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Jewish Education during the Holocaust- a building block of an universal humanistic and Jewish Educational process

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6. Abstract of paper:

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Jewish Education during the Holocaust – A building block of an universal humanistic and jewish educational process

"The full meaning of education in its largest context can be understood only within its connection to changing events" (Kurzveil, 1979, Masberg, 1985). It is on the basis of special circumstances that the Jewish education system during the Holocaust can be explained and understood. The Jewish education system was founded and then developed "against all odds" (Walk, 1975, Röcher, 1992). The goal of this study, then, is to examine the characteristics of the Jewish Education system during the

Holocaust, in order to unravel its uniqueness in relation to the defining of an universal humanistic and Jewish educational process.

The Holocaust is a difficult and loaded topic. The Holocaust as a subject in school is similarly difficult, while the questions of whether to teach it, when to teach it and how have not been completely answered yet. The reason for these difficulties, according to the basic thesis in this Research, lies in two factors:

- a. In the students' lack of knowledge during their training to become teachers.
- b. In the psychological burden a.o. because of it.

Therefore, it is highly important, both from the education perspective and the scientific one, to enrich student teachers with knowledge and information regarding the Holocaust as the study presented here exposes.

Methodologically, this research is based on interviewing ex students and teachers in German Jewish schools, as well as interviews conducted with the Jewish community leadership and central figures in German administration. These interviews addressed research questions according to the parameters that characterized the Jewish education during the Holocaust as "Oasis" (Baack, Leo, 1985).

Accordingly, were the following domains addressed by this research:

the physical – existential, the ideological - pedagogical in relation to the definition of the identity of the self, and the psychological – emotional on the basis of the vacuum in Jewish and general cultural life created by the Nazi regime and its racial ideology. Additionally, the research examined documents from the Holocaust period in Germany, Israeli archives such as "Yad Vashem" museum and other similar institutions, as well as literature on the subject of Jewish education and life during that time.

Among the main findings of this research, it was found that:

1. The Jewish education at that time functioned as the "mental rebellion" (Shoeps, 1986 ; Suchy) against all attempts to extinguish the Jewish community
- .2. There is a reciprocal relation between the realistic circumstances on the basis of which the Jewish education had developed, and the way by which the Jewish identity was defined (Kurzweil)
- .3. The memory of the Holocaust on the one hand, and the foundation of the state of Israel on the other, have created a perspective which emphasizes the values and

the historical , theological and social meanings of the Holocaust in the process of defining a universal humanistic and Jewish \ Israeli identity.

4. teaching the subject of holocaust throug teaching the singularity of the jewish education of that period, may shed some light on this dihhicult topic from a constructive perspæctive, which will enable the coping with this topic. Both for teenagers and young educators.

The values perspective , as reflected in this study, aims to challenge the student teachers to deal with this topic in order to prepare the future generations for taking a clear position towards the fundamental values of good or bad, the hope and faith in the world surrounding us as well as ourselves as having a commitment for the past 'to remember', and for the dignity and freedom of oneself, of the other, on the basis of a human principle of co existence.

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This essay is grounded on the research I conducted, dealing with the Jewish education in light of the events of the Holocaust. I chose to refer here to two aspects out of the whole research:

The chronological aspect, which focuses the discussion on the period following the Holocaust, and the thematic aspect, which refers to the question whether the Holocaust has given its signs in the current Jewish education in the state of Israel and in the Western countries' education (emphasis on Germany).

Based on the above mentioned, two facts underlie this essay: first, the problematic character of the subject and even more so, the problematic nature of teaching it, and second, the Holocaust's ideological charge in relation to commitment towards the past and at the same time its constructive implications for the future. It all becomes even more acute in light of the interest expressed and the sense of commitment for a sequential research, in order to ensure the conveyance of the factual knowledge and its meanings in an empathic manner (Ya'oz, 1999).

Whenever we deal with teaching the Holocaust after 1945, it binds us to devote a considerable place to the Jewish education that existed during the Holocaust. "The phenomenon of education, in its broader meanings, can be fully understood only in the context of the changes of time" (Kurzweil, 1979; Masberg, 1985). In accordance with this principle, we can explain and understand the Jewish education, while referring to the special circumstances, on which - "against all odds" - it was founded and during which, existed (Walk, 1975; Röcher, 1992). Accordingly, the purpose of the original research was to examine the characteristics of Jewish education during the Holocaust, in order to properly comprehend its singularity, especially in relation to the definition of the Jewish identity and to its humanistic educational meanings for the future.

Methodologically, the research relies on interviews with Holocaust survivors, former students and teachers of Jewish schools in Germany, as well as on interviews with leading figures of the Jewish community, leading figures of the German administration and Israeli representatives (for instance, the last two Israeli ambassadors in Germany and the Israeli Embassy of Culture in Germany in the 60's). In the interviews we examined our research questions according to the parameters characterizing the Jewish education of that period as an "oasis" (Baek, 1985) in the ideological-pedagogical area in relation to definition of self identity, in the physical existential area, in the humanistic area, in the social communal area and in the psychological-mental area, in light of the cultural vacuum in Germany under the Nazi regime. In addition, we examined archival documents from the Holocaust period, both in Germany and in the archives of Israeli institutions ("Yad Vashem", The Viner Library, etc.). We further examined documents from the archives of the Jewish community after 1945, as well as conducting an extensive literature review on the subject of Jewish education and life in Germany, following the principle of longitudinal research on the chronological axis of the period before, during and after the Holocaust.

Among other findings in this research, I would like to note the following:

1. Jewish education during the Holocaust fulfilled the function of "the spiritual rebellion" against all attempts of annihilation.
2. there is a relationship of interaction between the real-life background experiences, based on which the Jewish education developed and evolved, and the way of the Jewish self identity determination and the definition of the humanistic human figure.
3. in light of the commemoration of the Holocaust with orientation towards the past, on the one hand, and in light of the foundation of the state of Israel with orientation to the future, on the other, we get a certain perspective which conspicuously shows the Holocaust's ideological meanings as well as its historical meanings.
4. an extremely important finding shows that individuals managed to preserve a humane and human values and figure against all odds, both from the Jewish aspect of the issue and (even more so) from aspect of the Christian society, which assisted, hid and saved mixed couples, saved former neighbors

and friends and children whose parents were sent to the camps and never returned.

5. teaching the subject of holocaust through teaching the singularity of the Jewish education of that period, may shed some light on this difficult topic from a constructive and positive perspective, which will enable the coping with this topic, both for teenagers and young educators.

This ideological point of view, challenges those who want to become teachers to cope with this subject in order to qualify the future generations to take a stand towards fundamental values regarding good and evil, hope and belief in the world around us and in ourselves as having a clear self identity and as humans with commitment towards society, as well as towards the dignity and freedom of the individual, on the basis of a humane principle of co-existence. These two orientations are manifested through teaching the holocaust and rendering its history from generation to generation. There is some irony in this, since the generation of the parents who survived the holocaust, in spite of their efforts to repress the horrors and to conceal them from their children in order to build a sound home for them on solid grounds, did not manage to hide their inaudible cry of pain from their children, under the veil of the "thunderous silence", and thus, in most cases, these children are left with the sense of distress and burden, without having a substantial knowledge of what happened "there." When we say "happened", we mean something beyond the historical aspect of the scope and the political and social facts. Research of children of survivors reveals that the most severe stresses and anxieties were caused by parental over-protection, along side with the hardest thing of all, to live with a parent, whose personality has disintegrated, versus the feeling of relief, when the barriers are breached (Ron, 1987,1988,1992).

Hence, it appears that the subject of holocaust stimulates responses that carry an ambivalent character. It will suffice to quote here two representing responses, which I collected in the course of my research - the one from a group of students after touring the concentration camps and the other from several teaching trainees - in order to reach a conclusion regarding the importance of placing the subject of holocaust among the milestones of education in Israel in particular and in the rest of the world in general. Therefore, I strongly recommend that this theme will be integrated in the training program of teaching trainees.

The students: "coming back to Israel, after seeing the concentration camps, one suddenly experiences a strong sense of national pride in the fact that we are Jewish and Israelis, and a recognition that no one will ever humiliate us again and that we have a right to exist, just like other nations."

Teaching trainees: " the Commemoration Day for the Holocaust and Heroism is imminent and I am terrified of dealing with the horrible past of annihilation, with the tremendous humiliation and sufferings, primarily of children, who witnessed their parents being tortured and experienced the horrendous selection. I feel a need to complete my deficiency of knowledge of the subject and of tools and trainings which will enable me to teach this subject to young children, since without it - our Israeli identity becomes impossible."

German students: "I do not know if anyone in my family directly and actively took part in the holocaust, but the mere fact that I am part of the German people renders me with a sense of responsibility and a desire to know more than I do, in order to be able to respond in a desirable way, in accordance with my conscious and feelings- to abandon my ignorance of the events."

The subject of holocaust is in its essence very charged and difficult to deal with. When we examine the issue of teaching it, as far as content and scope are concerned, we discover that the attitude towards it is on the one hand very clear and doubtless: the subject must be taught, and on the other hand, there is still a discussion among teachers(especially for the younger ages) and teaching trainees regarding the question: how should one deal with this topic?, or as Eli Visel has said: "how can anyone describe the indescribable?" (Cohen, 1988). In light of the long lasting struggling of the educational system with this subject, it seems that this question, that involves numerous related intertwined questions, has not yet received it adequate answer.

Basing on the process of the formation of the professional knowledge of teaching trainees, especially for the younger ages (primary school), as it is manifested through their "daring" to deal with the subject of holocaust and to experience teaching it (through Literature, for instance) and as it is manifested through the difficulties, which the trainees testify they experience, I consolidated my point of view that the main reason, among other reasons, is the deficiency of knowledge given to them in the course of their studies. Hence, we can see that the

scientific and educational importance of this essay is in directing the spot light towards the need to enrich teaching trainees by exposing them to information regarding the singularity of education during the holocaust and to the conclusions derived from it, regarding both the entire human society in the religious, moral and humane aspects and the national-national aspect. The documentary dimension is very significant, but holocaust education is not less important, since through it we bestow the value of the victory of the human being in the renewing world after the Second World War and the horrors of the holocaust.

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