

Teaching at Holocaust memorial sites: Swedish teachers' understanding of the educational values of visiting Holocaust memorial sites

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Abstract

The present article focuses on teaching and learning about the Holocaust in Sweden, conducted as study trips to Holocaust memorial sites. Although about a quarter of Swedish teenagers visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum each year, this study is the first to examine these Swedish study trips. Since there are no centralised systems for arranging these study trips, this study regards dedicated teachers as the main stakeholders. By deploying critical discourse analysis of transcripts of nine in-depth interviews with teachers, the study terms the discursive order of the teachers' talk about the study trips *ritual democratic catharsis*. The teachers' two main purposes are the use of the study trips as a vehicle for the social dynamics in the group to evolve in order to promote personal growth among the students, and the students' learning about democracy and human rights. Their overarching didactic strategy of focusing on the suffering of the victims is meant to evoke empathy among the students, but lacks an explanatory aim. The study critically points out the teachers' unreflected relationship to historiographic Holocaust content as a subject, making their teaching vulnerable to contemporary political influences, jeopardising the democratic purpose of these trips.

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Introduction

In a Lutheran country such as Sweden, Church confirmation was traditionally seen as a ritual that culturally defined the passage from childhood to adulthood. This may no longer be very accurate since it is becoming less common for Swedish youngsters to undergo this ritual: about a quarter of all Swedish teenagers choose to do so these days (The Church of Sweden, 2019). It is by pure coincidence that more or less the same number of Swedish teenagers visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Flennegård, 2018). Even with no other correlations between Church confirmation and visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum, we would assume that there are some similarities in the rationale, such as learning about good and evil, the consequences of one's choices and fostering moral values. It is also understood that the vast majority of the Swedish study trips to the Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum and similar institutions are conducted within the regular school system.

It should be noted that unlike Church confirmation and unlike any other formal education, there is no centralised system, i.e. guidelines, curricula, etc., that regulate Swedish study visits to Holocaust memorial sites. In reality, this rather significant number of study visits could perhaps be understood as a grassroots movement of dedicated teachers and students. Surprisingly, however, apart from a descriptive government report, there is no previous research in Sweden on this matter (Flennegård, 2018). Hence, the design of this study is explorative in the sense that it aims to identify and analyse how teachers talk about these study trips with regard to their rationale and didactic approaches. Consequently, the purpose of this article is to shed light on and critically discuss this unexplored empirical field – Swedish study trips to Holocaust memorial sites – and contribute knowledge to international research in Teaching and learning about the Holocaust (TLH).

In other words, this is the first scientific study of the educational reasoning amongst Swedish teachers who take their students to visit Holocaust memorial sites. Fundamental questions arise concerning the rationales of the teachers, the effort invested and the imagined outcome in terms of educational values. Is it the Holocaust that is in focus, moral education, the history of the visited site? Or is it more of a school trip? It is also important to understand how teachers reflect upon preparation, their role during the study visit, follow-up activities and connections to formal curricula. In order to illuminate these matters, nine teachers with various degrees of experience in conducting study trips to authentic Holocaust memorial sites have been interviewed. The research questions that have guided this study were:

- RQ1 How do the teachers talk about the rationale for study trips to Holocaust memorial sites in terms of aims and justifications?
- RQ2 How do the teachers talk about the didactics of the study trips to Holocaust memorial sites?
- RQ3 How can learning and meaning-making processes during study trips to Holocaust memorial sites be understood in relation to educational content?

In this article, first an overview of relevant previous research on TLH, particularly on study trips, is provided, then the research method and the theoretical and methodological starting points are discussed. This is followed by a presentation of the data and analysis and finally a concluding discussion.

Survey of the research

There are several different reasons for undertaking study trips to Holocaust memorial sites, which becomes clear in a survey of the research literature. To start out, we need to place these study trips in an educational context. There has been a growing research field for more than 30 years that is often referred to as Holocaust education, but which cannot be understood as just learning about the Holocaust. Within TLH, there is an outspoken ambition to foster self-aware and democratically orientated youngsters, or as Lindquist (2011) puts it:

... studying the Shoah becomes a vehicle that allows students to engage in sophisticated conversations that stretch their understanding of the world and their ability to evaluate the many complex, multi-layered moral situations they will encounter as adults. (p. 28)

On behalf of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, a multilingual research team found that TLH is often framed at the national level, and that a common element is strong engagement of both teachers and students (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2017). These are the general fundamentals, but several studies point to a core of problematic features in TLH. Russell (2006) noticed a tension among UK teachers she interviewed, between disciplinary aims and what is perceived to be appropriate in teaching about the Holocaust. Clements (2006) notes the uncertainty and confusion among UK teachers with respect to the outcome of their teaching. Among Swiss history teachers, Eckmann (2010) found a similar lack of clarity in the disciplinary and cultural memory aims, and the links between Holocaust history and human rights education were assumed but not enunciated or didactically operationalised. Foster comments that his investigation of TLH in the UK 'suggests that a number of teachers may have important gaps in their content knowledge' (2013: 142).

This also applies to Swedish teachers. In a national survey of a representative sample of secondary and upper secondary history teachers, Lange found that they generally feel that teaching the Holocaust is important but they 'lack the knowledge necessary to be able to convey insights about the Holocaust to their students' (2008: 90). Following Wibaeus' doctoral dissertation, Swedish teachers are no exception regarding variation in the objectives of TLH, but they all express one objective: the urgency 'to connect information on the Holocaust and its history with issues of fundamental democratic values' (2010: 250).

From an educational perspective, study trips to Holocaust memorial sites could be regarded as a particular teaching method, and are often launched as extracurricular national programmes. Since the first Israeli study trip in 1988, educational programmes have developed in Israel where students apply to participate. Hence, there are quite a few studies of Israeli study trips. Ben-Peretz and Shachar (2012) conclude in their research overview that there is a 'danger of bypassing cognitive and critical mechanisms' (p. 21). Concerning the Israeli national context, Ben-Peretz and Shachar point to the tendency to 'increase in the sense of national identity', but 'a decrease in universal values' (p. 19). Jackie Feldman's ethnography (2010) has a wider cultural-societal range, framed by Victor Turner's ritual

theory (Turner, 1969). He analyses the Israeli study trips as civic religious pilgrimages where history is used for national aims: 'the students who left for Poland as *children* will return home to Israel as empowered, responsible members of society – *witnesses* – and become future *soldiers* of the State of Israel' (p. 255).

In Norway, no government-sponsored programme has developed. Instead, the organization *Hvite Busser* (The white busses) has been the key organiser of these study trips. The Norwegian students do not apply to a national programme, but *Hvite Busser* does the preparations, the trip and the follow-up work afterwards with school classes. This means that the process is located more in the regular local learning environment. Kverndokk (2007), like Feldman, uses Victor Turner's theoretical approach in his ethnographical doctoral dissertation when analysing *Hvite Busser's* trips, and he shows how they are influenced by Norwegian national memories from the Second World War. He uses the concept of genres and describes how meaning is shaped in a negotiation between three genres: the school trip, the tourist trip and the pilgrimage. Kverndokk's perspective is not educational, which means that the teachers who participate are placed in the background.

Thus, previous research suggests some notable tendencies in study trips to Holocaust memorial sites. First, it seems that there is a considerable risk of emotions and experiences per se being highlighted at the expense of knowledge and cognitive mechanisms. Second, the culture of national history influences the study trips, as well as TLH in general. Third, as a cultural phenomenon, the trips can be analysed as pilgrimages for young people.

The research has studied educational programmes that have not evolved within the school organisation. But this does not apply to how the vast majority of Swedish trips to Holocaust memorial sites are conducted, since there is no central organization arranging these kinds of trips for Swedish young people (Flennegård, 2018). Instead, the teachers arrange the study trips at a local level. Since there is no previous scientific research on Swedish study trips to Holocaust memorial sites, there is a gap in the research, not only in the Swedish context, but also with respect to how the teachers who arrange and conduct study trips in their local educational settings articulate the rationales and didactics of them.

Data-generating procedures

This study is based on interviews with nine teachers at secondary and upper secondary schools, who all have experience of conducting study trips with students to Holocaust memorial sites. The interviews were conducted in the fall of 2017 and constitute one source for the aforementioned government report (Flennegård, 2018). The informants were selected on the basis that more or less all secondary or upper secondary high school teachers in Sweden could be relevant informants. E-mails were sent to the central administration offices of all the 290 municipalities in Sweden and to all 1175 secondary and upper secondary private schools, requesting that the researcher's contact information be forwarded to teachers with experience of conducting study trips to Holocaust memorial sites with their students. The result of this effort was a list of 180 potential informants. Additional research criteria, i.e. the need for variation in the level of experience, length of the study trips and gender representation were applied, narrowing the list to 28 names. Further criteria relating to the type of school (public or private), size of the community (large, medium or small city, rural community) and the length of trip were applied. Based on the provided information, nine teachers out of the remaining 28 were randomly selected.

Of the nine informants, eight work at a public school and one at a private school; six at a secondary school and three at an upper secondary school; four in rural communities, three in medium-sized cities and one in a larger one. Five are women and four men. Their experiences vary from 16 study trips (one informant) to one (two informants) and two (one informant) trips, but five have experience from five or more trips. The longest study trip conducted lasted for eight days and the shortest four days.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the research questions. Considering that this is an unexplored research field, it was important to find similarities between the Swedish study trips but also to allow each informant to communicate the uniqueness of their experience. Kvale and Brinkman (2014) distinguish two interviewer approaches, one termed the 'miner' who wants to extract data from the interviewee, and the other the 'traveller' who wants to join the interviewee on a trip in unknown territory. The approach was to be a miner with respect to organisational facts and sites visited, but a traveller in exploring the rationale and didactics of the study trips.

The interviews followed the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (2017). To meet the requirement of consent, the interviews started by verifying that the informants had read the e-mail about informants' rights and the context of the research. To prepare the informants for an in-depth interview, they were asked to put aside at least one hour for the interview. To motivate them, they were informed that this was the first study of Swedish study trips to Holocaust memorial sites. The interviews were done individually, the shortest lasted for 59 minutes and the longest 2 hours and 5 minutes, and they were taped before being transcribed verbatim. All translations of the Swedish text to English in the following have been made by the authors of this article.

Theoretical and methodological approach

The interviews were analysed by deploying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as both the theoretical foundation and methodological driver (Fairclough, 1992). According to Fairclough, CDA depicts three layers in all communicative events. These layers are closely related to each other, but should be kept separate in the analysis. The text, all verbal and nonverbal expressions, is the first layer and related to the second, the discursive practice, as a coded result of it. The discursive practice is the layer where texts are produced, distributed and consumed. This layer is anchored in a third, the social practice. The social practice precedes discourse and thereby constitutionalises the discursive practice, but the discursive practice then also constitutionalises the following social practice. This means that discourses are shaped in an interaction between the discourse practice and the social practice. CDA, rooted in critical realism, recognises actors as having agency to shape existing discourses and create new ones, but only to the limit of what is acceptable within the framework of the actors' social structure (Fairclough, 2010).

Besides the discourse function of creating systems of knowledge and meaning, it also creates social identity and social relations. These three functions interrelate (Winther Jørgensen and Philips, 2000). Hence, when analysing discourses, one has to pay attention to the relationship between what is said and what it is possible to say with respect to the hegemonic discursive practice in a field. This article's overarching aim is to identify and understand patterns in the discursive practice of the teachers' talk about their study trips to Holocaust memorial sites regarding their rationale and didactic aims, in order to understand how these patterns can be understood in terms of a discursive order of the study trips. This

study concerns the experiences of the teachers represented by how they talk about it. Thus, it is the discursive practice that will be in focus rather than the social practice.

We analysed the teachers' talk to identify their didactic strategies in terms of patterns in how the content of the study trips and articulated aims relate to each other. The analysis is informed by the assumption that teaching history could have explanatory value when exploring the interplay between social structures and the agency of individual actors, in accordance with critical realism.

First, the transcripts were examined regarding *manifest textuality*, meaning to establish what the teachers were talking about in terms of keywords and common phrases. Second, *transitivity* in the text was examined to see how keywords and phrases could be interpreted as coded discursive practice. Third, the transcripts were analysed for patterns in the *discursive practice* regarding rationale and didactics.

Findings

The varying experiences of the nine informants when conducting study trips to Holocaust memorial sites are as follows: Vera 1, Knut 2, Allan 10, Christopher 10, Ingrid 10, Annelie 16, Ellen 6, David 5 and Patricia 1. All names are fictitious.

Manifest textual content

The first step in deploying CDA in this study was to learn about the manifest textual content. By running all the transcripts, a total of 103,863 words through the word processing engine NVivo 12, it was possible to single out dominant terms. By far, the most frequent word stem having content significance turned out to be *student* (Swedish *elev*) and thereafter *trip* (Swedish *resa*). Looking for proper names connected to student and trip, *Auschwitz* and *Krakow* were by far the most frequently occurring ones. The following quotes illustrate how the manifest textual content of the interviews can be termed 'teacher describing their trips with students to Auschwitz and Krakow'. Most often, it is about emotions and reactions when encountering the historical sites.

[A]lways when we go to Auschwitz or Birkenau, there is always someone talking about how bad he feels, stomach pain, having nightmares. There is always someone like that. And then you have to talk to them about that. There and then. How they feel and if they can continue. And they always can. (Kristoffer)

But some accounts also relate to the more recreational aspects of being on a study trip.

[T]hen we went to a big shopping centre, where the students wanted to go and shop a little and . . . when we were about to leave it rained heavily, and then we saw one of these hop-on, hop-off buses that we could . . . we caught. And that was good because in that way we could, we got, we had a guide, a little guided tour around Krakow. So, it was good. (Vera)

Strangely enough, it should be noted that a term such as *The Holocaust* (Swedish *Förintelsen*) is a low-frequency word. Another term that perhaps could have been anticipated as an important content term, *democracy* (Swedish *demokrati*), is rare. This also applies to *antisemitism* (Swedish *antisemitism*) and different forms of *Jewish* (Swedish *judisk*).

In other words, the manifest content does not seem to be focusing on history, democracy or Nazi ideology in relation to European Jews. Top of mind for these teachers are emotional reactions and experiences of leading a school trip.

Transitivity

After establishing the manifest textual content, the analysis continued by focusing on the discursive practice within the material. By running subject forms of personal pronouns in NVivo 12, *I*, *they* and *we*, and comparing them to the object forms *me*, *them* and *us*, the subject forms turned out to constitute 91% of the total usage of the six forms. This supported the general conclusion from the manual analysis of the transcripts, that the teachers position themselves as subjects, but the same goes for their descriptions of themselves together with the students:

[Y]ou spend time together around the clock, and they [the students] then see me and my colleague more as people and less as teachers. . . . /And that we experience something together. So, they notice that even if I have been to these places before, I am also affected, just like them. So, something happens in the group . . . what is it called, group dynamically. (Allan)

Allan talks about how experiences at the visited Holocaust memorial sites are significant for a process of changing the relationship between him and his students. It is not just that they share an experience, but this experience is articulated as the progenitor of a new quality in how they relate to themselves and each other. The informants also describe this dynamic process among the students, as in the following quote when a group conducted a ceremony at a site:

That is where all these feelings, accumulated during these visits, usually come to the students. There is usually a lot of crying, many tears, many hugs, lots of closeness, lots of . . . They see each other, that is my experience. So, they have a focus on each other, in the middle of things, that is . . . It is some kind of redemption there in some way. (Ellen)

Ellen's subject position is not together with the students but as a witness to what they do, and an interpreter of why. The student is articulated as a subject, who acts and says things on a stage, as if not transmitted via an interpreter. By focusing the analysis of the transcripts on how subject and object were connected in relation to the manifest textual content, it became clearer that the overarching transitivity is the teachers' articulation of how they, together with their students or the students by themselves, are subjects in material, verbal or mental processes; the informants talk about what they and the students do, say, think and feel. It is in relation to this that the informants elaborate on rationale, aims, content and didactics. Clearly, a part of the discursive practice is to be understood as a bonding ritual among the participants.

Discursive practice

The following presentation of the results from the analysis of the discursive practice will first focus on how the social dimension of the study trips was talked about. Then the results

concerning teachers' discursive practices related to teaching and learning content are presented.

Learning about themselves. The informants' talk is largely devoted to the social dimension of travelling together with the students and to the care of them as individuals. The rationale is that the unfamiliar social and cultural situations for the students and teachers during a study trip bring them closer to each other, and thereby create opportunities for the individuals to explore themselves in a different social position compared to the ordinary school setting:

When we get on the bus, all old patterns fall away. Then we are exposed to each other's vulnerability/.../[I]n this bubble, where we stay for nine days together so intensely, there are no preconceived expectations of who will grow into what/.../We just lift them out of everyday expectations, hierarchies, issues of school grades, into a context where you just, and that is not only just, should grow as a human being. (Annelie)

Annelie's description of a 'bubble' fits well into Kverndokk's picture of the Norwegian study trips conducted by an external organisation (2007). He analyses the trip in terms of a liminal phase of a ritual, where time and a space are perceived by the group as separate from the outside world. In the quote, Annelie articulates the school setting as something that has to be removed before the students' process of growing can start. But more important is that Annelie positions herself as together with the students, 'we are exposed', something that an external organiser would not necessarily articulate.

Generally, the Holocaust memorial sites are claimed to evoke strong feelings which, in a dialectic relation to the new social relationships that occur within the group, will serve to deepen these relationships:

[E]arlier it was shallow conversations if we sat down to talk about something. But I feel like the conversations got deeper after the trip/.../And I even think that the students become more open... They could come and tell me about embarrassing things. As they never ever would have told me before the trip. (Vera)

Thus, echoing through the transcripts, is not just a 'during' the trip but also an 'after', focusing on transformed social relationships. This transformation is one of the salient motivators among the informants. In terms of the discursive practice, the study trips are talked about as a vessel for transforming social roles and identities. By connecting the study trip to the school setting, it becomes part of a meaningful process for a professional teacher, although learning processes, i.e. cognitive development, are not in focus.

The informants' emphasis on the social dimension of the study trips also has a societal ambition:

In fact, there are those among our students who are not well off. This is one of the few trips when they have been abroad. So there is this compensatory... We do also have a compensatory task in schools for students, to experience things also... (David)

By using the words 'compensatory task' and by rephrasing into a modality of duty, 'we do also have', David grounds his ambition of social levelling within the notion of the school as

a societal institution. He thereby justifies a focus on economically disadvantaged students. The ambition to broaden the school's institutional potential of societal inclusiveness is articulated in the transcripts:

It has always been fun to bring these school-weary students. Because I have seen so many times how they really...so to say, show a completely different side, show interest and commitment. Usually they unfortunately revert to this school-weariness...ehh, when we are back, but then have...you can talk with them about this trip instead. (Kristoffer)

Besides the fact that Kristoffer values the 'school-weary' students changed learning behaviour during the study trip positively, the shared experience of him and the students is underlined. Kristoffer hesitates, and then rephrases to 'you can talk with them', indicating a new quality to the relationship after the study trip, even if everyday life in school is unchanged for the students.

The focus on social relationships also means that the informants talk a lot about their students' personal growth:

But to be able to get by, be able to fly, be able to catch a train and go to Krakow from the airport, go by tram... Yes, there are many other pieces as well. It is after all, to be an adult in some way. (David)

David identifies practical experiences from study trips as contributing to the students' growth from childhood to becoming an adult. This way of talking about the students requires an approach to how the study trips fit into the students' education in a broader sense that is not connected to specific disciplinary aims:

Ehh... well, yes, the main aim is, I think, always, both with regard to Poland and everything in general, it is about each student's personal growth with this, with the topic that helps them to get there and with all the work we have done until Poland. (Knut)

Knut is not just making the students' personal growth the main aim of the study trips. He also positions the trips as a part of the broader educational context, which 'always' has the same aim as the study trips. The topics in each discipline will thereby be subordinate to the aim of the student's personal growth. Knut, and some of the other informants, therefore mention the potential of replacing the Holocaust memorial sites with, for example, sites of atrocities in former Yugoslavia. As long as the aim of the students' personal growth is maintained, Patricia says, conducting study trips to other sites 'should work. I think. But perhaps it is harder to sell the concept, when it is not that well known. Or, it is well known, but [not] I think among teenagers'. Hence, the 'sell' argument is not the particularity of the Holocaust, but that it is already well-known 'among the students'.

As in the quote, Knut often talks about 'each student' or 'the student', instead of 'students' or 'the students', hereby articulating individuality. Asked about the specific aim of visiting the Holocaust memorial sites, he responds: '... and give a personal experience of the site'. Knut, like the other informants, often refers to his own personal experiences of visiting the Holocaust memorial sites. Thus, a salient rationale of the informants' discursive practice is articulating how the study trips contribute to the personal growth of the students from childhood to becoming adults. The study trips are claimed to contribute to this growth

through their potential to let the students learn about themselves via changed social interactions and the personal experience of visiting the Holocaust memorial sites.

Learning about and from the Holocaust. In the transcripts, the sites are talked about as bringing history alive through concretisation for the students. But even if experiencing the sites via the senses is highlighted as a method of learning, the informants express the limitations of the method. So, what is there to be learned about the Holocaust while on a study trip, according to the informants? Those who try to capture the Holocaust as a concept, not just knowledge about a particular site, describe it as incomprehensible or highly complex. Ellen is among the few informants who, when asked explicitly, elaborates on what can be learned about the Holocaust by visiting Auschwitz:

The whole concept, The Holocaust, is incredible difficult to understand./.../All of this is completely incomprehensible, I think, in one way./.../But, I do not think you can find the perpetrator perspective in Auschwitz./.../No, because there is really nothing that explains why it happens, when you are there. There you see that it did happen. I think. (Ellen)

One important didactic strategy with an explanatory approach in TLH focuses on the agency of the perpetrators and related social mechanisms. According to this strategy, Ellen connects focusing on the perpetrators to the *why* question, but clearly states that nothing about the *why* question can be learned in Auschwitz. This leaves her with the didactic aim of visiting the site to let the students grasp that the Holocaust did happen. This avoidance of focusing on the perpetrators is consistent with relating to the Holocaust as ‘incomprehensible’, but inhibits the explanatory aims of resources and constraints on the perpetrators’ agency, such as political and ideological structures and social psychological mechanisms.

In the transcripts, didactical considerations related to explaining the historical driving forces of the Holocaust are scarcely presented by the informants. Of those who do elaborate on this, Kristoffer mentions in general terms how the Nazis ‘whipped up the antisemitic mood through legislation, and so on. Ehh . . . that is something you cannot have on the trip’.

Two observations are notable. First, the informants, just like Kristoffer, do not articulate the study trips per se as having explanatory aims related to the Holocaust as an historical process. Second, these kinds of aims are vaguely talked about, if talked about at all, even when it comes to preparations for the study trips as well as teaching and learning afterwards. This implies that there is a vast cognitive space for the museums’ guides to fill in. Annelie says: ‘[w]hen we are in the camps, the camps tell their story. The guides point out, these are the facts’. Her wording is of the camp and the guides being a subject that cannot be questioned. Vera describes when the guide stops by the freight car at the unloading platform in Auschwitz-Birkenau:

[T]here might be some more authentic situations to build on. Like if they put X number of wax dolls into the freight car, you would see how crowded it was or, in some way, make it more alive. I understand why they absolutely do not do this, but for the students to understand, I think it would be necessary. Because it was so abstract. (Vera)

Vera does not interrupt the guide, though she recognises that the freight car does not make any impression on her students. When interviewed, she spontaneously suggests that a

solution might be visualising the suffering of the victims, thus illustrating the didactic content that she relates to the purpose of the visit.

Beside the aim of showing that the Holocaust did happen, another aim of the study trips is highlighted by Annelie: ‘One of the aims is that “this should never happen again”. But it is always a balancing act to keep it above the surface. So, it’s not just about history’. Annelie’s use of the metaphor ‘keep it above the surface’, positions the disciplinary content as potent enough to drown the aim of preventing history from repeating itself. In the transcripts, variations of this phrase ‘never happen again’ echo, bridging past, present and future:

The injustices, that it could happen, how it was possible to do these things, what can we do to prevent it from happening again and decisions in today’s society and racism on the whole, xenophobia, structural and individual racism, so, there are many things... (Ingrid)

Ingrid is asked what she thinks motivates the students to learn, and with the use of inclusive ‘we’ her wording is including the students as part of a mankind ‘we’. With this mankind ‘we’, she is moving from the past to action in the present for the future. The ideational content is broad, considering the different phenomena that ought to be targeted to prevent ‘it from happening again’.

Ingrid also has ambitions for her students to act:

Well, one main aim for me is that the students who participate, that they will spread the word and that we will get more students who say ‘stop’ and ‘quit’ in different situations where any form of xenophobia pops up, racism, bullying, harassment and so on, that more people will dare to be active and say ‘stop, this is wrong’. (Ingrid)

Here, the ideational content is broadened even more to preventing bullying and harassment. This aim is supplemented by an aim of disseminating the knowledge gained on the study trips. Consequently, on their return, the students will receive the title of municipal ‘ambassadors’, an action directed at the local community, which also places moral responsibility on the students in the present. This means that selecting students for the study trips is an issue for Ingrid:

This is not a trip for a student with high absenteeism and who needs a second chance, if you see what I mean?/.../This is very high tempo with high demands/.../Because I have experienced many times, that they cannot quite cope with being away from home, with the food and all of that... yes... being away and sleeping in a cabin. There are a lot of those things. And then they cannot absorb the experience./.../you have to think a bit like that. And [being] social and able to be part of a group/.../And then they have to manage to do the presentation. (Ingrid)

The phrase ‘if you see what I mean’ functions as a hedging strategy. This is due to the tension in the quote between the essence of the mission of preventing all kinds of discrimination, and the fact that the participating students are selected according to social criteria. The normative argument is that ‘one must’ consider the social stability of the students if they are going to cope with the study trip, but also the performance of presentation. This is connected to the significance Ingrid places on spreading the message. Ingrid’s wording conveys an urgent concern to get the message through to the students of the importance of acting in the present. This style of talking can be noted among other informants as well,

as an imperative to the individual. Even the very restrained Allan says that one purpose of the study trip is to show the students that ‘choices and individual behaviour have significance’.

The aim of prevention has other implications with respect to what perspective to emphasise at the Holocaust memorial sites: the victim, the bystander or the perpetrator. Annelie mentions Hitler as a cause of the Holocaust but continues:

Well, it is so easy [to say], but that is why we continuously try to connect this to that it matters what you do. By and large. When we stand in Warsaw and look at the remains of the brick walls we tell . . . what we have heard . . . stories we have heard of what it was like. About people outside the ghetto who tried to throw bread inside. We draw, or pace out, in the yard how big a room could be. Then the kids get to stand in there and think ‘This is how many would live in such a room’. (Annelie)

Her didactic strategy is worded as a direct connection with Hitler, as a cause of the Holocaust, and the individual’s responsibility, using her catchphrase ‘it matters what you do’. Then she moves on to give a detailed description of how the students, physically, are positioned in the victim perspective with the intention of letting them explore that perspective mentally. Ellen invokes the rationale of this strategy when the Holocaust is worded as incomprehensible:

The only thing we can, maybe, understand, I think, on these trips, is the victims, in some way. And maybe by feeling empathy for the victims, I can also feel that this is something I do not approve of. (Ellen)

The basic rationale is that the students’ relationship to the Holocaust should be based on strong empathy with the victims, and thereby act in the present for the future. The core is ‘a human mission, or how shall I express this? Democracy making all humans of equal value’ as Ingrid says. This explains why Ellen labels her study trip a ‘Democracy trip’.

To sum up, a salient purpose related to content is promoting positively worded concepts, such as democracy, by using the Holocaust memorial sites as a means of experiencing the suffering of the victims via the senses and representation. The students are then supposed to connect their memories of the sites to the opposite of these positive concepts. Thus, in the transcripts, explanatory learning *about* the Holocaust becomes less salient than learning lessons *from* the Holocaust. Nevertheless, according to the curriculum, the students are supposed to learn about the Holocaust.

Conclusions

To conclude, we would like to shift our gaze from the various discursive practices that are mentioned above, and analytically bring them together in terms of a discursive order that is guiding the informants’ understanding of the meaning-making process in bringing their students to Holocaust memorial sites.

As noted, the teachers are not really focusing on teaching their students about the Holocaust, and to some extent they are not teaching them at all. The teaching is often handed over to local guides at the memorial sites, if not in all cases then in most. The teachers’ aims differ somewhat from what can be expected from teaching about the

Holocaust in the classroom. The teachers take on a role as facilitators of what can be understood as a rite of passage. The evilness of the Holocaust is absent as cognitive content, but is replaced in the form of a socioemotional experience that fulfils two main purposes.

The first is to use the study trips as a vehicle for the social dynamics in the group to evolve in order to promote personal growth for the individuals. Due to the teachers having pre-existing social relationships with their students, they tend to look at what the students can learn about themselves in a different learning environment compared to everyday life in school. This applies, not least, to school-weary students. Furthermore, the teachers articulate an aim of contributing to social inclusiveness and levelling by conducting the study trips. Thereby, there is an implied democratic equality among all kinds of students, including the teacher, when they collectively experience evilness and the importance of democracy on a study trip. Consequently, this purpose functions to improve trust in the school as a democratic institution.

The second salient purpose is to let the students learn about the importance of democracy and human rights. As a prime means for this purpose, the Holocaust memorial sites function as a concrete embodiment of the opposite of democracy and human rights, not primarily as a trigger for cognitive processes about the Holocaust. Instead, experiences at the Holocaust memorial sites are expected to be transformed into action by the students. Therefore, the students are almost imperatively encouraged to spread the message to others and to act against all kinds of violations of human rights. The overarching didactic strategy for the study trips is a consequence of this purpose: focusing on the victims' suffering is meant to evoke empathy among the students. This is intended to teach the students to be aware of and act against all kinds of bullying and harassment. In the end, the rationale is that they will thereby defend contemporary democracy.

In the light of previous research, this study confirms that connecting teaching and learning about democracy to TLH still holds a strong position among Swedish teachers, a decade after the last study (Wibaeus, 2010). The study also shows that this extends to the study trips, enabled by a discursive order which we suggest be termed *ritual democratic catharsis*. The catharsis is a necessity after staring evilness in the eyes when focusing on the suffering of the victims. Democracy offers a safeguard.

We would like to point out that the overarching didactic strategy is questionable considering that the study trips are justified as part of the students' education. First, learning about a paradigmatic historical event, such as the Holocaust, focusing largely on the victims' suffering will leave students with strong emotions. If the study trips devote very limited, or no time at all, to focusing on the perpetrators, there will be no opportunity to learn about the agency of the perpetrators' atrocities. Thus, the perpetrators are hidden behind the mask of incomprehensible evilness. That is why catharsis from evil is needed. However, catharsis is not learning. This means that the underlying social, political and ideological causes and conditions of historical events will not be humanly recognisable which may prevent learning.

Second, since the purposes are the socioemotional process and strengthening democracy, the same didactic strategy could be applied to other contexts. Put simply, one does not need the Holocaust in particular if using this strategy. The frequency of this kind of study trip to Holocaust memorial sites will consequently depend solely on the significance of this genocide's placement within collective memory. However, even if the Holocaust is well known among teenagers, this cannot provide a fundamental argument for study trips from an educational perspective. Arguably, study trips should be conducted as part of students'

education because of the specific teaching and learning that can be achieved at the particular site. To take charge of this grassroots movement's engagement, teacher-training programmes in Sweden that recognise study trips as a specific learning practice and which focus on TLH, not just Holocaust history, should be further encouraged. In addition to this, we would like to stress the importance of keeping the grassroots initiative alive, but also the importance of ensuring that the content of what is taught and how it is taught being in line with Swedish national curricula.

Finally, that Swedish teachers hand over their teaching to other institutions such as museums in foreign countries is worth attention in itself. This study shows that with respect to study trips to Holocaust memorial sites, it must be regarded as a problematical matter, due to the teachers' unreflected relationship to historiographic Holocaust content. Thus, without reflected relationship to the historic content, their teaching during the study trips will be vulnerable to contemporary political influences. In light of the political developments in Poland in recent years, which have resulted in an ongoing discussion on implementing laws regarding the Holocaust memory (Noack, 2018), the teachers' democratic ambitions risk being jeopardised. Conveying a predetermined democratic lesson, on the premises of Holocaust memorial sites, in the absence of the perpetrator's agency, taught by guides who are by law forbidden from providing any critical commentary on their employer, the contemporary Polish state, is hardly a perfect foundation for educating young people.

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