

Teacher's Sense of Self-Efficacy and  
Pedagogical Content Knowledge (P.C.K) of  
Holocaust Education in Elementary Schools and  
Their Influence on their Pedagogical Choices

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## Abstract

Holocaust education presents many deliberations for teachers due to the ingrained dichotomy in teaching this subject. Educators must find optimal methods for teaching a subject that can be traumatic for young students on the one hand, and unavoidable on the other. Holocaust education can strengthen students' values, but the subject is so complex that certain researchers warn against approaching it without making the necessary accommodations (Gross & Stevick, 2015; Levy & Sheppard, 2018; Novis Deutsch, Perkis, & Granot-Bein, 2018).

In addition, Holocaust education presents endless dilemmas in elementary schools, due to the students' lack of maturity, inability to comprehend historical complexity, emotional sensitivity, and difficulty differentiating between past and present (Szejnmann, Cowan, & Griffiths, 2018). This study explores how elementary school teachers in Israel cope with the dichotomy of Holocaust education, and the considerations they make before addressing this complex subject in their elementary school classrooms.

Three theoretical frameworks can help understand how teachers construct Holocaust education. They demonstrate incorporation of cognitive, emotional, and ethical-social elements:

1. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) – This term was defined by Shulman (1986, 1987) to describe the unique knowledge possessed by teachers, which combines the teacher's content knowledge with knowledge about the students' capabilities. Pedagogical content knowledge is based on learning, reflection, and experience, i.e. the cognitive process of constructing the educational program (Hashweh, 2005; Shulman & Shulman, 2004).

Do teachers have the opportunity to develop Pedagogical content knowledge about Holocaust studies? Most elementary school teachers never learned about the Holocaust during their professional training (Brutin, 2011). Furthermore, the Holocaust is taught only once per year and for a relatively brief period of time. Do teachers gain adequate experience in teaching this subject?

2. General teaching efficacy (GTE) in a specific subject, as described by Bandura (1977, 1982, 2011) and developed by other researchers, is thought to influence diverse characteristics of teaching, including defining goals and selecting methodologies (Bandura, 1992; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004). However, beyond its dependence on the teacher's knowledge and experience, the teacher's emotions regarding the subject influence the emergence of sense of teaching efficacy. The Holocaust naturally evokes compounded emotions both in teachers and students.
3. Teaching ethics are an important aspect of any discourse on teachers' educational choices, and on the social contexts in which these choices are made (Chen, Wei, & Jiang, 2017). Holocaust education involves an intricate web of ethical systems that are based on human and universal social values, as well as on specific Jewish-Zionist values. The teacher's responsibility for the emotional well-being of the students is also incorporated into these complex considerations. As a result, assessment of the underlying ethical system is critical.

In order to assess the considerations made by educators when teaching elementary school students about a subject as emotionally, cognitively, and ethically complicated as the Holocaust, we chose the mixed-method paradigm (Creswell, 2014), which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The quantitative element studied 280 elementary school teachers who answered questionnaires that covered all aspects of the teachers' Pedagogical content knowledge and sense of teaching efficacy, as well as variables related to their goals and methods for teaching about the Holocaust. We then studied the differences between groups, as well as correlations, and regressions. The qualitative element of the study involved interviews with six Holocaust education experts, and 20 elementary school teachers.

The findings from the quantitative study showed that despite the limitations, teachers develop Pedagogical content knowledge on Holocaust education, as well as a sense of teaching efficacy. However, dichotomy was revealed in their choice of teaching methods. The teachers described employing methods that provide emotional protection for their students, alongside concrete methods that have been shown by various studies to counter this emotional protection. We also found that teachers choose emotionally-protective teaching methods based on their

perception of their students' emotions, however when choosing methodologies that evoke negative emotions, the students' emotions are not considered.

The ethical system behind this dichotomy was exposed based on the findings of the qualitative portion of this study. An analysis of the interviews revealed two categories. The spectrum between these categories can be used to conceptualize the teachers' ethical considerations. On one hand, the ethical system is based on the concept of caring education, as described by Noddings (2012), which attributes highest priority to the students' emotional sensitivity and to caring for students. On the other hand, "meaningful learning" as described by Dewey (1915) focuses on social and personal values, and on the students' relevance and involvement (Israel Ministry of Education, 2014; N.C.S.S., 2009). According to the second approach, the most appropriate teaching methods emphasize concreteness and personalization, as well as moral universal and specific objectives.

Literature on the ethics of caring emphasizes how students' emotions are often neglected when confronted with other moral systems (Chen, Wei, & Jiang, 2017; Colnerud, 2015). According to these studies, this is generally the result of an absence of straightforward discourse on the role of caring in education. These studies claim that genuine, focused discourse on ethics can increase awareness of the complexity involved.

However, the findings of this study show a fundamental contradiction between the 'Meaningful learning' based on Dewey's approach and Noddings' ethics of 'Caring'. Even though they are both student oriented, holocaust educating poses a case study in which the content itself is emotionally complex for the student (Difficult Knowledge). This unique case reveals the different attitudes towards the concept of ethical teaching. While according to the 'Meaningful learning' agenda ethical teaching regards the moral concepts of the student's society, the ethics of 'Caring', will consider ethical teaching as one that protects the emotional world of the student. Holocaust education presents a case in which caring for the emotional well-being of the student is not necessarily in line with his society's values. Focusing on the ways teachers are attempting to bridge this gap, this study offers a new understanding of the ethics of 'Caring', as more than going 'considerably beyond' Dewey's approach and 'advocating new

priorities' as Noddings phrased it, but rather posing question marks upon its ability to bridge the psychological needs of the student and the need to educate him in light of his society's values.