



Shoah Education in Israeli State Schools: An Educational Research 2007-2009

**Highlights submitted by Dr Erik Cohen,
School of Education, Bar Ilan University**

In 2007-2009, we conducted a national survey of Shoah education in Israeli state schools. 307 principals, 519 teachers and 2,540 students in religious and general junior high and high schools throughout the country participated in the survey.

Among the key findings of the study are:

Importance and centrality of the issue of the Shoah

The Shoah is a core theme within the Israeli state educational system. The Shoah is considered important by principals, teachers and students. In fact, the Shoah constitutes a common denominator among students of various backgrounds. There are no major differences between students from different demographic groups in terms of their perceptions of the issue and evaluations of Shoah studies.

- 77% of the students and 96% of the teachers say the Shoah affects their worldview.
- 94% of the students are committed to preserving the memory of the Shoah.
- 83% of the students are interested in learning more about the Shoah.
- The importance attributed to this issue was articulated clearly in the interviews, focus groups and open questions.

Shoah education: identity, values and ideology

There is wide agreement among the principals and the teachers regarding basic values and educational implications of Shoah teaching.

- 85% of teachers see the Shoah as a tragedy for all humanity, not only the Jewish People.

- The Jewish, Zionist and universal implications of the Shoah are all considered important by principals and teachers:
 - Strengthening commitment to existence of an independent State of Israel is an important goal of Shoah education for 100% of principals and 92% of teachers.
 - Strengthening humanist-universal values is an important goal of Shoah education for 97% of principals and 81% of teachers.
 - Instilling a feeling of connection to the destiny of the Jewish people is an important goal of Shoah education for 99% of principals and 93% of teachers.
 - Universal values, and particularly the goals of strengthening students' commitment to fighting racism and strengthening democracy, are given stronger emphasis by the principals and teachers in the general schools.

There is even greater commonality among the students' beliefs and values. There are few differences between the students in religious and general schools (except regarding specifically religious belief and practice). The views have been strengthened slightly among the older students.

- 94% of students are committed to the memory of the Shoah
- 88% of students feel a sense of identification with the Jewish people
- 86% of students are committed to the existence of an independent Jewish state
- 81% of students see the Shoah as a tragedy for all humanity, not only the Jewish People.
- 80% of students identify with universal values

Differing approaches to Shoah education

Two major polarizations characterize the approaches of educators, principals and experts: cognitive vs. experiential learning; and universal vs. particular-Jewish values. However, these debates are not necessarily contradicting dichotomies, but poles in a spectrum, and may in fact be complementary. Cognitive and experiential learning may be combined and even enhance one another; universal and Jewish values may also be combined. The junctions between cognitive/experiential approaches to learning and universal/particular values become particularly apparent in the evaluation of the impact of the journey to Poland.

Shoah education: A multidimensional experience and pedagogy

Generally speaking, the students are highly exposed to the issue of the Shoah, through various settings and types of activities. Similarly, the teachers are involved in various activities and use diverse methods.

- The school is the most important setting through which students are exposed to the issue of the Shoah. Israeli youth also learn about the Shoah in their youth groups and through their families, but far less frequently.
- Shoah education in Israeli state schools includes a combination of formal (primarily history classes) and informal (ceremonies, field trips, etc.). In addition to mandatory classes, students attend ceremonies (95%), see performances and presentations (82%) and visit institutions for Shoah commemoration (85%) with their schools.
- The most effective means of learning about the Shoah according to the students are the journey to Poland and hearing the testimonies of survivors (each indicated as effective to a 'great' or 'very great' extent by 91% of students).

- 80% of the teachers are involved in more than one type of activity related to Shoah education—mainly teaching plus informal activities such as ceremonies, field trips, etc. Only 20% of the teachers are involved in one type of activity (usually teaching). Similarly, 66% of the teachers apply a multiple method in teaching (lectures, group projects, and creative works).
- Hours allotted to Shoah studies spikes dramatically in 11th grade, when students are preparing for matriculation exams.
- Among the 18 Shoah textbooks used in the schools, two texts predominate: one is used by 65% of the teachers and the second by 11%.
- More than half of the teachers have received training in Shoah education through a professional enrichment course during the last two years. 77% attended courses at a single location; the second most commonly attended location was indicated as the venue by 10% of the teachers.

Importance and impact of the journey to Poland

The journey to Poland is among the most important and effective aspects of Shoah education, highly valued by students, teachers and school principals:

- Among those who participated in the journey to Poland, 89% of the teachers and 96% of the students were satisfied.
- The journey to Poland was indicated as an effective means of learning about the Shoah by 99% of students who participated.
- 80% of the 9th graders intend to go on the journey in the future.

The primary impacts of the journey are increasing students' knowledge about the Shoah and strengthening commitment to remembering the Shoah:

- A greater percentage of students who went to Poland say they feel knowledgeable about the Shoah (74% compared to 62% of non-participants).
- A greater percentage of students who went to Poland recognize names, places, and events related to the Shoah; the gap between participants and non-participants is particularly notable in terms of the less widely recognized items.
- 96% of principals of schools organizing journeys to Poland, 94% of participating teachers, and 91% of participating students think the journey to Poland strengthens commitment to remembrance of the Shoah.
- Participation in the journey increases the tendency to view the Shoah as a tragedy for all humanity (89% of participants compared to 80% of non-participants).

Profile of the journey to Poland participants

Participation in the journey is one of the few areas in which a difference may be seen between students from different backgrounds.

- 61% of the students who did not participate in the journey to Poland indicated the cost of the journey as the greatest obstacle, and students from lower socio-economic brackets are significantly less likely to participate.
- Family connection to the Shoah (Ashkenazi background, loss of a relative in the Shoah) increase likelihood of participating.

Satisfaction with Shoah education

Overwhelmingly, the various constituencies are satisfied with the Shoah education programs at their schools:

The students

- 85% say the subjects learned in Shoah studies classes are thought-provoking.
- 80% say the subjects learned in Shoah studies classes are relevant to their lives.

The principals

- 83% are satisfied with the overall quality of Shoah education at their schools.

The teachers

- The vast majority of teachers are satisfied with the overall training (84%) and enrichment courses (73%) they have received in Shoah education.
- History teachers feel more qualified in teaching the Shoah: 92% of history teachers feel qualified, compared to 72% of non-history teachers (89% of those who teach history and are also homeroom teachers or teach another subject feel qualified).

Recommendations for improving Shoah education

Despite the general sense of satisfaction with Shoah education among the various constituencies, some key recommendations have been suggested by the interviewees.

- Allotting more hours for Shoah education is recommended by 72% of principals and 79% of teachers. This request is particularly strong among those working in the junior high schools: 78% of the junior high school principals and 87% of the junior high school teachers recommend increasing the number of hours for Shoah education.
- 44% of the teachers express a need for more enrichment courses and training.
- 88% of principals and 87% of teachers recommend increasing informal educational activities about the Shoah (ceremonies, field trips, etc.).
- 78% of the principals and 67% of the teachers suggest giving more emphasis to Zionist values.
- 61% of principals and 68% of teachers recommend increasing the emphasis on knowledge about the Shoah.
- 57% of the principals and 60% of the teachers suggest giving more emphasis to universal values.
- The opinion was strongly and repeatedly voiced (in interviews and open questions) that the Shoah be taught in a meaningful and deep way, not only for exams.

The Steering Committee members

Dr. Yael Barenholtz: Director of Research at Administration, Youth and Society, Ministry of Education
Aryeh Barnea: Principal of a state high school
Zvi Inbar: Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany
Dr. Zeev Mankowitz: Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Professor Dan Michman: Bar Ilan University and Yad Vashem
Dorit Novak: Director of the Central School for Shoah Education at Yad Vashem
Adina Shudofsky: Assistant to the Senior Advisor on Allocations in Israel, Claims Conference
Sarah Wieder: National Supervisor of history education in religious state schools, Ministry of Education
Hanyeh Weintrov: Shoah teacher in a religious state school
Michael Yaron: National Supervisor of history education in state schools, Ministry of Education

Contributors

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference)
The Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation
The Ruderman Family Charitable Foundation
The Paul & Margaret Feder Family Trust
The Argov Center for the Study of Israel and the Jewish People at Bar Ilan University
The Jacob Ginzburg Foundation
The E. Stern Institute of Religious Education Research at Bar Ilan University
Bank Hapoalim
Bar Ilan University
The Israeli Foundation for Advancement of Man
The Moshkovitz Ya'acov & Vladislava Foundation
The Abe & Ibolya Schwimmer Holocaust Educational Fund

Research Team

Dr Erik H. Cohen, Educational sociologist, Research and project director
Dr Einat Bar-On Cohen, Educational anthropologist, Director of the qualitative aspects of the research
Dr David Resnick, Project consultant
Ephrat Balberg-Rotenstreich, Shoah history teacher, Consultant on Shoah teaching
Reuven Amar, Mathematician, Computer and data analysis consultant
Oshri Weiss, PhD student in cognitive sciences, Research assistant
Adam Farkash, MA student in history, Research assistant
Limor Zeelah, MA student in Jewish education, Research assistant
Allison Ofanansky, Research assistant and English editor
Rina Iflane, Data processing
David Meyers, Data processing

Observers and interviewers

Noemie Grynberg	Iris Reuveni
Ofra Guttman	Hilla Tsadok
Adam Farkash	Oshri Weiss
Sarit Michaelov	Limor Zeelah
Allison Ofanansky	