

An authentic voice:

perspectives on the value of listening to survivors of genocide

It is common practice to invite survivors of the Holocaust to speak about their experiences to pupils in schools and colleges. Systematic reflection on the value of working with survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides and on how to make the most of doing so is rarer, however. In this article Andrew Preston reports how his school has worked with Martin Stern, a Holocaust survivor, and reflects on how to make best use of the opportunities and challenges associated with bringing an authentic voice into the classroom. Preston's article is not simply about 'voice', however: it is itself multivocal. Preston reflects on the issue from a teacher's perspective, Stern comments on it from the perspective of a survivor with extensive experience of speaking in schools and Madeleine Payne Heneghan offers a student's perspective of listening to a survivor in school.

Andrew Preston

Andrew Preston is Lead Teacher of Holocaust Education and teacher of history at English Martyrs Catholic School, a Catholic mixed secondary (11-18 comprehensive), Leicester, an IOE Beacon School in Holocaust Education.

Rationale

Why should a school invite a survivor of the Holocaust or a more recent genocide in to speak? And to whom? For many a school, Holocaust Memorial Day is marked every year on 27 January and it becomes an opportunity for Holocaust education and moral education, perhaps visited in citizenship or history. Assemblies on the Holocaust are given, and perhaps a speaker may be invited in who has first-hand experience of such terrible events. And thus Holocaust and genocide education for that year has been done, completed, and matters can return to more 'pressing' concerns such as exams, attendance, results and so on. Although such an approach may sadly be common, it does not do justice to the pupils, staff, survivor or the Holocaust. Granted, at least something is done – but so much more is possible.

As an Institute of Education (IOE) Beacon School in Holocaust education, over the past year we have developed a wide range of teaching and learning centred on the Holocaust and other genocides within both our own school and with partner schools in the region across a wide area of the curriculum. However, for the past few years a survivor has not been to speak about the events that we have been learning about. We have highly engaging lessons and resources around a wide range of themes centred primarily on the Holocaust, and while these are highly effective and promote extensive and thought-provoking lessons from the pupils – they still lack a first-hand 'link' to the past. Of course this could be seen as the same for all lessons, in particular in history – we do not have a direct line to William the Conqueror after all, so why do this with the Holocaust or more recent genocides? The importance of the Holocaust as a key area for study among all pupils has been discussed extensively and I will not revisit it here.¹ However, few historical events are directly challenged in the manner that deniers and revisionists have threatened the very memory of the Holocaust in recent decades, and in the few remaining years available to them it is imperative that the many survivor voices who still want to be heard are given an opportunity to speak: the last living witnesses of a crime which some want to deny ever happened.

In my previous school in Rugby I had begun to teach a new series of lessons about the Holocaust to Year 9 pupils, and for the first time with the Holocaust I faced a problem I did not know how to get around – one pupil simply could not believe what he was learning. It was not that he did not want to know or he chose to ignore it all and misbehave, but he simply couldn't comprehend the horrors and scale of what he was learning about – that human beings could do such a thing to each other – and therefore he closed it off in his head and refused to believe it. This is a huge danger in history and in education and one reason in particular why survivors who are willing to talk about their experiences are so vital – they are an authentic voice, providing a direct, physical and human connection to an otherwise abstract past encountered in the classroom. So, as a purely historical source of evidence their testimony is very important and valid, but I would further argue that pupils

Figure 1: Andrew Preston and Martin Stern following a staff INSET 8 October 2013



get a much more ‘real’ experience when they can connect their learning with a much more tangible part of the past and potentially can learn much from it, not just the history of that one survivor – their world suddenly has a direct connection to the past which they are learning about.² It is not just pupils who gain from the experience, though: through working with survivors my own learning about and approach to Holocaust education has been developed significantly, and so the educational benefits are valuable for all.

Beyond the personal story: learning from a survivor to develop Holocaust education

Finding a Holocaust survivor to come in to speak to pupils proved surprisingly easy. The Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) runs a free Outreach Programme whereby they send educators and survivors to schools.³ While it is slightly harder to contact survivors of more recent genocides directly, yet there are many survivors based in the UK who wish to share their stories. Charities such as the Aegis Trust and the Survivors Fund (SURF) are often able to put schools in touch with survivors, as is the Holocaust Centre, based in Nottingham, which works with survivors from Rwanda as well as the Holocaust.⁴ In my previous school SURF were

able to put us in touch with three survivors of Rwanda who were willing to come into the school and be interviewed by the pupils about their experiences.

HET put us in touch with a local Holocaust survivor, Martin Stern. At first the intention was for Martin to come in to school to speak to Year 9 pupils about his experiences – the sort of event which happens in classrooms across the country and which, in itself, can be immensely powerful. However, as soon as we began communication with Martin himself it became clear that a working relationship could be developed which would be much more beneficial than just a one-day visit.

Our first step was to invite Martin to a meeting between us and our partner schools in the city that we have established as part of the IOE Beacon Schools programme, to hear more about the teaching and learning about the Holocaust within our respective schools. At first this was simply a review meeting to explore what had been developed over the previous year, but it became an invaluable opportunity for the other schools to meet Martin as well. Martin was able to share his opinions about Holocaust education with the other schools and arrangements have been made for Martin to speak at their schools as well. To conclude the meeting, I formally invited Martin to become part of our

Figure 2: Martin Stern's story

Two young Dutch men walked into a nursery school in Amsterdam one day in 1944 and asked for Martin Stern. The teacher told them he hadn't come in that day. 'I put up my hand and said: "But I am here."' Stern, now a retired immunologist, is recalling that fateful moment as dusk gathers outside his sitting room in Leicester. 'The poor woman was trying to protect me. I'll never forget the look on her face as I was led away.' He was arrested, aged five, because his father was a Jew.

*Martin and his one-year-old sister Erica were taken to Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands, where they were housed in wooden huts, each one crammed with as many as 800 people. 'The food consisted of vegetables unfit for sale. Old runner beans that hadn't been stringed were nicknamed "barbed wire" by the boys I was with because they were painful to eat.'*⁵

Martin was later put on to a train destined for Theresienstadt where he survived due to the care of a Dutch fellow prisoner, Catharina Casoeto de Jong.

Martin and his sister were still in Theresienstadt when it was liberated by the Red Army and, after returning to Amsterdam, Martin moved to England at the age of 12 to live with relatives.

Martin studied at Oxford and became an immunologist and a hospital doctor. Since retirement Martin has worked with the Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire and with the Holocaust Educational Trust, giving talks to primary and secondary schoolchildren and other groups, including university audiences. He has played an activist role in relation to the Rwandan and Darfur genocides and the persecution of Christians in Pakistan. He believes that education about genocides including the Holocaust needs to be part of the education of every human being, but that it needs to change to take advantage of the knowledge and research in related areas.⁶

IOE network of schools, in order that he could help develop our education about the Holocaust and other genocides, giving us valuable insights from his experience, and helping to develop new materials and projects. Thankfully, Martin graciously accepted – and was keen to have more of a role in Holocaust education and to develop a working relationship with our local cluster of partner schools. I believe many a survivor would want to take a more active role in such a process, and would be keen to be more involved than just going round school by school sharing their story, as valuable as this undoubtedly is.⁷

Speaking to pupils and staff

Martin shared his story (Figure 2) with the whole of Year 9 towards the end of last June. Martin divides his talk into four stages and it lasts approximately one-and-a-half hours (a potential challenge which will be explored later).

1. Martin's story, which makes up approximately half of the talk.
2. A brief section on genocides (starting with the twentieth century, and then extending further into the past).
3. Why human beings act this way and the psychology of normal humans:
 - a. Ordinary people commit horrific acts under some circumstances (e.g. the Milgram experiment).⁸
 - b. Why? Features of every normal human mind which can lead people to commit atrocities in particular circumstances.

4. Conclusion: we must know the history, but there is more – we need to reflect on what this means to us today.

At the end of each of the main stages we provided an opportunity for questions by the pupils, partly so that the talk would be broken up and partly to allow pupils time to think and reflect on Martin's talk. The lead teacher proves an important part of the event, directing questions and working with the survivor to ensure that the session runs smoothly and to time.

Survivors vary in their approach. Some focus purely on their own story, others may consider other genocides as well and offer their thoughts on this. It is essential that a school communicates with the survivor beforehand so that both the school and the survivor are clear on what the talk is about and the purpose of the event.

In the new school year Martin also shared his story with the whole staff in an afternoon In Service Education and Training (INSET) event. The purpose here was similar, to make living links with the past about which we teach. As a representative of an IOE Beacon School in Holocaust education, I felt the need to develop our working relationship from being essentially between just myself and Martin, and expand it to bring in the whole school, as well as our partner schools. As such, Martin will later in the year be doing a more specialised talk to A-level psychology students. He also arranged with the headteacher to come into the school to view lessons and see how students actually go about learning in schools, so

that we can develop our work together in making sure that survivor visits use the same teaching methodology (as far as is possible given the size / nature of the audience) that pupils might experience in the classroom, and hence make the experience more educationally rewarding. Obviously not all teachers (e.g. maths, food technology and so on) would perhaps be able to directly relate this into their everyday teaching, but even those teachers commented on the talk – one assistant headteacher stating that it reminded her of why she taught in the first place; another teacher said that the talk was emotionally and intellectually important. As teachers we should continue to learn and develop and this was an important part of that process.

Martin's views

In order to understand Martin's perspective on the value of working with schools as a survivor I interviewed Martin on 26 September 2013. The interview text is reproduced below.

Q – What do you think the value is of a survivor coming in and working with a school?

A – When I learnt medicine I had to plough my way through thick books, lots of them, and I learnt a lot from those. But the thing didn't really acquire any meaning until I was with a patient in front of me, and I learnt far more from the patients than from the books. You need the two together. So the value of having a survivor is that the pupils are seeing a real human being to whom this happened, and it conveys meaning in a way that the printed page, a film or a video simply can't.

Q – Often it seems that schools might invite a Holocaust survivor in for a day, perhaps as an act of remembrance for Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), and spend a few hours on it, and essentially tick the Holocaust box for a year. In your opinion, is there a better way for schools to work with survivors?

A – First of all I absolutely agree with the implication in your question that it's doing a kind of standard activity and ticking a box. I've heard many of my fellow survivors speak, and a lot of them are absolutely terrific at it. So even as a box-ticking exercise it does have value. The problem about it is that it acts as a piece of drama that tends to grab people's attention and also displaces your attention from other things. And the reaction that has bothered me a great deal, and has in fact made me radically change the way that I speak to audiences as a survivor, is that we think we now know all about it, and of course it's a bad thing, it mustn't be allowed to happen again, and we can assume that we know what we can do to stop it happening again. And for lots of reasons, I think that assumption is wrong. And I now do a presentation which is designed to make people question the assumption that people are naturally good and that you can take it for granted that you know how to stop terrible things from happening.

Q – Developing on from that, what would you say the main challenges are from a schools perspective, and from your perspective, of a survivor working with schools?

A – From a school's perspective, in my view it's very important that Holocaust and genocide education should

Figure 3: Martin talking to the headteacher following his talk to staff on 8 October 2013



fit into the general scheme of education as an organic part. I believe that in the future every child, everywhere in the world, should as part of their education, have education of this sort. It may, and I hope it will, evolve so that in the future it may be substantially different to the way that it is now.

But nevertheless, we need education about how to live together without killing each other *en masse*. It seems very important to me that Holocaust education should not be seen as something that is stuck on or besides other education. I suppose if you organise bicycle safety for your school kids, that could be seen as an activity which really has got nothing to do with the broad sweep of education. It's just necessary to protect children's lives and you have to have it. It can be done outside the school, it was in my youth. Very laudable, but not part of the main education. I think the opposite is true of Holocaust and genocide education. It needs to be integrated. It needs to be understood, not as a separate, detachable module but as something that really runs through our lives and involves many aspects of education.

So I am in favour of Holocaust and genocide education including bits that are relevant to other subjects. And other subjects including bits that are relevant to Holocaust education.

Not a total blurring of boundaries because that would make the teaching inefficient and messy, but a cross-communication that shows they are not in water-tight compartments.

Q – You’ve mentioned the issue of the authenticity of the voice in the past, you speak yourself without any images at all, can you explain why you do that?

A – I was a teaching hospital doctor and my basic educational tool was a set of slides to which I would give a lecture. So using slides was something I was very familiar with: I used to talk at medical conferences and sit up all night refining the slides to make them communicate their message more quickly, more efficiently and more attractively. So I know quite a bit about how to do it. But yet, as you say, my presentation doesn’t use slides. That may change to some extent, but I did that very consciously and my initial reason was that I thought it was very important that people should have to listen to what I had to say, and not be distracted by a picture in the background and go off into a daydream.

The next influence which confirmed that direction was two very good academic friends, both of whom never use slides and believe passionately that a lecture is better off without slides. Both of these people are brilliant lecturers, and that’s partly because they are very intelligent people and very high quality academics, but not using slides compels you to think very carefully about your words. It’s not only the audience that can be distracted by your slides, the speaker can be too. They can rely on them as a reminder, and speak to the slides rather than what they really need to speak to. And I found it a useful discipline to speak without slides, in refining the words, reducing them, keeping things simple, not relying on a slide to explain something which is too complicated to be said by word of mouth. I try to make the word of mouth such that it can be understood in its own right without the help of slides. And I think that makes the words better.

There are limitations. In my medical work I had to present data which included a lot of very complicated numerical data, and there is no way it can be done without standard forms of graphics which everybody in the medical audience understands. It’s another language. So again in genocide education if you have to talk about numerical data, for example the number of people persecuted and killed in various genocides there are forms of graphical representation which can get over in a flash what it can take a very long time to do by word of mouth (if you can do it at all). So the data themselves may be too complicated to be presented without slides.

And somewhat related to that is the fact that I am now teaching about things in the mind which make people behave in a genocidal sort of way. And that means psychology, sociology and things like that. Mainly psychology in my case. And it means exposing audiences to a set of concepts which one has to assume are totally new to them. Not always, not all of them. But the assumption has to be that the listener has no prior idea of what you are going to be talking about. And I have been doing that without slides, and it has worked. But it has failed with some groups of pupils. Particularly the younger age groups in the sixth form, and particularly when I have tried to get too much in too short a time, and spoken for too long a time without a break. So my plan is to have some

slides, very simple slides and very small in number, to explain those concepts and provide a kind of visual anchor. But I am looking for very high-quality slides and that is delaying it. If you do use slides, they ought to be good.

Now I am not sure that my recipe would work for everybody. I do know Holocaust survivors who use slides very effectively. And frankly they are acting as a reminder for the speaker as well as for the audience. And if you can’t do it any other way then that way is better than not doing it at all, it’s a lot better. Also, a lot of Holocaust survivors use pictures, photographs of members of their families, photos of where they lived and what they did, and photographs relating to the Holocaust itself, maps and things like that. And they can be used effectively. Clearly every presenter needs to think about what is best for their style of presentation. Presentation technique has moved on a terrific lot in the time that I’ve been involved with it. And is still moving on. The best presentations, with or without slides, which you can watch on the internet for example, are of a tremendously high standard which you would not have got 20 or 30 years ago. And therefore I think that every presenter, however good, in the current situation of developing presentation technique, can learn to do it better. And I think we should all be doing that. It is often difficult for survivors because they tend to be elderly, and they may not be primarily interested in developing their presentation technique, but all the same if they did, then it could be helpful. I come back though to the statement that a lot of survivors do a very good job even if they don’t do it in the way which I think is ideal.

Q – At our last meeting you met teachers from our partner schools. I wondered if you had been in contact with them since or done any further work with them as a result of that?

A – No, I haven’t so far. And I would like to. I think what would be absolutely great would be to get a group of teachers together with an interest in Holocaust and genocide education. I would love to work with a group of teachers to see how we can support each other and get better at what we do. I have found (particularly now that I’ve changed the way that I work) instead of going to the school, doing the talk and going away, I try to interact very much more with the teachers. And I of course learn a lot in the process. A professional teacher knows a terrific lot that I don’t. I also find that there are people there with ideas, and I think that’s fantastic. I think that if we can make some of those ideas fly, that would be terrific. If you listen to the news there seems to be an awful lot of activity which is designed to improve education by shouting orders from the top. I am all too familiar with that in medicine. It demotivates people, it destroys initiative. We know that in democracy, millions of normal people can choose a better government than one genius. Not using the brain power of all these teachers, who presumably are not doing it [teaching] against their will, they’re doing it because they’re interested in it, they want to. They have some ideas. And not using those ideas is like the bank robbing itself as it were, it’s our most valuable asset and it has to be used.

Q – What are your thoughts on developing the relationship with schools, so that it goes beyond a one-off talk to pupils or staff, and trying to develop a better working relationship with that school?

A – Well again, going back to my medical work, I ran for a number of years a laboratory in hospitals. And we had to start it more or less from scratch and develop a whole lot of techniques that were used routinely elsewhere. And even when that was finished, we were still all the time introducing new activities in the place. I used to go and visit other departments in other cities, and I used to send my staff off to other labs to learn how to do things. And the extraordinary thing is that in some respects many of those places were worse than the lab I ran, and yet I don't think I ever failed to learn something positive, even from when visiting a place that was worse than mine. I think these days the idea of sitting in your own container, in this case a school, and regarding yourself as self-sufficient, won't do. My guess would be that you could not go and have a conversation with a Holocaust or genocide teacher in another school without learning something, even if they are totally new to it and you have far more experience. I think we're better together and I think it provides a stimulus for everyone and I think it's crazy we're not doing more of it already. I couldn't be more in favour.

Q – Finally, have you any further comments or thoughts?

A – Firstly there is the problem of the disappearance of Holocaust survivors. People are taking technical measures to solve that problem – audio recordings, visual recordings, even extremely high-tech 3D recordings or animations to have a Holocaust survivor after their death answering people's questions by use of extremely sophisticated computer technology. The fact is that we're going to be dead. It strikes me that genocides are not at an end. And you will be able to find other genocide survivors after we have left the scene. And I think in many cases in a lot of ways that will be vastly superior to all these technical measures. And that reflects back to why it would be useful to have a Holocaust survivor visiting a school. I don't believe that any sound or video recording, or piece of high-tech 3D electronic wizardry can replace the actual flesh and blood within a few yards of yourself, alive.

Obviously, people are very conscious of the fact that they need to develop Holocaust education so that it can proceed without live survivors. There is a side issue there of using descendants of Holocaust survivors. Some are involved. I personally am not a wild enthusiast about that. I don't think it is quite the same. I think other methods will prove necessary.

Another issue that was raised is that Holocaust survivors, in telling their story, will be presenting some information which may be historical, and which may not be right. They are not historians, I am not a professional historian. The other day I was checking over some of my own stuff and discovered a few errors in what I have been telling school pupils for years. Obviously, if you are a historian standing next to such a survivor telling their story, you might be reluctant to pull the survivor up sharp. You might feel it was disruptive and interrupted the flow of their story. You might feel that this is an awfully nice old person and you don't want to upset them. And indeed they might be upset. I certainly have seen Holocaust survivors getting upset rather easily when taken to task over what they have said. Holocaust survivors tend to be emotionally brittle. You as a teacher are usually confronted with a Holocaust survivor who you don't personally know. You don't know how brittle they are. So it is difficult.

On the other hand we should not be teaching pupils things that are wrong. One of the things about teaching history is teaching how to distinguish fact from fiction and how to take a critical attitude in a positive way. I think there is room for exposing Holocaust survivors themselves to input from historians, to refine the story they tell so that they don't knowingly perpetrate errors. I think there may be difficulties with that but it is an issue that teachers need to be conscious of. I think teachers ought to be able to approach a survivor in a way that isn't confrontational and likely to be traumatic for even an easily traumatised survivor. I think also pupils can be taught quite correctly that the account that they have heard is the account as the survivor believes it to be. There is no harm whatever in the context of a history lesson in teaching the limitations of eyewitness evidence. Every lawyer and psychologist knows about the problems of memory and the problems of evidence-giving. Certainly historians are conscious of it and I think that's part of learning history. So one needs to be aware of the problem, but I don't think one needs to have a nervous breakdown over it, it's part of life. The professionalism of the teachers should be able to handle the situation in a way that is appropriate and which leaves pupils well taught. Including taught critical attitudes.

A student's view

Madeleine Payne-Heneghan is a Year 11 pupil who has taken a keen interest in learning about the Holocaust in her lessons. She wrote and presented an insightful and emotional essay for Leicester's Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2012, and was invited to listen to Martin alongside the whole of the Year 9 pupils when he gave his talk to them in June. She was asked to write her views on the talk and also to reflect on the value of the school inviting a Holocaust survivor into the school to talk to pupils. What follows are her thoughts in response to this:

When I first heard that Martin Stern would visit our school I decided to Google him. The story of his struggle was there, laid out in Arial black font, his own experience of childhood overshadowed by the events of 1940s Europe. In my research for an earlier work for Holocaust day I had read many accounts of such childhoods. My eyes widened as the details of a life lived in such tragedy had resulted in such a rounded individual as a local and well-noted Consultant Doctor at the Leicester Royal Infirmary Hospital. I began to build my own picture of what such a person might be like. When he walked in and began to speak I felt a picture being coloured in, not a pretty picture by any stretch of the imagination, but a picture that needed colour none the less. When one looks at the topic, the Holocaust is a very hard subject to study, and an even harder topic to give an opinion on.

When I sat in that room waiting for Martin Stern to start speaking my mind was wandering, like the minds of many Year 9s and other Year 10s in the room with me. My mind was wandering on to thoughts of visiting Berlin for the very first time the following day. Then, when Martin began to speak, the room went from a loud 'social event' to totally

mute. Every child in that room was completely silenced. The room was hot and humid, but nothing seemed to detract from that all-important story; the story of Martin Stern. We sat there, in awe of this man and his life, his story, surviving both Westerbork and Theresienstadt.

When I went to Auschwitz I struggled to find answers and a meaning for all this horror and wondered how a person could even go on with life after these events. One can move on with one step after another but just when you feel some distance from the event a creak in a door at night could bring you back to the memory of a life in hiding or a song sang to raise spirits can dampen them. Just like I took heart in the words of Eva Mozes, Martin Stern also inspired me.⁹ Surely, what can be closer to a superhero, to have overcome such a life and turned to help others, dedicating his own life to the selfless vocation of administering to the sick? Even then taking time to tell others of his experience in order to educate others about the Holocaust and how learning from it might save us from repeating it in any way.

When he came, I had a lot of questions, one being that if a person was subjected to such inhumane treatment, treated like they were completely worthless, is it this that would cause them to go to the help of others by taking up such a vocational job? I never did get to ask my questions as the more he spoke the more trivial they seemed and it felt like viewing a unique window into history that would soon close so I didn't want to waste time by speaking when I should be listening.

Since he came to talk to us, I have been lucky enough to visit Berlin as part of a school trip. When we were there we visited many different places, including the Reichstag, the Brandenburg Gate, the Treptower Park, and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The memorial struck me the most prominently, and a sense of the scale seemed ridiculous. Each stole the same grey colour, some only just above the floor, others reaching meters into the air, it seemed distinctly haunting and surreal. Seventeen years in the making, from an outsider's point of view, they look relatively flat, but as soon as you go into the thick of the memorial, only then do you realise how deep the memorial runs, and I believe that is the case with all atrocities like the Holocaust. From an outsider's point of view, someone else can sort it out, it isn't so bad that it is worth one's time, and yet when you look at it properly you realise that this is everyone's opinion. For what you believe, it is better to stand alone with the hope of someone joining you, than to hope someone will stand in your place. And I feel this is very much the case for Martin Stern, an inspirational person, who has stood up for his beliefs, both back then and still to this day. Because he, like others, must see the importance of informing and inspiring the next generation.

Other students ask me why I look into this subject so much, and honestly I don't know if I have a sufficient answer, but I believe the answer is simply that it is compelling. I am compelled to listen, because the toll of apathy is too great. The Holocaust is a subject which people don't like to talk about, a horrific happening that needs to be aired. Spread across generations so everyone will know the price of ignorance, the cost of discrimination, and the value of each human soul. I

believe that by people such as Martin Stern visiting schools, it will help to educate younger generations and spread a vital message. To turn a blind eye is to be complicit in the brutality yourself. As a Year 11 I now find myself having to map out my own future and I feel that the opportunity to hear these experiences compels me towards careers in justice. It would not only be a great responsibility but also a great honour to give a voice to those without.

Conclusion

It should be clear that a school can do much more than simply invite a survivor from the Holocaust or another genocide in to share their story with pupils. Yes, this is valuable in and of itself, but a better working relationship can be established. It should not be as a one off event that simply teaches about the Holocaust or a particular genocide on its own – instead a survivor's testimony could be part of a much wider curriculum whereby the students have had the opportunity of studying the history of that genocide in depth and forging real links with it. Bialecka suggests that a survivor could come in to a school at the beginning of such a study, and then again at the end – and if a survivor would be willing to do this it might be useful; it is something that we have not as yet tried.¹⁰

As an IOE Beacon School we have found that the more we try to work with Martin, the better informed our teaching has become and the more it has developed from just one particular subject focus into a wider range of subjects and across age groups – what started off as an initial visit to talk to Year 9 pupils has become much wider to inform Holocaust education across the whole school, and indeed to our partner schools as well. This has given a much more solid position to Holocaust education across the school – it has helped teaching about the Holocaust move beyond the realm of the history and RE classrooms, and many more subjects are willing to engage with it. This has of course proven tremendously valuable in the learning opportunity for pupils. Martin's approach in particular, by focusing on both his story and then his thoughts on the human condition, has engendered a much more genuine learning experience, in that pupils actually engage with Martin and his ideas, as opposed to simply listening to him passively with the opportunity for limited questions at the end of the talk. Indeed, this is something that we are keen to develop. As such we are currently looking into the possibility of Martin coming in to the school and working with a select group of pupils both to help the pupils engage with the history of the Holocaust in more depth, and to help Martin develop his approach to delivering his story (as discussed in his interview). Of course, developing such a working relationship will depend on the survivor: each survivor will have a different experience, a different story and a different focus – not all will share Martin's approach – but if a survivor is willing to develop a working relationship with a school, it can prove immensely worthwhile for all concerned – the pupils, the teachers and the survivor.

Figure 4: Questions to consider when working with a Holocaust / genocide survivor

- *Does the visit / work fit into a wider scheme of learning about the Holocaust?* Do you want to use the survivor's account to engage pupils, to develop a personal interest and a link to the subject that can be built upon? Do you want to use it to raise questions that could then be explored in the rest of the sequence? Do you want to enable pupils to use prior learning to make connections with what they hear?
- *Is the visit a one off visit or part of a wider scheme of learning?* A single visit has great value, however, a survivor may be willing to work much more closely with a school and to work with various age groups on various topics.
- *Are the content and issues to be discussed age-appropriate?* Are pupils adequately prepared and mature enough for the emotional impact of the visit? A visit could be intellectually challenging and focus on issues beyond the survivor's story – for example the psychology of perpetrators. How will you prepare pupils to access the challenge?
- *How long will the visit last?* Most of the lessons that pupils' experience are multi-modal and involve a series of short tasks. Are pupils going to be able to sit and focus for a prolonged period of time? Perhaps there is scope for collaborative teaching in which a teacher takes a prominent role alongside a survivor and for the use of small group work and discussion? Of course, not all survivors would be willing or able to co-teach, but it is worth exploring, particularly if a longer term working relationship is being considered.
- *What if there are factual errors in a survivor's account?* At a recent conference on 'Future of Holocaust Education' a teacher gave an anecdotal account of working with a charming survivor who made historical blunders in their account, leaving the teacher in a quandary: they did not want to offend the survivor but they did not want to allow their pupils to be misinformed.¹¹ Teachers need to be prepared to handle situations like these in a sensitive and diplomatic manner, should they arise – for example, by following up after the visit is over. It could prove useful to meet the survivor before a visit and to hear their story in advance. Again, a longer term working relationship would make situations such as this easier to handle should they occur.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Not least in the pages of *Teaching History*, where two special editions have been devoted to it (*Teaching History 104* and *141*).
- ² For more guidance on using survivor testimony in addition to historical visits, see Bialecka, A., Olesky, K., Regard, F. and Trojanski, P. (eds) (2010) *European pack for visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum: Guidelines for teachers and educators*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. Available at: www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/remembrance/archives/Source/Publications_pdf/European_Pack_en.pdf.
- ³ See the Holocaust Educational Trust website for information at: www.het.org.uk/index.php/education-general/outreach-programme
- ⁴ The Aegis Trust can be contacted at: www.aegistrust.org/. SURF can be contacted at: <http://survivors-fund.org.uk/>. The Holocaust Centre, previously known as Beth Shalom, can be contacted at: <http://holocaustcentre.net/>⁵
- ⁵ Jeffries, S. (2010) 'Memories of the Holocaust: Martin Stern' in the *Guardian*, Wednesday 27 January 2010. Available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/27/holocaust-memorial-day-martin-stern.
- ⁶ Martin and Erica's journey is available as a teaching resource produced by the Holocaust Educational Trust and the National Union of Teachers at: www.het.org.uk/index.php/component/hikashop/product/show/cid-4/name-martin-and-ericas-journey/category_pathway-0?Itemid=0. Martin can also be heard talking about his story to the Holocaust Educational Trust here: www.hmd.org.uk/resources/podcast/martin-stern
- ⁷ Survivors, like any category of people, are very varied. Some would not want this role or be suitable. But there are others who could be active in this way. There are also quite a few survivors who are retired teachers. From experience working with charities using older volunteers for committee work I know that one problem is how to identify and handle the point at which declining mental capacity means that a role ceases to be appropriate.
- ⁸ The Milgram experiment on obedience to authority figures was a series of social

- psychology experiments conducted by Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram, which measured the willingness of study participants to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts that conflicted with their personal conscience. The experiments began in July 1961, three months after the start of the trial of German Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. Milgram devised his psychological study to answer the question popular at that particular time: 'Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? Could we call them all accomplices?' Milgram summed up the experiment as follows; 'I set up a simple experiment at Yale University to test how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another person simply because he was ordered to by an experimental scientist. Stark authority was pitted against the subjects' [participants'] strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and, with the subjects' [participants'] ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not. The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation. Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.' See Milgram, S. (1974) *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, New York: Harper and Row.
- ⁹ Eva Mozes Kor is a survivor of the Holocaust who, with her twin sister Miriam, was subjected to human experimentation under Josef Mengele at Auschwitz. Both of her parents and two older sisters were killed at the camp; only she and Miriam survived.
 - ¹⁰ Bialecka et al., *op. cit.*
 - ¹¹ www.southampton.ac.uk/english/news/events/2013/07/29_holocaust_studies_conference.page