

Study paints vivid picture of Holocaust

By Casey Hana
and Carolyn DeMarco
staff writers

FOUR DECADES have passed since the Holocaust. A full generation insulates today's youth from the horrors of mass genocide in eastern Europe during pre-war and World War II years.

Have things changed? Sidney Bolkosky says not really.

"We live in a world more like that of the perpetrators (of the Holocaust) than of the era preceding it," said Bolkosky, professor of history at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, in pointing to our fast-paced, technology-based society.

"We are all potential victims, and more importantly, we are all potential perpetrators. Jewish and non-Jewish."

Bolkosky is one of three authors of "Life Unworthy of Life," a curriculum on the Holocaust adopted by Oakland Schools for use by the 40 high schools in the intermediate district.

BOLKOSKY AND co-authors Betty Rotberg Ellias, a Southfield-Lathrup High School teacher, and David Harris, social studies consultant for Oakland Schools, introduced the curriculum this fall at a two-day teacher in-service. It was held at the Holocaust Center in West Bloomfield.

Author Bolkosky is considered a Holocaust expert. Ellias, the daughter of survivors, is a member of the Jewish Community Council's Holocaust subcommittee.

Response to the training exceeded expectations, Harris told a group of 23 teachers from public and private schools throughout the area. An additional 34 teachers were trained on a second day.

Farmington's three public high schools were represented in the training, including Al Judge from Farmington High, Richard Steele from Harrison High and Tom Wallis from North Farmington High, according to information from Oakland

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Schools. The three brought back materials from the seminars to each school, according to Oakland Schools' Harris.

JUDITH WHITE, assistant superintendent for staff and curriculum development for Farmington Schools, said a committee is in the process of revising the district's social studies curriculum, but no decision has been made to include the "Life Unworthy of Life" program.

As an intermediate district employee, Harris is consulting with Farmington educators on this social studies curriculum review.

He said if a Holocaust teaching unit is used in Farmington it would most likely be in a Modern World History course. The committee is recommending that such a course be made mandatory for ninth and 10th graders in Farmington schools.

Because such a course would cover the history of the Holocaust time, "they would have to decide how the Holocaust would be handled," he said.

Although introduction of the Holocaust topic has not been formalized in Farmington, the teachers participating in the in-service may already be using materials in their classes, Harris added.

THE DEVELOPMENT of the course began three years ago, when Harris said he was approached by presenters of "a diamond in the rough," the raw material for a curriculum.

Harris helped with revisions and asked for a grant from the Michigan Department of Education to finance



Graphic collages from the students' textbook on the Holocaust are seen behind author Betty Rotberg Ellias during the in-service for 23 area teachers. One goal of the curriculum is for students to be able "to assess the consequences of indifference to the plight of others," Ellias told the group.

the project. It was denied.

Enter the Center for the Study of the Child, a non-profit organization headed by Sidney Lutz of Lutz Associates in Farmington Hills.

Lutz presented seed money of \$250,000 to cover the costs of producing the 318-page teacher manuals, 216-page student textbooks and accompanying 62-minute videotapes. After all costs are paid, future proceeds for sales of the \$250 curriculum package are committed to funding future Holocaust education projects.

Additional support has come from the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit.

Oakland Schools is the first to adopt the "Life Unworthy of Life" curriculum. Plans are under way to introduce it to high schools across the United States. Interest in the curriculum has also been expressed by individuals and organizations in Canada, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Israel.

OTHER HOLOCAUST curricula exist, Bolkosky said, but "there has been no focus except on . . . photographs of atrocities . . . bodies and mass graves, which alienate students, teachers and parents who are 'Holocausted out.' It has been taught poorly."

The story can be told from many perspectives, Bolkosky said — from theologians, psychologists and others.

"Some have emphasized the development of the bureaucratic and technological dimensions. It doesn't mean the many views are true or false, just different. They need to be integrated."

The new curriculum is a multimedia approach.

Videotapes of survivor interviews are fused into the 18-lesson study, which is designed to be integrated into world history courses.

For classes with limited time, the lessons are ranked in importance. A minimum of five 45-minute lessons

are suggested for those that deal with the destruction families and personal responsibility.

TEACHING METHODS can include students staging their own war criminal trials, Nazi rallies and comparing daily activities and calorie intake of prisoners with their own lives.

While the mass genocide of the Holocaust was not unique, Harris said, four features convinced the intermediate school district of the worthiness of creating a project based solely on it:

- The Holocaust was totally involving every realm;
- It was not a barbaric act, but one of advanced death technology;
- Activities were approved by the state; and
- The majority of bystanders were indifferent to the destruction of their neighbors.

"When we speak of dispassionate, indifferent, cold mechanical behav-

ior, we are not talking just about Hitler and the leaders. We are not focusing on them," Bolkosky said.

The Holocaust could not have taken place if 10, or 100, or 1,000 or millions of engineers, plumbers and railroad people had not complied, he added.

A NOTED scholar, Bolkosky said that only 10 percent of employees in the death camps were sadistic brutes. "The rest were normal people. Those are the perpetrators . . . the death camps were built by Ph.D.s, overseen by educated people. That's what makes it different."

"Something happened in the educational system. There was an emphasis on unquestioning obedience to authority. It was out of the question to raise a question. Perhaps developing a healthy, critical mind is a step in the right direction."

"This is not a Jewish issue," Bolkosky added, "it needs to be taught for what it is."

Mercy students take a close look at history



RANDY BOST/Staff Photographer

"The course description said it was going to be a strong, painful course, we knew we would be learning something," said Mercy High student Renee Naud.

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in a World Literature course at the Catholic, all-girls school.

"They're going out of this class knowing more about this one thing than anything else in their lives," said the 20-year teaching veteran, who has taught English at Mercy for the past nine years.

"I'm just convinced that the benefit far outweighs the burden I sometimes feel with it."

USING A combination of historical and personal Holocaust accounts, documentaries, films and discussion, Schusterbauer is bringing the horror of this human devastation to his Farmington Hills classroom. He has guided the girls carefully through the first history, then learning about those involved through literature.

"I want no cheap sentiment," he said, "I want them to eventually feel this pain, to realize, in the end, feel

the horror of this thing."

Students taking the Holocaust course say the grim reality of studying it is different than taking other, upbeat, classes with Schusterbauer.

It was obviously the course of choice for this school year; nearly 240 students — half the junior and senior classes — registered to take it. More students are scheduled to take it this winter.

"I wanted to know how something like this could happen," said Pam Davis, explaining why she enrolled.

"The course description said it was going to be a strong painful course; we knew we would be learning something," said another student, Renee Naud. "It was not as much that we wanted to learn, but felt an obligation to learn."

"It didn't hit home with me before," added Jill Vaquera. "The course makes it more real."

TO GET insight for the course,

Schusterbauer "immersed" himself in Holocaust literature last summer, learning all he could from the growing stack of books and movies.

His son took a similar course at the college level several years ago, which prompted Schusterbauer to design his own, high school-level class.

The course is scheduled to be taught only this year at Mercy, but he hopes it is successful and is allowed to continue in future years.

"It touches everything you do, in a sense," he explained. "I talk to people all the time about it."

AS PART of the course, students watched the movie "California Reich" — the story of a modern West coast family whose lives follow the Nazi mold. The movie disturbed students, and brought the Holocaust experience even closer.

"It's shocking to know now it could happen again," said Ellen Dowley. "These children, 5 years

old, hated Jews but didn't know why."

Now half way through the course, students have learned the history, personal accounts and tragedies surrounding the Holocaust victims. But they have further to go.

"At this point, we're really just begun," said Margie Daniels. "There's a lot more to go in the course and beyond the course for all of us."

Schusterbauer is suggesting his students visit the Holocaust Center in West Bloomfield on their own, after the course is completed.

Most of the students agreed that such a class should be restricted to upperclass members; that it's "not for everybody." They also agreed that all people throughout the world should understand what happened during the Holocaust, to avoid ever having it happen again.

"This is not something to separate us; we should all be educated about it," said Erika Furey.



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