

“Looking back – Looking forward Genocide Education in a Danish Context”

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Introduction

In Denmark, as in other countries throughout Europe and the world, genocide education has received increasing attention and higher prioritization in the new millennium. Genocide education in Denmark is part of a political strategy aiming to prevent genocide.² The approach is simple: in order to learn from history, and to prevent the recurrence of historical events such as genocide, it is necessary to learn about history.

In this paper I will discuss the approach to the field of genocide education in the Danish context. This will include a discussion of both how the legacy of the Holocaust is reflected educational-wise and the extent to which other genocides are covered in education. This paper furthermore introduces a number of Danish educational initiatives in the field of genocide education and reflects on a number of challenges and dilemmas facing genocide educators in Denmark today.³

The educational effort – the Holocaust and other genocides

Regardless of the national context, genocide is a sensitive topic involving political and ethical questions that require careful consideration when applied in an educational context. What is required of teaching when aiming to use genocide education as a means of genocide prevention? What do we want students to learn, and how do we engage them?

In order to get an overview of the field of genocide education, it is helpful to start by looking at the common post-war memory culture in Denmark and to consider how the history of the Holocaust is applied within the educational context. An interesting point to explore next will be the relationship between the Holocaust and other genocides within the educational context and to what extent other genocides are included in the general educational effort.

A precondition for understanding the field of genocide education in the Danish context is that this topic is not mandatory in any part of the educational system. Neither the Holocaust nor the crime of genocide has to be taught according to any educational act. This raises some questions and consideration as this to a certain extent limits consistency in the educational effort.

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² Brudholm, Thomas og Mennecke Martin (ed.): “Erindringens Fremtid – Auschwitz-dag i Danmark, p. 70. Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2004

³ This paper is mainly concerned with genocide education at the secondary and high school level.

Teaching about Denmark and the Holocaust

When revising how and to what extent the field of genocide is taught in a given national context, it is helpful to start by exploring a nation's history in relation to genocide. In Denmark, as in many other European countries, the point of departure for genocide education is the Holocaust.⁴ This is due to the direct impact the Holocaust has had on Danish society, history, and national identity. As the Holocaust is the only genocide experienced in the national history, it is consequently more present in the common Danish post-war memory culture than other genocides. Upon reviewing this aspect of the national memory culture with respect to the Holocaust, one observes that this fact affects teaching in different ways. However, the main effect is that the Holocaust as a topic in school is addressed more frequently than other genocides.

The educational prioritization is also explained by the Holocaust being a vital part of teaching on World War II, taught in both primary, secondary and high school. In addition, there is also the fact that Danish teachers are more knowledgeable about the Holocaust, than about other, and for the most part, more recent genocides. This is in part due to the training the educators themselves received in school. A third aspect, which sheds light on the educational priority of the Holocaust, is a simple one: there is more Danish material available on the topic of the Holocaust than on other genocides.⁵

The Holocaust is usually first taught in the subject History from the sixth to the ninth grade (age 12 to 15 years) and in Civics class, from the eighth to ninth grade (age 14 to 15 years).⁶ Both primary and secondary school teachings on the Holocaust usually (but not exclusively) take place in these classes in connection with teachings on World War II, with a focus on the overall fate of the European Jewish population. However, in high school the topic also arises in connection with other subjects: In German class (fiction/non-fiction text), French (the fate of the French Jews), Theology (together with Judaism, anti-Semitism etc.) and Psychology or Philosophy (the discussion of guilt, responsibility and 'evil').⁷

Decisions of which topics to teach in Danish schools are usually made by the individual school and/or teachers. As a consequence, schools and teachers need to

⁴ This is based on surveys conducted on a yearly basis between 2004 and 2007 among high school teachers and students participating in Auschwitz Day seminars (more on these seminars later in this paper). High School students and their teachers were asked to state which genocides they had been taught about or given lessons on, respectively. Source: Department for Holocaust and Genocide studies at the Danish Institute for International Studies.

⁵ If more educational material on other genocides became available in the future, this would only perhaps serve to change the general priority, due to the issue of the common memory culture.

⁶ Hermansen, Asger "Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries. Denmark", October 2005 (Question no. 5) Ministry of Education, Department of Primary, Lower Secondary, and General Adult Education.

http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/teachers/educational_reports/country/denmark.pdf

⁷ Ibid. (Question no. 7)

choose to teach their students about the Holocaust. That this liberal way of allowing schools to choose their own curriculum can be problematic is illustrated by the fact that a few schools choose not to teach their students about World War II - or the Holocaust - at all.⁸ This does not seem to be a general problem though. All teachers are required to produce reports on the topics addressed and the texts read in their classes, and past reports indicate that the Holocaust is being "(...) covered extensively".⁹

The Fate of the Danish Jews and the Collective Memory Culture

When exploring the teaching of the Holocaust within a Danish context, it is interesting not only to explore the traditional teaching on the genocide of the European Jewish population, but also to explore how the particular Danish history with regards to the Holocaust is taught.

The fate of the Danish Jews is extraordinary. When the Germans initiated the deportation of the Danish Jewish population in October 1943, 6,500 out of approximately 7,000 Danish Jews managed to flee to safety in Sweden. They were sailed to Sweden with the help of both the resistance movement and ordinary Danish citizens. However, not everyone managed to escape, and close to 500 Danish Jews were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto outside of Prague.

Theresienstadt was the destination for Jews not intended for immediate 'final solution'. However, there were frequent transfers from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz and other death camps. Due to a promise by the Germans to the Danish authorities, the Danish Jews in Theresienstadt were exempted from such transports.¹⁰ An important point however, is that the imprisoned Danes were unaware of this agreement.¹¹ Conditions in the camp were difficult and among the Danish group more than 50 persons died from disease, starvation, malnutrition, and deprivation during their imprisonment.¹²

In 1944 the International Committee of the Red Cross visited the camp. Leading up to this occasion, deportations from Theresienstadt had been intensified and the camp itself had undergone renovations.¹³ The remodelling served as a part of a successful

⁸ This is the case with a few of the so-called 'Arabic Free Schools'. See Banke, Cecilie Felicia Stokholm: "Eleverne skal lære at skelne", p. 26, DIIS Report 2006:4, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006.

⁹ Hermansen, Asger "Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries. Denmark", October 2005 (Question no. 5) Ministry of Education, Department of Primary, Lower Secondary, and General Adult Education.

http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/teachers/educational_reports/country/denmark.pdf

¹⁰ Stræde, Therkel, "October 1943- The Rescue of the Danish Jews from Annihilation". Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Museum of Danish Resistance 1940 – 1945. Denmark 1993.

¹¹ Of the approximately 140,000 Jews transferred to Theresienstadt, nearly 90,000 were deported further east and to almost certain death. Roughly 33,000 died in Theresienstadt itself. This is bound to have created a feeling of dread among the Danish Jewish group.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005424>

¹² <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005424>

¹³ Gardens had been planted, houses painted, barracks renovated and around 17,000 prisoners had been sent off to Auschwitz so that the camp would not seem over-crowded.

propaganda stunt, as the committee drew a relatively favourable picture in its report of conditions in the camp. Members of the commission have later stated that they knew they were part of a 'Nazi charade' But by playing along they hoped to improve, or at least secure conditions for the Danish Jews.¹⁴

Somehow this positive impression of conditions in Theresienstadt has been reflected in the majority of the writings on the Theresienstadt ghetto and consequently also in Danish collective memory. In general the shaping of a common post-war memory and national identity in relation to the Holocaust has been heavily influenced by this general perception, that the history of the Danish Jews – including the Jews in Theresienstadt - is a positive one. To a certain extent Theresienstadt is not perceived as a "(...) real concentration camp".¹⁵ The fact that the rescue of October 1943 has been given a more prominent place in the post-war culture than the deported Jews is also reflected educationally as the rescue is a dominating factor educational-wise.¹⁶

In order to disseminate a more accurate picture of Denmark and the Holocaust, one of the challenges for tomorrow's teachers will be to include these darker sides of Danish history. Research on the fate of the Danish Jews in Theresienstadt is currently being undertaken, and as new generations of scholars, historians and journalists revisit this topic, their findings may spark debate and influence public perception which eventually may also affect the educational context.

In the past years this has been the case with research and debates on other parts of Danish history during World War II. The focus of this newer research has, among others, been on the restrictive Danish Refugee policy towards non-Danish Jews during the Nazi period. This was shown recently in a vast investigation on how the Danish state responded to the refugee problem created by the anti-Jewish policy of Nazi Germany. The reactions of the Danish politicians were extremely restrictive and part of the general appeasement policy towards the German neighbour.¹⁷

More recent research has furthermore been undertaken on topics such as the thousands of Danish volunteers at the Eastern front during the war, the business relations between Danish industries and Nazi companies, as well as of the use of slave labour and the role of the agrarian sector during the World War II.

Genocide Education – a Broader Scope

As outlined in the beginning the aim of this paper is to review the general efforts within the field of genocide education. Having outlined how the Holocaust is the

¹⁴ See Stræde, Therkel, "October 1943- The Rescue of the Danish Jews from Annihilation". Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Museum of Danish Resistance 1940 – 1945. Denmark 1993 and Vilhjálmsón, Vilhjálmur Örn and Blüdnikow, Bent: "Rescue, Expulsion, and Collaboration: Denmark's Difficulties with its World War II Past", *Jewish Political Studies Review* 18:3-4, 2006. See also: Danish State Archive, Copenhagen: Eigil Juel Henningsen's private archive (No. 6880): Frants Hvass's report of 11 July 1944, 5.

¹⁵ Stræde, Therkel, "October 1943- The Rescue of the Danish Jews from Annihilation". Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Museum of Danish Resistance 1940 – 1945. Denmark 1993.

¹⁶ Interestingly, the tendency to focus on the positive story of the Danish Jews, is prevalent not only in Denmark but also abroad.

¹⁷ See Kirchhoff, Hans & Lone Rünitz, "Udsendt til Tyskland", 2007 (forthcoming); Banke, Cecilie Felicia Stokholm, "Demokratiets skyggeside", 2005; Kirchhoff, Hans, "Et menneske uden pas er ikke noget menneske...", 2005 and Rünitz, Lone, "Af hensyn til konsekvenserne", 2004, Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag

point of departure in the Danish context, the remainder of this paper will explore how the scope of this field has broadened in recent years. This will include a closer look at a variety of educational initiatives and a discussion of a number of challenges and dilemmas facing genocide educators today.

For various reasons genocide education – in the broader sense - has been given increased attention in the new millennium. One reason for this new educational priority is that genocide is no longer a crime taking place far away from the daily lives of Danes and Danish society. Pictures from recent years' genocides in Darfur, Bosnia and Rwanda have been brought into people's living rooms by the media. During the war in Bosnia, Danes along with the rest of the world were witnesses to the Srebrenica massacre taking place only a few hours flight from Copenhagen. When the victims of Bosnia sought refuge in Denmark, Danes also came face to face with the suffering associated with genocide.

Furthermore, Denmark is actively involved in the international community thereby playing a part whether one is concerned with Srebrenica, Rwanda or Darfur. Also of interest, is the issue of rebuilding countries and prosecuting war criminals. Danish psychiatrists, aid workers, UN soldiers and nurses are involved in the rebuilding process during conflicts, and Danish politicians and functionaries deal with war crimes tribunals, both abroad and in Denmark.

In this way the problem of genocide has become more visible and increasingly relevant to Danish society. This relevance is reflected in both different educational initiatives as well as in the general educational effort.

The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust and the Danish Auschwitz Day

In January 2000 Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson invited government representatives, experts, researchers and survivors to take part in an intergovernmental conference in Stockholm. The conference was intended as a contribution to international cooperation on Holocaust education, remembrance and research. It was the first time that heads of state, government, and foreign government representatives had gathered to discuss the lessons to be learned from the history of the Holocaust.

The aim of the Stockholm Forum was stated in a declaration that participating country leaders committed themselves and their countries to. In the declaration, high representatives of various governments committed themselves to, among others: "(...) strengthen our efforts to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust".¹⁸ And furthermore the declaration obliged signatories to: "(...) encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance..."¹⁹

¹⁸ The Stockholm Declaration, it. 4 <http://www.holocaustforum.gov.se/pdfandforms/deklarat..pdf>

¹⁹ The Stockholm Declaration, it. 4 <http://www.holocaustforum.gov.se/pdfandforms/deklarat..pdf>

The Danish Prime minister at the time, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, took part in the Stockholm Forum and committed Denmark to the Stockholm Declaration. In 2003 following the Stockholm Forum, an official day of Holocaust and genocide remembrance and commemoration called Auschwitz Day was established in Denmark. The Auschwitz Day takes place every year on January 27th. – The day of the liberation of the Auschwitz extermination camp in 1945.

However, in the Danish context the Holocaust Remembrance Day that was envisioned in the Stockholm Declaration became a day in commemoration of the Holocaust as well as other genocides – even though the name indicates otherwise.²⁰ On the issue of choosing the name, former Danish Chief Rabbi Bent Melchior said at the time: “The term Auschwitz has gained universal meaning. Really, it encompasses all forms of mass murder, ethnic cleansing and all collective crimes against people, whose only crime is to be born into or having joined the ‘wrong’ group. In our mind, Auschwitz, originally a European phenomenon covers atrocities in all parts of the world.”²¹

The decision to include other genocides, and not establish a day of Holocaust Remembrance alone as was done in many other countries worldwide, was disputed.²²

Critics argued that Denmark according to the Stockholm Declaration was obliged to establish a day in commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. The basis of the day, however, was decided upon by the Danish government, to whom it was imperative to give the day a broader scope. In his speech on January 27th 2003, when the Auschwitz Day was marked for the first time, the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen drew explicit parallels between the crimes committed under Hitler and Stalin.²³ According to the Ministry of Education the objective of the day is: “(...) to promote education about the Holocaust and other genocidal regimes among schools, youth education institutions, universities, and the general public.”²⁴

In this way Auschwitz Day became a day to place genocide and political mass murder on the public and educational agendas, and initiate comparative discussions on crimes committed by different regimes in different times. This is done with the aim of preventing the recurrence of history, as genocide education is perceived as a tool in this regard.

The Annual Auschwitz Day

²⁰ The Stockholm Declaration was approved by the then Prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen. However, the decision to include other genocides in the Danish day of commemoration was made by his successor Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

²¹ Please see the official website for the Auschwitz Day: <http://www.27-1.dk/dagen/Tekster/baggrund/>

²² Brudholm, Thomas og Mennecke Martin (ed.): “Erindringens Fremtid – Auschwitz-dag i Danmark”, p. 70. Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2004

²³ Read the speech at: <http://www.27-1.dk/dagen/Tekster/statsministeren/>

²⁴ Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries: Denmark, see: http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/teachers/index.php?content=educational_reports/

The activities related to the Auschwitz Day fall into two categories: the events of January 27th and educational activities about genocide.

On the evening on January 27th, municipalities around the country organize events to mark Auschwitz Day. These events may include talks by survivors, journalists working in the field, aid workers, film viewings, concerts, plays, etc.

The idea of these events is to mark the day while furthering debate and awareness on the Holocaust and other genocides among the general public.

The other, and for the purpose of this paper more relevant category of activities, is the educational activities associated with the Auschwitz Day.

Educational activities

There are various educational activities related to Auschwitz Day.²⁵ Seminars are offered to high school students around the country, educational websites are available for both secondary and high schools, articles and educational materials with a genocide educational scope are produced and teacher-training seminars are offered to Danish teachers.

Seminars

Since 2003, when Auschwitz Day was held for the first time, high school students have had the opportunity to participate in seminars and learn more about genocide. In the weeks leading up to January 27th, seminars on genocide are arranged in the larger cities of Denmark.²⁶ Each year 2000 high school students participate in workshops where genocides from around the world and a variety of time periods are discussed.²⁷

The overall idea is to familiarize the students with the ethical and political challenges related to genocide, to provide them with insight into the dynamics of genocide, and thereby to help prevent history from repeating itself. In this sense, the educational activities fit well into the overall Danish strategy of preventing by educating.

In order to illustrate that genocide is a complex issue which impacts on many aspects of society and all kinds of people, Auschwitz Day has a new thematic focus each year. In past years, themes such as "Rescuers and Bystanders" and "Perpetrators" have been shaping the discussions. Also the processes "before " and "after" genocide have been discussed. The theme for Auschwitz Day in January 2008 will be "Site of

²⁵ The educational activities are organized and conducted by the Department for Holocaust and Genocide studies at the Danish Institute for International Studies in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. For more details on the educational activities please see: www.folkedrab.dk

²⁶ Please see www.folkedrab.dk and www.folkedrab.dk/UNG

²⁷ Over the years workshops have been conducted on various topics such as: Gulag and the crimes committed under Stalinism, The Armenian genocide, The absence of intervention in Darfur, The Nuremberg Trials, The mentality of perpetrators, the survival strategy of survivors and many more.

crimes”, and the debate will focus on the individual stories connected to different places in different genocides.²⁸

Online Genocide Education

In addition to the seminars, two new Danish websites on genocide addressing secondary and high school students were launched in 2004 and 2005.²⁹

The websites offer articles on seven different genocides, including background material, explanations of what led up to the genocide, a description of the chain of events during the genocide, as well as an overview of the aftermath.

While the website makes no pretence to be all-inclusive, currently, Armenia, Bosnia, Cambodia, Rwanda, The Holocaust, Stalinism, and Iraq are covered. Articles on Darfur are in the making.

The websites are closely linked to the above mentioned educational seminars, as teachers and students can access articles and prepare for their participation. Thematic articles are posted each year and teachers are provided with working questions and other relevant sources. The scope of the websites is not, however, limited to the educational events in January. Throughout the year users of the websites can study the cases of genocide, access movie and audio clips, read eye-witness narratives, solve quizzes, and get ideas for school assignments and suggestions for further reading. Later this year, an on-line dilemma game will also be launched for educational purposes.

As mentioned previously, the websites originally targeted secondary and high school students. However, it has become clear that the user-group is somewhat more diverse than that. It appears that journalists, university students, as well as the generally interested public are regular users. This obviously poses different demands when addressing the target-group.³⁰ Recent statistics show that the websites have an average of 18,000 users each month, peaking in January and around examination time in the spring.³¹

There are both challenges and advantages related to on-line education on genocide. The Internet offers a great deal of information, which is also the inherent problem as there is no limit, structure, or hierarchy in the materials available.

By ‘Googling’ the term ‘genocide’, one gets some 134,000 hits (Danish pages that is). For educational purposes, only a limited amount of these would do. For students seeking information on genocide it is very difficult to navigate between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources. One example of this difficulty in navigating was the webpage produced by a group of Danish revisionists copying the layout of an

²⁸ I.e. how was life in Auschwitz? How does one live on in the town of Srebrenica? What happened in the churches of Rwanda? Was Denmark a crime scene in the 1930s when Jewish refugees were sent back to Germany? These and many more issues will be discussed in January 2008.

²⁹ Please see www.folkedrab.dk and www.folkedrab.dk/UNG

³⁰ User statistics developed by Department for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen.

³¹ User statistics developed by Department for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen.

educational website on the Holocaust. The aim was to confuse the users by using identical layouts. The Internet is an easy way for deniers and revisionists to reach students and spread their message. The issue at stake is that students might not be able to estimate the trustworthiness of particular sites and distinguish accordingly. At the same time, the Internet is a very efficient way of both engaging and educating students and one way of going about the problem is to offer reliable material through educational websites.

The advantages of web-based education are among others that this is a relatively inexpensive way of reaching a lot of teachers and students, while the material is flexible as it can easily be revised and updated. In addition, online material has the advantage of interactivity that traditional teaching material cannot compete with, which can be furthering for the learning process.

Thus, the challenges when producing on-line educational material are various. Besides the issue of producing reliable material and reaching students and teachers, it is difficult to find a reasonable balance between the target group, the possibilities within the media and a language suitable for the subject.

Educational materials

Various educational materials have been produced in relation to the Auschwitz Day. Apart from articles posted on the educational websites, articles in historical journals and teachers' magazines are regularly published. The aim is to raise awareness among teachers on how to integrate genocide education into their classrooms.

Another initiative in this regard was the publishing of the book "The Aftermath of Genocide" (2007) targeting high school teachers.³² The background for this publication was the reorganizing of the Danish high school system in 2005. In high school subjects has traditionally been taught on an individual basis. The focus in the new high school now emphasizes interdisciplinarity. This among others poses new demands for Danish teachers, and "The Aftermath of Genocide" was a way of showing that 'genocide' was a topic suited for interdisciplinary teaching.

The book targets high school teachers and addresses the aftermath-issue from various educational angles. Each of the chapters in the book discusses the aftermath-theme from a perspective corresponding to subjects taught in high school; i.e. Literature, History, Natural Sciences, Philosophy, Civics, Music etc. The idea is to provide teachers with knowledge on how to teach genocide within their particular subject, while also demonstrating how the topic can be taught within an interdisciplinary frame. The book is still relatively new, and it is yet not possible to measure its impact with regards to genocide education. That the book has been well-received by reviewers and is currently entirely sold out and awaiting reprint does indicate satisfaction among the target group, however.

³² Brudholm, Thomas and Mennecke, Martin (ed.): "Efter Folkedrab – En flerfaglig Undervisningsbog", Danish Institute for International Studies, 2007. <http://www.folkedrab.dk/undervisning/efterfolkedrab/>

Teacher training seminars

In addition to the seminars, online education and educational materials, activities related to Auschwitz Day also include teacher training seminars addressing teachers in both secondary and high schools. Seminars have so far taken place in various countries, including Israel (Yad Vashem), Bosnia (Sarajevo) and in Theresienstadt in the Czech Republic.

The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research

Another noticeable initiative in relation to the Danish effort regarding genocide education, and particularly Holocaust education came in 2004. Following the Stockholm International Forum, Denmark joined the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. The Task Force consist of representatives of governments as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations. Membership entails commitment to the Stockholm Declaration and promotes education and the purpose it to promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research both nationally and internationally.

Genocide Education in Denmark – Challenges and Dilemmas

As has been discussed in this paper, the field of genocide education in Denmark has its point of departure in the Holocaust. In recent years, however, this focus has been broadened to include other genocides in the general educational effort.

This change in the educational frame is partly due to a general internationalization of Danish society as well as a commitment to different initiatives. Yet another aspect of the priority is that genocide education, as well as the teaching of human rights, fits into the framework of the so-called 'civic education program' which promotes democratic and humanitarian values in youth education.³³

However, genocide educators are faced with a variety of challenges and dilemmas when addressing the issues in the field. First of all, neither the Holocaust nor other genocides are part of the core curriculum, and as such these topics are not mandatory. As mentioned one problem with making the schools choose their own curriculum is that some school choose not to teach on the topic at all.³⁴ This doesn't seem to be a general problem though. As pointed the Holocaust is covered extensively in teaching, though mostly in connection with teachings on World War II. However, teachers need to also focus on the darker sides of Danish history, in order to disseminate a more complete picture of the fate of the Danish Jews. One practical challenge that teachers occupied with teaching on the Holocaust will be facing within a few years is the diminishing generation of witnesses. Up until now Danish educators have been able to call upon this generation in the educational effort; as time passes this will no longer be possible.

³³ In this context, the 'civic education program' should not be considered an institutional program, but more an effort to promote and implement certain values in the general educational strategy.

³⁴ This is the case with a few of the so-called 'Arabic Free Schools'. See Banke, Cecilie Felicia Stockholm: "Eleverne skal lære at skelne", p. 26, DIIS Report 2006:4, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006.

Related to the issue of the passing time, another consideration regarding the Holocaust serving as point of departure for genocide education should be mentioned. This concerns a future where the Holocaust will no longer be as immediate in the collective memory culture as it is presently. This raises the interesting question of which consequences this will have educational-wise and whether the Holocaust in the future will remain the starting point in genocide education?

As for challenges and dilemmas related to teachings on genocides other than the Holocaust, these are as pointed out not taught as often as the Holocaust. In the future, it will therefore be imperative for Danish teachers to become better educated in the field of other genocides.

This will on the one hand fit into the general effort to broaden the scope of genocide education, but it will be relevant for a different reason to: Denmark is home to a relatively large ex-Yugoslavian population as well as other smaller groups of refugees and immigrants having experienced genocide. In the future, educators will increasingly face classrooms with the children of both victims and perpetrators. Genocide education in such an environment will require careful consideration as to how to teach the history of the Balkans. A politically correct language will have to be developed to avoid offending or accusing certain groups of students. Educators today already face a somewhat similar problem when teaching the Armenian Genocide in a classroom with students of Turkish origin, though this seems to be more a problem of denial.³⁵

The issue of students whose family or they themselves lived to experience the horrors of genocide stresses the relevance of the abovementioned consideration regarding whether or not the future point of departure for Danish genocide education will remain the Holocaust.

In summary, genocide education in Denmark is a developing field in which both teachers and students are very engaged. In an educational context, the focus on the Holocaust and other genocides offers many possibilities for comparative studies of the sociology, psychology and historical patterns of different genocides in different times. This field however, poses certain challenges and dilemmas both with regards to teachings on national history in relation to the Holocaust and with regards to teachings on other genocides. As demonstrated here, the Holocaust is traditionally taught in the Danish school system as it is both part of the collective memory-culture and has a natural place in the teachings on national history because of the fate of Danish Jews and Denmark's involvement in World War II. Ideally, genocide education in a given national context has a broader scope than genocides with an immediate relevance to the particular country. As mentioned, the strategy is to aim for prevention through education. It is however, difficult to ensure a consistent educational effort when the topic is not mandatory. Herein lies perhaps the bigger challenge with respect to genocide education in Denmark.

³⁵ I base these considerations on interviews with selected high school teachers and genocide educators at the Auschwitz Day seminars.

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