out this treatment of the Jews during World War Two?

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What sorts of things happened to the Jews during World War Two and where did these things take place?

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Number the events in order of when they happened.

(Put a 1 next to the first event that happened and a 6 next to the last event)

	The Nazis first use gas to kill Jewish victims
	'The night of broken glass' – Jewish shops were smashed and synagogues destroyed
	Auschwitz concentration camp established
	Jews were removed from being citizens of Germany
	First ghetto established for the forced concentration of Jews
	Mobile killing squads first start their mass shooting of Jews

Approximately how many Jews were murdered during World War Two?

During the Second World War many Jews were sent to camps like Auschwitz and Dachau.

What do you know about any of these camps?

Describe what you think would happen to Jews upon arrival at a camp.

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### Why did the Nazi persecution of the Jews end?

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## What happened to Jews who survived the war?

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How did the Nazi persecution of the Jews end?

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What would happen to Jews who survived the Second World War? Where would they go?

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Look at the two photographs below. They were both taken after the Nazis had left the camps.



Photo credit: Central State Archive for Photos and Films, Kiev



Photo credit: Central State Archive for Photos and Films, Kiev

Why did the Nazis leave the camps?

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## 2.3 Final questionnaire

This research project is part funded by St. Edward's School Oxford and is in association with the Institute of Education, University of London.



Age:

Gender: M / F

What job does your father do?

What job does your mother do?

Have you ever studied in school the treatment of the Jews during World War Two, including primary or secondary school and subjects other than History?

Yes / No (Please circle one)

If yes, can you explain what you learnt?

Have you ever learnt about the treatment of Jews during World War Two in any of the following ways?

(Please circle)

Reading a book

Visiting a museum or exhibition

Watching a TV programme/documentary

Watching a movie

Talking with friends and family

Reading newspapers/magazines

What did you learn about the treatment of Jews during World War Two or about Jewish life from these things?

Have you ever watched any of the following films or read any of the following books:

(Please circle)

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

Defiance

Schindler's List

Night

The Pianist

If this is a Man

The Diary of Anne Frank

Life is Beautiful

What name is given to the treatment of the Jews in Europe during World War Two?

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How were the Jews treated during World War Two?

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What sorts of things happened to the Jews during World War Two?

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Why were the Jews treated like this?

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Who carried out this treatment of the Jews during World War Two?

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What percentage of people living in Germany in 1933 do you think were Jewish?

(Tick one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1%	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 21-30%
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 1-10%	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 31-40%
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 11-20%	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 40%

What methods did the Nazis use to kill the Jews of Europe?

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During World War Two, many Jews were sent into camps like Auschwitz and Dachau.

What do you know about any of these camps?

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Describe what you think would happen to Jews upon arrival at a camp.

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Why did the Nazi killing of the Jews end?

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Approximately how many Jews were murdered during World War Two?



Where in Europe did the killing of the Jews take place?

### 3.1 Interview programme

#### Semi-structured interview questions, probes and prompts

Show photographs of liberated inmates.



- Where will the Jews in the photograph go?
  - (Probe: In response to the answer 'home' ask: what if their home has been destroyed or taken by other people?)
- The Holocaust happened over 65 years ago. Do you think that it is still important today?
  - Why/why not?
  - Should the Holocaust be studied in school today?
- Who are the Jews? (Probe: are they a race, a religion, a culture?)
  - What makes someone Jewish?
- Where have the Jews come from and where have they lived throughout history?
  - (Prompt: have they always lived in Europe or in one particular country?)
- What was life like for Jews living in Europe before the Nazis came to power?
  - (Prompt: was life for the Jews any different from other people?)
- Was life always like this for the Jews of Europe, say 500 or 1000 years ago?
  - (Probe: Were they ever treated differently in any way? Why do you think this was?)
- Hitler came to power in 1933 but World war Two did not start until 1939. What was life like for Jews living in Germany during those years?
  - What laws did the Nazis introduce against Jews?

#### Activity

Pupils given 5 laminated cards and asked to put them in chronological order. They will try to justify their decisions to each other as they perform this group activity. I will ask them why they put the events in that particular order.

1. The Nazis first use gas to kill Jewish victims
2. 'The night of broken glass' – Jewish shops smashed and synagogues destroyed
3. Jews removed from being citizens of Germany
4. First ghetto established for the forced concentration of Jews
5. Mobile killing squads first start their mass shooting of Jews

#### **Scenario One**

Samuel had been taken to Auschwitz and was forced to work for the Nazis. He was made to work in the running of the gas chambers.

- Do you think that Samuel would simply obey orders or do you think that he might be willing to fight against the Nazis?
- Why? What are Samuel's aims? What are the risks of him obeying? What are the risks of him resisting?

#### **Scenario Two**

Joseph was a Polish farmer near one of the Nazis camps. Every day inmates from the camp would walk past his fields on the way to work.

- Do you think that Joseph is likely to help the inmates?
- How could he help them if he wished?
- What danger was involved in helping people?

#### **Scenario Number 3**

Sergey lived in a village in Ukraine. One day Nazis came to round up all of the Jews from his village and take them to the forest to be shot. The Nazis invited Sergey to help them carry this out.

- What do you think Sergey is most likely to do and why?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages for him in taking part in the killing?

### 3.2 Photographs used in follow-up interviews



Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-270-0298-14  
Foto: Anthon | Juni 1942

## 4.1 Information sheet for pupils



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London



Michael Gray BA, MA, AKC, PGCE  
Master of History and Politics  
Assistant Housemaster  
St Edward's School  
Woodstock Road  
Oxford  
Oxon  
OX2 7NN

Email: [REDACTED]

### Research into pupils' ideas about the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War

PhD Research, University of London

#### Why is this research being carried out?

This research is being carried out to try and discover what knowledge and understanding of the pupils have about the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War. If teachers know what preconceptions pupils bring with them, then it will enable them to improve the quality of their teaching.

#### Are there any positive or negative effects from participating in the research?

I hope that you will find taking part in the research interesting. It is possible that you may find talking about some of the treatment an upsetting experience. You will benefit from thinking about different questions linked to the research but the main benefits from the research will be for pupils in the future.

#### What sort of research will be carried out?

You will be asked to fill in a questionnaire. I am not looking for right or wrong answers but rather what ideas and understandings pupils have. Your teachers will not see anything that you have written.

#### Do pupils have to take part?

There is no obligation for you to take part. Even if you start participating in the research, you may stop at any time.

The research project conforms to the Ethical Guidelines of the British Education Research Association and has been approved by the Institute of Education, University of London's Ethics Review Committee. For further information or any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

## 4.2 Consent form for pupils



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London



Michael Gray BA, MA, AKC, PGCE  
Master of History and Politics  
Assistant Housemaster  
St Edward's School  
Woodstock Road  
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Oxon  
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Telephone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

### Research into pupils' ideas about the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War

PhD Research, University of London

#### Research on the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War

I am carrying out some research on pupils' understanding of the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War and would like to ask you to complete a few activities, including a questionnaire and interview. You do not have to participate in the research and you may stop participating at any time. The activities are not a test and you will not be given a score.

Some of your comments may be published but your names and schools will not be used in order to preserve your anonymity.

If you are happy to participate, then please sign the sheet below.

X

I hereby consent that I am happy to participate in the research and have read and understood the information sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

School

#### 4.3 Information sheet for parents and guardians



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London



### **Knowledge and understanding of the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War in 13 and 14 year old pupils in English secondary schools**

PhD Research, University of London

Michael Gray BA, MA, AKC, PGCE  
History and Politics  
Assistant Headmaster  
St Edward's School  
Woodstock Road  
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OX2 7NN

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am carrying out some research on pupil knowledge and understanding of the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War in English secondary schools during one or two History lessons next term. \_\_\_\_\_ School has agreed to participate in the research and below is a description of the project.

#### Why is this research being carried out?

This research is being carried out to try and discover what knowledge and understanding of the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War pupils bring with them to the classroom before they study it. If teachers know what preconceptions pupils bring with them, then it will enable them to improve the quality of their teaching.

#### Are there any positive or negative effects from participating in the research?

I hope that the pupils will find taking part in the research an interesting experience. It is possible that some pupils may find talking about this subject an upsetting experience. The pupils will benefit from thinking about different questions linked to the topics but the main benefits from the research will be for students in the future.

#### What sort of research will be carried out?

Pupils will be asked to produce a spider diagram about the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War, answer some open-ended questions about it and respond to some specific factual questions. Some students will also take part in a 15-20 minute interview. This will be done in groups of three. The research is not a test and pupils will not be given a score. I am not looking for right or wrong answers but rather to try and gain a broad picture of what sorts of knowledge and understanding pupils of this age have about this topic.

Do pupils have to take part?

There is no obligation for pupils to take part and pupils who participate will have had the research explained to them in detail and chosen to opt in. Even if a pupil has started participating in the research, they may stop at any time.

What will happen to the data and how will it be used?

The data that I collect will be written up and used to form a part of my doctoral thesis for the Institute of Education. The research may also be published in other forms such as journal articles. It is possible that some participant's answers will be quoted, although the name of the school and the name of the pupil will be ~~anonymised~~ and alias names given for publication.

All data will be securely stored and once the data is no longer required it will be destroyed.

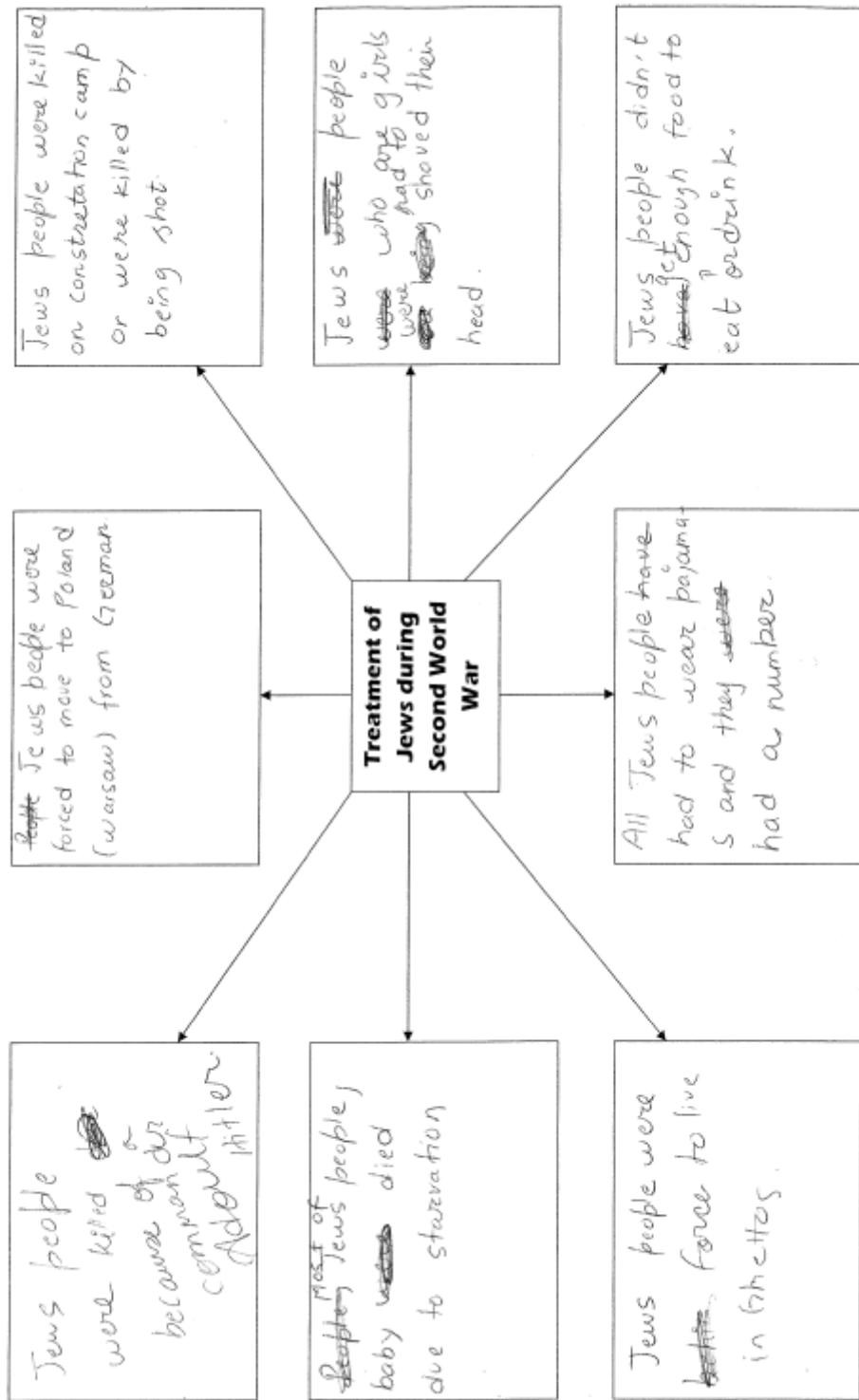
The research project conforms to the Ethical Guidelines of the British Education Research Association and has been approved by the Institute of Education, University of London's Ethics Review Committee. For further information or any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks.

Michael Gray BA, MA, AKC, PGCE

## 5.1 Spider diagram examples

Write in the boxes things that you know about the way that the Jews were treated during the Second World War.



**Write in the boxes things that you know about the way that the Jews were treated during the Second World War.**

Adolf Hitler hated the Jews, I don't think anyone knows & specifically why he hated them. Some people said that he hated them because they had more wealth and more power than others.

Jews were treated differently from the others, they were treated harshly and sometimes violently.

I don't know if I'm right but, I have read in a book once that people thought they were alien like looking, that they looked different from humans.

Some say Hitler's doctor was a Jew and therefore he blamed her death on him.

They would always wear the star of David, this would make it easier to show who was Jewish or not.

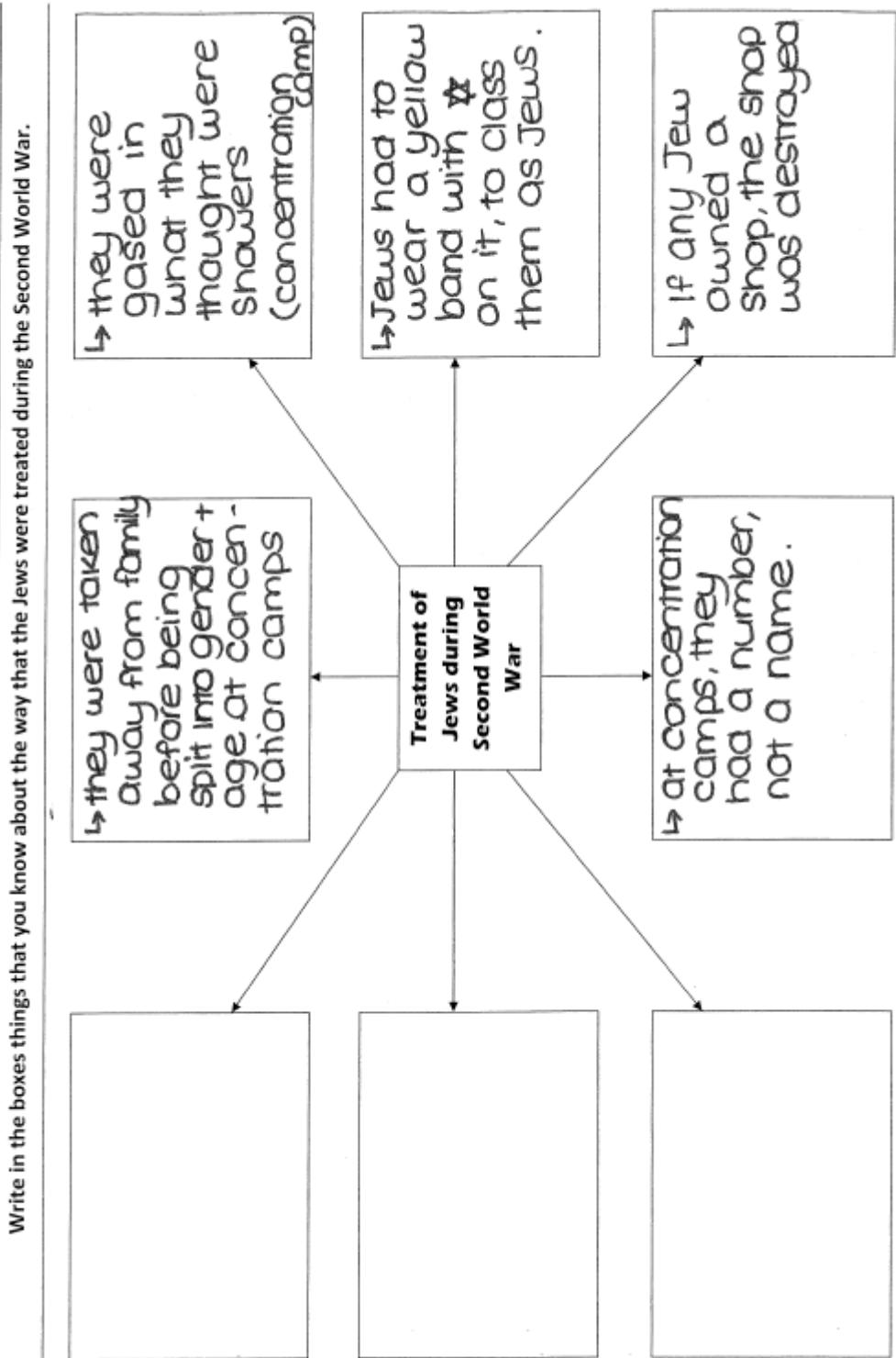
**Treatment of Jews during Second World War**

Anyone who helped a Jew would be killed.  
Many Jews lived in Europe until the war.

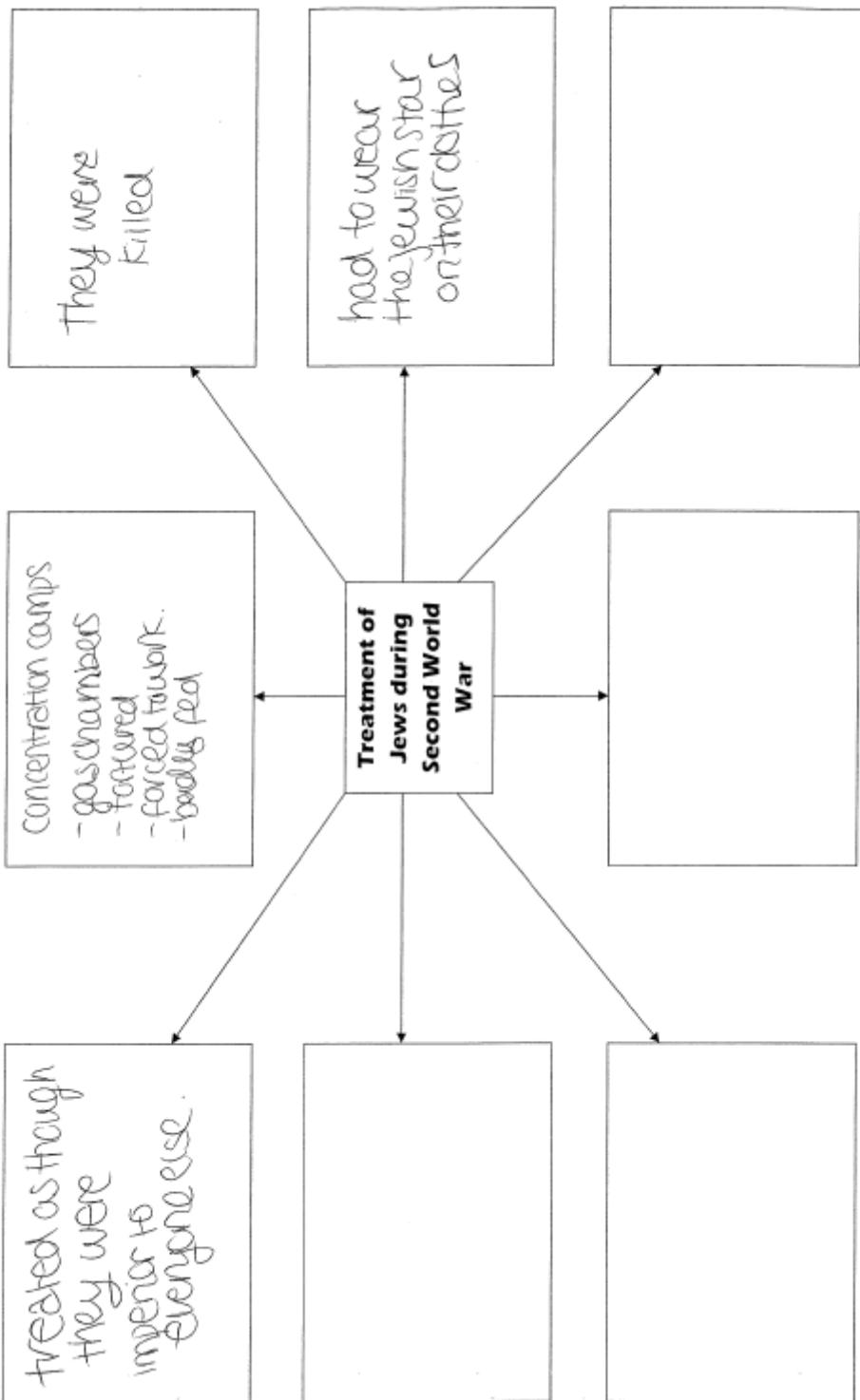
They were sent to concentration camps. They would often be treated badly and killed. Children, men and women.

One of the famous Jews everyone knew was Anne Frank. She lived in Amsterdam and in the war she hid in an attic, a room above her apartment.

Write in the boxes things that you know about the way that the Jews were treated during the Second World War.



Write in the boxes things that you know about the way that the Jews were treated during the Second World War.



## 5.2 Transcript Analysis

### Interview 1

**Interviewer:** So what's going in these photographs?

**Pupil 1:** Well, they've been sent to a concentration camp and they've split up into children.

**Pupil 2:** Yeah, and they have those pyjamas, like, when I watched 'Boy in the Striped Pyjamas'.

**Comment [GM(1): Influence of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas.]**

**Pupil 1:** Yeah, and they look quite happy .

**Interviewer:** Why do you think they look so happy?

**Pupil 1:** Because they've been liberated, by like the Russians.

**Pupil 3:** Maybe like at the end, they've been set free or something.

**Interviewer:** So who are these people then?

**All pupils:** The Jews

**Interviewer:** So they're Jews who've been in a concentration camp?

**All Pupils:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** So what do you think is going to happen to the Jews in that photograph?

They've been liberated and where are they going to go now?

**Pupil 1:** Well in real life they're go to, they're sent to...er...is it Israel when there's a war?

**Comment [GM(2): Initial code: Survivors go to Israel]**

**Pupil 2:** What at the end?

**Pupil 1:** Yeah

**Pupil 3:** If they've any family left then they'll go back to them

**Comment [GM(3): Another initial code; survivors go back to look for family. They "go home".]**

**Pupil 1:** If you lived in Germany and then you were sent away and obviously the Nazis were there I don't think you'd actually want to go back to Germany in the end because that's where all the horrible stuff has been going on, did they go to, I'm not sure, was it Israel and then there was that thing between them and the Palestinians and I think the Americans, because the Jews had never actually had like a homeland and I think that there's been like a war between the Palestinians and the Israelis so...

**Comment [GM(4): Survivors go to Israel]**

**Interviewer:** The Holocaust happened over 65 years ago. Do you think it's still important today?

**All pupils:** Yeah

**Pupil 2:** Because we can think about what happened and we can learn not to do anything like that again.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the Holocaust should be studied in schools?

**All pupils:** Yeah

**Pupil 2:** Because we can think about what happened and we can learn not to do anything like that again.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the Holocaust should be studied in schools?

**All pupils:** Yeah

**Pupil 2:** Yeah I think it should, I think it should be studied at like an earlier age.

**Pupil 1:** Yeah like little children...

**Pupil 2:** No I'm not saying like primary school but maybe...because we only did a bit in year 8. but...we don't know much

**Pupil 1:** I did it in year 5...

**Pupil 2:** But I think, so we can understand a bit more about it when we're younger.

**Pupil 3:** Yeah, because they do say, like you learn, you learn easier and things when you're younger and I think that if you get to grips with the Holocaust then you may find it easier to handle when you're older, when you're like work about it in your GCSEs.

**Interviewer:** We've talked about the Jews in the photograph. Who are the Jews?

**Pupil 1:** They like some religion.

**Comment [GM(5):** Initial code: Religion or race?

**Pupil 3:** Yeah religion.

**Interviewer:** So they're a religious group of people?

**All pupils:** Yeah.

**Pupil 2:** Well, I suppose they were sort of treated like a race at that point, so they were, so obviously the same sort of thing happened with racism with black people but I think they were treated like a race whereas a religion, saying 'all Jews are horrible' not just really looking at their religion but because they had done so well in the point of, in Germany at the time, yeah so they were treated like a race rather than a religion.

**Comment [GM(6):** More sophisticated understanding – treated like a race, irrespective of whether or not they are a religion.

**Interviewer:** Ok, where have Jews come from and where have they lived throughout recent history?

[Pause]

**Pupil 2:** They've never really had a...

**Pupil 3:** They haven't really lived anywhere... They're a religion.

**Pupil 2:** I think they've never actually had a homeland. I mean, I think someone said,

Jews will always walk the land'. But I don't think they've ever had a proper...

**Pupil 3:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** What do you think life was like for the Jews living in Europe before the Nazis came to power?

**Pupil 1:** Didn't they have to wear the Star of... was that after the Nazis?

**Comment [GM(7):** Tentative knowledge of Nazi policies.

**Pupil 2:** After, there's probably, because, I mean, I think the main reason they were picked, was because they were doing quite well in shops and businesses. I think they were doing quite well, like in profitably and I think that's one of the main reasons why Hitler and the Nazis chose the Jews and said...

**Comment [GM(8):** Victims centred-economic "differentness" of Jews expressed. The Nazis were jealous of the Jews.

**Pupil 1:** No but in the Holocaust wasn't just Jews

**Pupil 2:** Yeah, I know

**Pupil 1:** It was gays and...

**Pupil 2:** But it was mainly Jews.

**Interviewer:** Hitler came to power in 1933 but World War II didn't start until 1939.

Between those years, 1933-39, how do you think the Jews were treated when the Nazis were in power?

**Pupil 2:** They were probably treated like dirt. I mean, he, they were quite happy before then, obviously there would have been some people who were against them, and then after he came in, maybe there were more people who were against them, because he introduced his views and stuff.

**Comment [GM(9):** Appreciation of some long-term antisemitism?

**Pupil 3:** Yeah, because I think at the beginning he was really nice to everyone, even the Jews, and saying that like, there were special, giving like free holidays and things like that and then because people started to really like him and agree with him that's when he started saying things about the Jews and about how they were stealing Germany's jobs and stuff like that

**Comment [GM(10):** Some confusion over Hitler's long-term antisemitism.