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When antisemitism is left out: Swedish teachers' educational strategies and students' understanding of the Holocaust during a study trip to memorial sites

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ABSTRACT

By deploying critical discourse analyses (CDA) of interviews with teachers and students before, during, and after a study trip to Holocaust memorial sites, and contextualizing the various discursive practices through participant observations, this study terms the regulating discursive order of teachers' and students' talk *decontextualized racist evilness*. The overarching teaching strategy aimed at leveling the gap between past and present to encourage students to act against racism. This study demonstrates how the universalist concept of the Holocaust was linked to the understanding of antisemitism as racist prejudice, among others. Additionally, it shows how the specificity of historical content was rare as was the explanatory teaching. The study indicates that students developed reasoning connected to the "why" question on their own; however, this reasoning was limited because of the lack of explanatory content (e.g., antisemitism). The study argues that study trips may not be legitimized as a prime bulwark against antisemitism.

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Introduction

In democratic societies, education is foregrounded as a vehicle for combatting antisemitism, and particularly high expectations are related to the educational domain of teaching and learning about the Holocaust (TLH):

[T]he underlying principle that teaching and learning about the Holocaust is a primary – even *the* primary – bulwark against antisemitism has become increasingly prominent in recent years. / ... / [It] is frequently used to legitimise educational initiatives, such as taking university staff and students to Auschwitz-Birkenau. (Pearce et al., 2020, p. 151)

If education about antisemitism is focused on in relation to the Holocaust, educational researchers most often argue for addressing antisemitism to develop students' explanatory understanding of the Holocaust (e.g., Foster et al., 2016). It may seem obvious that when teaching about the Holocaust, it is not possible to avoid teaching antisemitism. A recently conducted systematic overview of research on TLH concluded that antisemitism was scarcely addressed by researchers' approaches (Pistone et al., 2021). However, as it also provides insights into TLH practices, the authors suggest that TLH as a practice may be more developed than the research overview indicates.

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Notably, one such TLH practice, frequently conducted within several national contexts, is study trips to the Holocaust memorial sites (Österberg, 2017). Within this practice, Swedish study trips constitute a unique case; nearly one in every four Swedish teenagers has been to Auschwitz in recent years, with the vast majority visiting the concentration camp as part of their schooling (Flennegård, 2018). As Swedish study trips are not regulated by any specific guidelines or curricula, and no dominating external arranger has disseminated a standard program, their development can be understood as a grassroots movement. Additionally, they last for several days, some of them up to 10 days, thereby constituting a significant educational effort driven by dedicated teachers and students (Flennegård, 2018). Therefore, there are reasons to expect such ambitious pedagogical activities to include antisemitism education.

Thus, this study intends to examine which teaching content and strategies, particularly with respect to antisemitism education, are applied within the Swedish TLH-practice study trips to Holocaust memorial sites, and how students' learning and meaning-making processes interact with what is taught.

A multilingual research overview of TLH concludes that “the field needs studies that focus on the meaning that the Holocaust has for teachers and students, how these meanings are constructed and negotiated” (Eckmann & Stevick, 2017, p. 286). Given that Swedish teachers' rationales and teaching strategies have been analyzed (Flennegård & Mattsson, 2021) separately from Swedish students' perspectives (Flennegård & Mattsson, 2023), and in different educational contexts within the practice of Swedish study trips, this study was designed as an in-depth study of one such trip where teachers' and students' shared experiences could be examined. With respect to the scarce research on Swedish study trips, and to shed light on a continuous educational practice, the empirical object was a school that had been a part of the grassroots movement of Swedish study trips for more than two decades. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1 How do teachers talk about the study trip regarding educational content and strategies, particularly antisemitism?

RQ2 What discursive practices emerge in relation to learning and meaning-making processes, particularly with respect to antisemitism?

RQ3 How do students talk about the study trip regarding educational content, and what explanatory understanding do they construct, particularly with respect to the relation between antisemitism and the Holocaust?

This article first provides an overview of previous TLH research, particularly on study trips, which was relevant to the study. Thereafter, data-generating procedures are described, followed by the theoretical and methodological points of departure. Afterward, the data and analysis are presented before conclusions of the findings and a discussion.

Previous research

For more than 30 years, there has been a growing research field accompanying a vivid educational practice that understands TLH as more than learning about a historical event. An international trend of framing education about the Holocaust with democracy and human rights education is noted (Bromley & Russell, 2010). Additionally, societal expectancies place pressure on TLH in relation to this framing (Eckmann, 2015), however, connections between Holocaust history and human rights education might not be sufficiently enunciated for students to understand the links between the different aims of TLH (Eckmann, 2010).

Naturally, universalistic framing has implications for antisemitism education within TLH. Anchoring in large-scale surveys and interviews with English teachers (Pettigrew et al., 2009) and students (Foster et al., 2016), Pearce et al. (2020) state that “[t]he generalised, universal dimensions of these aims [the teachers'] shed some potential light on students' absent knowledge and misunderstandings about antisemitism” (p. 160). Examination of students' answers in the survey demonstrated that only around one in every four students aged 11–16 years knew what the word

“antisemitism” meant (Foster et al., 2016, p. 131). However, most students were aware that Jews were the main victims of the Holocaust. Therefore, the “research revealed a very common struggle among students to credibly explain why Jews were targeted” (Pearce et al., 2020, p. 156). When students focused on the perpetrators in their explanatory understanding, their reasoning resulted in a Hitler-centric mono-causal explanation wherein the persecution of the Jews was a creation of Hitler (Foster et al., 2016).

The many aims of TLH and the universalistic approach are discussed in a similar problematizing manner by Pistone et al. (2021). The systematic research overview demonstrates that in most of the analyzed studies, “antisemitism was rarely defined and that definitions of the term were seldom discussed in the assessment of TLH programs” (p. 75). An important reason, discussed in the report, is the TLH practice’s intention to make knowledge about the Holocaust transferable to the present time. This intention is connected to universalistic concepts to draw lessons from the Holocaust, which risks pushing content out of its historical context. Accordingly, antisemitism is not necessarily part of TLH practice since the focus is on violations of humans in general, not Jewish humans. Another reason is the tendency within TLH to understand the Holocaust through the lens of general racism. Within this approach, color and class are the main categories when power dimensions are examined, and Jews are positioned as “white” and high up in the class hierarchy. Thereby, it is challenging to understand how Jews could be targeted, and the distinctive racial features of the Third Reich are downplayed. Accordingly, antisemitism is understood “as a prejudice among others” (p. 78).

Despite the universalistic turn of TLH practice, national historical culture and political incentives impact Holocaust concepts and narratives (Carrier et al., 2015; Eckmann & Stevick, 2017). Turning to Swedish curricula, education about the Holocaust was introduced in 2000 and has been mandatory ever since. Notably, this applies only to lower secondary school and no definitions of the historical event, nor any other specification, for example, time regulations, are stipulated. Antisemitism is not mentioned explicitly in the curricula (Skolverket, 2000, 2022). As the Swedish school system is highly decentralized, education about the Holocaust is very likely to vary. Regarding previous research on Swedish TLH, a study based on interviews and classroom observations conducted in 2003–2004 thematized five different approaches used by teachers; however, each teacher applied only two of them. The overarching aim was to “connect information of the Holocaust and its history with issues of fundamental democratic values” (Wibaeus, 2010, p. 250). However, the risk of students being left out of explanatory understanding was noted and emphasized by two more recent studies (Alvén et al., 2022; Flennergård & Mattsson, 2021). Another recent study, focusing on students’ discursive practices, indicated that democratic framing has a strong hold on Swedish TLH (Flennergård & Mattsson, 2023). To our knowledge, no previous research has been conducted to examine the relationship between education about antisemitism and Swedish TLH.

From an educational perspective, study trips to Holocaust memorial sites have been analyzed as a specific teaching and learning method. Applicable to this study are studies with an educational perspective on lengthier trips to Holocaust-related sites, including other than concentration and death camps. Within the Israeli context, study trips have been arranged since 1988 for upper-secondary applicants. According to a 2017 research overview, several studies using a cause-effect approach have not demonstrated unambiguous results with respect to study trips being a particularly effective educational method for knowledge acquisition compared to classroom education (Österberg, 2017). Regarding broader educational aspects, a 2012 overview found that programs that included study trips constituted a potential “danger of bypassing cognitive and critical mechanisms” (Ben-Peretz & Shachar, 2012, p. 21).

Studies from a cultural-societal perspective have examined trips as secular pilgrimages. Regarding the Israeli context, an ethnographic study demonstrated that the trips’ content focused on the victims and their suffering, with explanatory approaches less apparent (Feldman, 2010). The role of strong emotions without corresponding cognitive processes has also been demonstrated in a study

of young Jewish people from Toronto (Fanjoy, 2018). Similarly, an investigation of study trips with young Australian Jews concludes that prioritization was on “emotional identification. However, deep learning is less effective” (Alba, 2015, p. 134).

Regarding study trips carried out in a Jewish context, it is reasonable to presume that these trips were constituted by unique features as Jews were the victims of paradigmatic genocide. Notably, an ethnographical study demonstrates how Norwegian study trips, like Israeli trips, were structured as pilgrimages (Kverndokk, 2007). The educational focus was on Jewish victims and their suffering, albeit interwoven with narratives on World War II non-Jewish Norwegian victimhood. Although the prioritized research perspective was not educational, a conclusion with bearing on this study is most important: the focus on the victims’ suffering in combination with the ritual setting led to “a moral obligation to *not* grasp” explanations of the Holocaust (Kverndokk, 2009, p. 79; author’s translation; emphasis in original).

Hence, previous research highlights three main features with bearing on this study: the educational practice of a lengthy study trip conducted by Swedish teachers with their students. First, among the multilevel aims of TLH, democracy and human rights education have increasingly tended to frame education on the Holocaust internationally. Research indicates that such framing has a strong influence on Swedish TLH practice. Second, the TLH intention to draw lessons from the past risks decontextualizing historical content. Thus, particularity, such as the victims being Jews and knowledge about antisemitism, tends to be positioned in the background of educational content. Additionally, antisemitism tends to be understood as prejudice among others, partly as an effect of the intention to counter present-day racism. Thereby, students’ understanding of why Jews became Holocaust victims and perpetrator-related issues tends to be shallow. Third, lengthier study trips might be structured as secular pilgrimages where strong emotions are at play, reasonable due to the victims’ suffering being the focused. That emotional processes do not tend to be integrated with corresponding cognitive processes is indicated by previous research. Thus, as an educational method, study trips tend to not have the desired outcome of deep learning, although strong emotional processes are involved.

Data-generating procedures

The study’s empirical object comprised teachers and students at a secondary school in the rural community Berbo (fictitious name). The school had a two-decade-long unbroken tradition of conducting study trips. Owing to the pandemic, the study trip in focus had to be postponed to the late summer of 2021. In total, 57 students were 15–16 years old, among which 24 were male and 33 were female. Furthermore, six teachers participated in the study: one of them had led all previous study trips, two had experience leading more than eighteen, and three teachers had participated in just a few excursions.

No specific preparational efforts were made in relation to the study trip’s educational content, except for one brief online meeting, when practical matters were mainly brought up. According to the students’ history teacher, who did not participate in the study trip, the students had been taught about antisemitism in school with a focus on the chronology of the Holocaust and the rise of the Third Reich. The eight-day study trip included visits to the former mass killing site at Zbylitowska Góra outside Tárnow, the former Jewish quarter Kazimierz, and the former ghetto in Krakow. Additionally, the group visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The three most experienced teachers guided the students at all sites except for Auschwitz I, where two of the museum’s guides led the divided group on identical tours. A brief evening gathering of 30 min was conducted in the evening before departure from Poland. No follow-up meetings were conducted after the study trip.

The study’s empirical material was generated through participant observations, field interviews, and semi-structured interviews, all conducted by one researcher, who is the author of this article. It comprises elaborate field notes and verbatim-transcribed recordings of field interviews and semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher.

Moreover, 10 weeks ahead of the study trip, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers and four students. The interview guides were developed in relation to the research questions and the researcher's brief knowledge of the program of the forthcoming trip. Within four weeks of the trip, eight interviews with three teachers and five students were administered, and the interview guides were informed by the research questions and field notes from the trip. Altogether, 16 interviews lasting between 20 and 60 min were performed.

The students' history teacher and all the participating teachers were interviewed, either before or after the study trip. Thereby, rich material was generated regarding teaching intentions and teachers' meaning-making discursive practices connected to the study trip in focus, as well as to previous study trips at Berbo. Regarding students' articulations, the material is comparatively less nuanced, due to the large number of participants and the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant limited access to the field before the study trip. As the researcher did not have any interaction with the students before the pre-interviews, the students' history teacher and one of the participating teachers were asked to select four respondents. The intention was to conduct follow-up interviews with these four students after the trip to generate accounts of continuity and change with respect to students' discursive practices. However, as the trip evolved, field interviews indicated other students who articulated more nuanced reflections on teaching content. Thus, the decision was made to interview three of them after the trip to generate a more complex account of meaning-making processes among the students, and to conduct follow-up interviews with only two of the initially selected respondents. Therefore, the material is more restricted with regard to variety of students' expectations before the study trip, compared to experiences articulated afterward.

The field notes comprise detailed information on educational content presented by the teachers throughout the bus journey, at the historical sites, and at the evening gathering. Emphasized and recurrent expressions and phrases were recorded verbatim in the field notes. Additionally, facts about how teachers related to the sites visually, e. g. pointing at a specific detail, were noted. Students' interactions during teaching sessions were rare but recorded verbatim when occurring. The researcher could not observe all conversations related to the educational content that went on between teaching sessions, however, as many as possible were entered in the field notes.

The researcher was not part of the educational team, and did not conduct any educational work before, during, or after the study trip. Since most of the pre-interviews were conducted during one day at the school in Berbo, the researcher moved around among the teachers and students, which meant that initial social contact and conversations were established before the study trip. The aim was to create "a more or less marginal position, thereby providing access to participant perspectives, but at the same time minimizing the dangers of over-rapport and the bias" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 93). As the group was large, the researcher assessed that it was possible to maintain this marginal position throughout the study trip. Most participants generously shared their time to answer questions that were deliberately posed as open questions.

This study was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. Each participant provided written consent to participate in the study. In this article, as in the digital field notes and transcribed interviews, all names were pseudonymized.

Theoretical and methodological approaches

The study's empirical material constitutes an account of Berbo secondary school's work on a particular study trip. It provides insights into the social practice of a study trip that has been developed for more than two decades, as a local variant of the Swedish grassroots movement. As such, the study trip's social practice is framed by the Swedish national TLH discourse. Therefore, as empirical object, Berbo can provide insights into Swedish TLH discourse. Additionally, change and continuity within the tradition of study trips at Berbo secondary school are created and transferred from one year to another, mainly through language connected to the study trip as a repeated social practice. In CDA, the dialectic relationship between language and social life is recognized: "There are reasons

for combining particular signifiers with particular signifieds” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 75). Thus, CDA was applied as the study’s theoretical framework and methodological engine.

In CDA, all communicative events are analyzed as three interrelated layers. The text is the first layer, where all verbal and nonverbal expressions form a coded version of the discursive practice, which is the second layer. When analyzing the discursive practice, producing, consuming, and distributing texts are in focus, particularly in relation to the third layer, the social practice, wherein the discursive practice is anchored. Hence, the discursive practice is viewed as a part of the social practice. From a CDA perspective, the relation between discourse and social practice is understood dialectically; the social practice precedes the discursive practice, hence, constitutes what can be said and how, but the discursive practice then constitutes the social practice. Thereby, discursive and social practices is understood as interrelated in the process of shaping discourses. The agency for actors to create new discourses is recognized by a CDA perspective, which is rooted in critical realism. However, actors’ creative potential is restrained by what is acceptable within the social structure where the communicative event is generated (Fairclough, 2010).

From a CDA perspective discourse has three main functions: creating systems of knowledge and beliefs, social identities, and social relations. These are interrelated, which is important when analyzing a discursive practice within a particular domain, as what is possible to say and by whom is regulated by the hegemonic discursive practice, termed the discursive order, within the domain in focus (Fairclough, 1992).

The study concerns how teachers and students talk about an evolving educational practice; thus, it is the discursive practice that is in focus. However, the discursive practice is contextualized through participant observations; hence, additional attention is paid to the discursive practice as part of the educational practice.

The analysis was conducted in three steps: first, the transcripts of the interviews and field interviews were analyzed regarding the *manifest textual content* with respect to TLH content. Accordingly, keywords and phrases related to constituting Holocaust concepts of Swedish TLH-practice (Flennegård, 2024; Flennegård & Mattsson, 2021, 2023), such as *the Holocaust* (Swedish *Förintelsen*), *Jewish* (Swedish *judisk*), *antisemitism* (Swedish *antisemitism*), *Nazi* (Swedish *nazi*), *victim* (Swedish *offer*), *perpetrator* (Swedish *förövare*), *human* (Swedish *mänsklig*), and *democracy* (Swedish *demokrati*), were identified. Furthermore, according to the field notes the teachers’ talk permeated the teaching sessions, while students’ interactions were rare. During teaching sessions, the teachers often referred to their experiences of previous Berbo study trips. Therefore, the teachers were regarded as the main stakeholders. This was primal for the decision to let the teachers’ talk form the base of the manual analysis. This analysis started with scanning the transcripts of teacher interviews, with respect to what they articulated as main educational content and strategies. Thereby, preliminary educational themes were analytically generated. The themes were hereafter used as preliminary descriptions of main patterns, present within the discursive practice of teachers. Thereafter, the interviews with students were analyzed in relation to the preliminary educational themes, which were then refined. The first theme was termed *Closing the gap* to describe how teaching content was presented to emphasize similarities between past Jewish life in Krakow and the participants life in present Berbo. The second theme, termed *Defining and understanding the Holocaust*, focused how a universalist conceptualization of the Holocaust was linked to the first theme to make students experience immediacy and concern.

Second, field notes were analyzed regarding how the two educational themes related to teaching content, presented during site visits. Hence, the focus was on the use of keywords and phrases as discursive practices; thereby, the production, consumption, and distribution of keywords and phrases as part of the whole educational practice were appreciated.

Third, the analysis focused on *intertextuality*. This step was characterized by recurrent commuting between teachers’ and students’ articulations of the identified keywords and phrases to analyze whether and how the discursive practices was shared by both categories. Additionally, since the use of CDA leaves room for agency, *transitivity* was focused on in the transcripts of the interviews with

students after the study trip. Thus, the relationship between personal pronouns' subject forms, *I* and *we*, and verbs, such as *know*, *understand*, and *feel*, were observed. The analysis concluded that the students positioned themselves as subjects in relation to teachers and educational content, sometimes with elaborate reasoning stemming from particular events during the study trip. Therefore, these transcripts can be viewed as accounts of how students integrated conveyed keywords and phrases related to the Holocaust in their discursive practices when interviewed. The analysis of how the students talked about the Holocaust in the interviews after the study trip highlights how the Berbo tradition will be discursively transmitted to future students, not only by teachers but also by former students in the local community.

Findings

The various discursive practices are presented in the following two sections, each focusing on an educational theme generated by the analysis. Both sections follow the same order. Since the teachers were regarded as drivers of the educational practice, each section begins with a presentation of what the textual analysis of transcripts of teacher interviews generated in relation to the educational theme in focus. Then, based on the field notes, teaching episodes during the study trip are presented, where the discursive practice as part of the social practice is outlined. Each section ends with a presentation of findings of the textual analysis of the transcripts of student interviews.

Closing the gap – “they made a difference. you can make a difference.”

The teachers explicitly expressed what was their intended overarching educational theme:

To absorb that *one person can make a difference*, our theme is that we talk a lot about moral courage and how to *translate this to how it looks today*, and how to use that knowledge in your life. Because the Holocaust is not just about the Holocaust and the history of Jews, it is about *the history of mankind*. (Jens, teacher, emphasis added)

Notably, “One person can make a difference” happened to be the most frequently used phrase in the interviews with teachers in relation to educational content. In this quote, the teacher articulated his interpretation of the phrase as a movement from particularity to universalism, with a nexus between past and present. The nexus constitutes an imperative for the individual to learn from the past and to act with moral responsibility in the present. In the quote, this moral imperative is linked to the universalist conceptualization of the Holocaust.

In the following section, the focus is on how this moral imperative functioned within the discursive practice as part of the whole educational practice. The presentation starts with observations of educational practice at two interrelated site visits, the former Jewish quarter, Kazimierz, and the former Jewish ghetto, conducted one morning.

In the former Jewish quarter in Krakow, Kazimierz, anecdotal facts about pre-war Jewish life were presented. According to the field notes, during the visit to Kazimierz, the overarching teaching approach was to exemplify the violation of humans at the expense of the particularity of what was violated (i.e., the specificity of Jewish pre-war life). According to field notes, no time indications were connected to the events presented. An obvious effect was that the students were not explicitly reminded of the time distance between the historical events and themselves. Another effect was that students became confused about what had happened to the victims and in which order the events had occurred. Additionally, teachers found themselves in problematic situations since they could not explain historical processes because of the lack of time indications. For example, one teacher described how victims were forced into the ghetto and concluded on two different occasions without further explanation: “The Nazis wanted to keep the Jews alive, despite their [the Nazis] intention to kill them. Strange!” (Annelie, teacher). However, chronological precision and historical contextualization were not prioritized in this presentation.

Instead, the emphasis was on “heroes that made a difference” (Stefan, teacher). Notably, four historical characters’ deeds, of whom three were not Jews, to help and rescue Jews during the Holocaust were presented, and the characters’ moral quality was highlighted. Interwoven in the presentations was the recurrent phrase “one person can make a difference.” The tour ended at the former factory of Oscar Schindler where photos of rescued Jews were displayed, and a teacher concluded: “Oscar Schindler was a man who chose to make a difference. You and I have choices to make, both large and small” (Annelie, teacher).

Asked about the balance between presenting historical context and characters’ deeds, the teachers gave their motivation for prioritizing the latter: “I am afraid that historical facts will distance the students. The hard thing is to bring together what happened here and then, with Berbo today” (Annelie, teacher). Thus, the teacher’s strategy, to close the gap between past Jewish Krakow and present Berbo, aimed at helping students to be inspired by the so-called heroes to act with moral responsibility.

Regarding educational practice during the site visits of Kazimierz and the former ghetto, there were no discussion assignments conducted to unpack moral values or stimulate students’ further inquiry. Furthermore, the students asked very few questions when the entire group was gathered. Therefore, students, to a very limited extent, contributed to creating and negotiating shared discursive practices.

The intention to use the nexus between the past and present as a moral imperative was made explicit to the students in a concluding speech on the last evening before the departure from Poland:

One person makes a difference has been the theme of the journey. ... What happened was unique in its systematic, *but in similar ways*, it has happened again. This journey is about sharpening our senses for the future and training us to resist. *A human being* makes a difference. *They* made a difference. You can make a difference as well. (Stefan, teacher, emphasis added)

In the speech, the uniqueness of the Holocaust was touched upon, but a universalistic concept was emphasized with general reference to other historical events. In particular, the word “Jews” was not used, nor was “the Holocaust,” but “human being,” which contributed to a universalistic perspective. The pronoun “they” reasonably referred to the previously termed “heroes” whose deeds were being presented to the students. Regarding what had been taught about the historical characters and the occasion when the speech was held, it is arguable to interpret the speech as sending the students on an individual moral-demanding mission.

According to the field notes from site visits, hotels, and buses, students did not recircle the catchphrase “one person can make a difference,” nor did they make any references to the presented characters’ deeds. Additionally, textual analysis of interviews with students after the study trip showed that they did not talk spontaneously about these issues, which had to be brought up by the interviewer:

Well, I can understand what they [the teachers] mean. If a person rebels against something and succeeds in inspiring others, he can obtain more people for what he wants. However, they can also work poorly at the same time. People who want bad things do so and succeed in attracting those who want to do bad things. So, I think that it could be quite a lot true, but it can be true in both directions. (Helmer, student)

It [to make a difference] was possible for only a few. You must be in a privileged position to make a difference. (Markus, student)

In the first quote, moral responsibility was elaborated upon with the recognition of the alternative to act destructively. Additionally, the responsibility for one’s act was appreciated due to its social implications. However, the reasoning was general and did not refer to the past, as in the second quote, where the relationship between potential to act and the conditions to act was considered. Hence, during the interviews, when encouraged, students started to elaborate on moral issues and could build on the educational content from the study trip.

However, in light of the teaching strategy to close the gap between past and present to convey the moral imperative, students' scarce references to this imperative throughout the analyzed material are notable. This scarcity may partly be a consequence of methodological constraints. After all, the group was large, and only one researcher was involved, which meant that an unobserved talk went on between students and teachers. Notwithstanding, moral values were not intentionally addressed in a systematic fashion, nor were the students encouraged to inquire about the presented historical characters. As the students did not articulate the moral imperative before the study trip, teaching during site visits without inviting students to contribute to the discursive practice was clearly not enough to make the students naturally integrate this way of talking into their discursive repertoire.

Defining and understanding the Holocaust – “sweeping everybody in”

To examine how antisemitism was articulated in relation to educational content, the analysis first focused on teachers' talk about the Holocaust. As indicated by earlier quotes, the teachers' wording was of a general universalistic character. However, teachers formulated more precisely when asked to elaborate on how they conceptualized the Holocaust:

The Holocaust is, after all, the part of the Second World War, which includes the extermination of Jews, Roma, and other people as prisoners of war, and so on. (Lennart, teacher)

Aside from the term “extermination,” teachers appreciated the victims, not the perpetrators and their ideological incentives, when defining the Holocaust. Among the victim groups, Jews and Roma were explicitly mentioned, but without any differentiating comments. Additionally, teachers included many other groups such as “persons with disabilities” and “homosexuals” (Jens). The phrase “and so on” in the quote helped keep the teachers' definition of the Holocaust wide. The readiness to expand the victim category played out in the quote; although the Holocaust was worded as a specific phenomenon within the Second World War, prisoners of war were paradoxically articulated as victims of the Holocaust. Thus, similar to what was demonstrated in the analysis of teaching strategies at visited sites, historical precision was not a salient feature of teachers talking about conceptualizing the Holocaust. Instead, the tendency was to expand the concept with respect to different groups targeted by the Third Reich, without considering on what premises these groups were persecuted and perished.

One might ask how this leveling of differences between targeted groups can be understood in relation to the aims of the study trip:

In general, we talk a lot about people who do not fit within the norm because, I mean, there was a Nazi norm. To hate or think that people outside the norm are not worth living is something that students can easily relate to. (Stefan, teacher)

The aim is to counteract racism and exclusion. (Lennart, teacher)

In the first quote, an assumption of students' readiness to relate to being left outside was used as a motivation for what aspects of historical content to emphasize. The rationale seems to be that the presumed similarities between the students and victims of the Holocaust should be stressed. Therefore, historical precision with respect to victims would be an obstacle. In the second quote, to counteract present “racism” was presented as a prime aim. The broad concept of “racism” can be related to antisemitism, which warrants a textual examination of how these two concepts are related within the teachers' discursive practice:

We do not put much effort into it [antisemitism]. They talked about this aspect in school. They sort of know what antisemitism means. I rarely use the term during the trip. However, we often talk about racism. ... Because antisemitism is more specific. (Stefan, teacher)

In general, a universalistic conceptualization of the Holocaust, which avoided precision with respect to Jews as a targeted group, was coherent with avoiding the appreciation of antisemitism. Another teacher said:

We do not talk much about the term antisemitism, specifically. We discuss the equal values of all humans more. ... I do it from the aspect that *the color of your skin*, or your religion, does not matter. ... I also think that the reason why I have not focused on or used that word [antisemitism] is that we have had Roma students with us over the years. We have, and we will have, students who are insecure about their sexuality or who are openly homosexual or asexual. It is really about *sweeping everybody in*. ... It is as if the Holocaust was not about them. (Annelie, teacher, emphasis added)

It is reasonable to conclude from the textual analysis that, in teachers' discursive practice, the intention to emphasize humans' equal value positioned antisemitism in the background and gave priority to the wider concept of racism; the latter concept simply relates to more groups. This interpretation is indicated in the quote by the phrase "the color of your skin." Perhaps more revealing is the quote's second part. The teacher assumed that students would experience exclusion from the content based on their individual ethnic or sexual identification if antisemitism was brought up; thereby, the teacher said she avoided specificity. One might ask, why would students experience exclusion? Reasonably, only if the focus was solely on the victims, not on disclosing the perpetrators' stereotypes of the victims. As the sites represented Jewish victims, it had meant explanatory teaching about antisemitism. However, antisemitism was not a useable concept to build upon within the teachers' discursive practice; it would have been too specific if the strategy was "sweeping everybody in," according to the teacher's comment.

Concerning field notes, the analysis confirmed what could be expected from the teacher interviews: no observation of the educational practice where "antisemitism" was mentioned. However, since the use of the concept of antisemitism to some extent must consider perpetrators' ontology, the presence of perpetrator-related episodes during site visits could be of particular interest. However, the focus on victims was maintained throughout the study trip. This orientation of the educational practice interplayed with the discursive practice and became particularly constraining on some occasions (e.g., at the unloading platform in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where one of the teachers guided the group):

If we look at the unloading ramp, we can see a freight car. The museum placed it afterward. *Here were also those who decided who would live and who would die. Who were they ... those who were murdered immediately?* (Stefan, teacher, emphasis added)

The hesitation, the three dots in the quote, can be interpreted as a hinge where the teacher seems to reflect on whether to follow the implication of the quote's third sentence. However, the hinge is utilized to close the door to a different perspective, one that could shed light on explanatory approaches to the Holocaust (i.e., focus on the perpetrators). Moreover, one teacher told the students about a meeting with a survivor in Auschwitz-Birkenau some years earlier: "I told the man that I traveled with students who tried to understand *what is not possible to understand*" (Annelie, emphasis added). Thus, the Holocaust as a historical event was articulated as *not possible to understand*.

Turning to students' talk, it mirrored the teachers' with respect to mentioning different categories of victims. Students did not spontaneously bring these categories up when asked to define the Holocaust but used general references such as "they," "them," "all," and "people":

It [the Holocaust] was, after all, exterminating people because they needed to be purebred. Well, Hitler became a ruler at that time. He wanted it to be only *white* people of pure race. Anybody who was different in their own way he considered to be a pariah. (Saga, student, emphasis added)

Unlike the teachers, the students involved "Hitler" in their concept of the Holocaust and attributed this pronoun to a causal position, an observation with bearing on what will furthermore be said about explanatory approaches. Concerning the analysis of teachers' talk about racism, the quote indicates that students discursively recircled the term. However, applying a present and rather shallow meaning to the concept of racism led to misleading students' understanding of the premises of why the Third Reich targeted different groups.

A most relevant aspect of this study was to analyze if, and how, students articulated knowledge about antisemitism. According to the textual analysis of the entire material, students did not

spontaneously bring up the term. When asked if they had heard the word, some said, “it is not something I recognize” (Hugo), while others said it meant “hatred against Jews” (Robert). It should be stressed that the students’ reasoning in many aspects of the interviews was exuberant. However, they just did not use the term “antisemitism,” the concept was absent or, more precisely, incorporated into “racism.” The interviews also generated occasions for reflecting on the educational content in general:

There is not much to explain. These people [perpetrators] were not completely healthy. Well, I think of Hitler. ... However, it is almost the same as racism. (Abir, student)

We never talked about how just a regular Nazi helped them [perpetrator leaders] throw the victims on the train. We do not really say why. ... What I do not understand is how can you get an entire people to annihilate them [victims] out of pure hatred. ... Why? I do not know, it is ... well ... It is the most incomprehensible thing that has happened anyway. (Tilda, student)

You think of those who were murdered and those who were exposed to it. However, you also think backward. Then, you think of those who ... killed them, those who did this. How did they experience it? (Robert, student)

The first quote illustrates how students lack broader explanatory approaches, such as antisemitism, and refer to Hitler and perpetrators in a way that makes it possible to distance themselves. These kinds of explanations often used the term “brainwashed” to describe how those other than Hitler contributed to the Holocaust (e. g. Helmer, student). The point is, that, although narrow, students constructed a causal chain from insanity via Hitler to other perpetrators, implying that present problems such as “racism,” like in the first quote, could be explained in the same way. In the second quote, the student did not distance herself from the perpetrators. Instead, a struggle to understand was articulated after recognizing the educational content’s lack of explanations of driving forces, and an engaged search for a broader and deeper understanding developed. However, it ended with recircling the teachers’ discursive practice of the Holocaust as “incomprehensible” (Annelie, teacher). The third quote demonstrates how students can think of the perpetrator’s state of mind even when the focus is victim-centered. In an interview after the study trip, one student described how thoughts about perpetrators had generated questions during the visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum:

Interviewer: Why do you think of them [perpetrators]?

Hugo: Once you were there, it kind of made you think about it.

Interviewer: Can you say that ... have you reached any answer to those questions?

Hugo: No, I mean; these were questions that were sort of spinning in my head. It was not something I asked anyone about or anything else.

Interviewer: No.

Hugo: Some questions may not even have answers.

In the quote, the student commented that he did not express his thoughts and questions to “anyone.” However, the student’s last reply indicates how his silence became meaningful to him within the context of this study trip. Why ask questions if there are no answers (i.e., if the teachers say the Holocaust is incomprehensible)?

In summary, by emphasizing universal features, the teachers’ articulated definitions of the Holocaust corresponded to the strategy of closing the gap between the past and present. The strategy builds on leveling differences between targeted groups to convey concepts of the Holocaust as a crime committed on the premise of the utmost possible broadly defined racism. Hence, no room for antisemitism is reserved in educational practice. Any invitation to more precise questions related to why the Holocaust happened was blocked within this discursive practice, by articulating the Holocaust as inexplicable. Second, although the students did not contribute much to the shared discursive practices during site visits, their way of talking in the interviews after the study trip, about the Holocaust as a racist crime, reflected the teachers’ definition. This conclusion is supported by the fact that students seemed to believe that Jews were persecuted because they had different skin

colors. Third, in the discursive practices developed in the interviews after the study trip, students articulated an appreciation of explanatory understanding. Accordingly, they based their talk on reflections on perpetrators during site visits, despite the educational content being heavily focused on victims and the fact that perpetrator-related perspectives were distinctively absent. In the absence of the concept of antisemitism, as well as any causal factor for the Holocaust other than Hitler's will, the students could not develop their understanding further. Instead, the articulation of the Holocaust as inexplicable could offer an end to their reasoning.

Conclusions and discussion

From a CDA perspective, one ought to reflect on the presented discursive practices to analyze them in terms of an eventual discursive order that offers and regulates meaning-making processes to teachers and students.

As noted, the overarching teaching strategy was to ease students' content absorption by minimizing the historical context and specificity. Therefore, the universal concept of the Holocaust was articulated so that the historical event could be presented as a result of general racism. The strategy aimed to encourage students to act morally responsible in relation to present-day racism. Thus, from the perspective of this aim and the applied strategy, emphasizing that Jews were the prime victims targeted by the Third Reich and that antisemitic beliefs were a driving force to the Holocaust, would direct students' attention to particularity and historical context. Although the educational practice was discursively dominated by teachers' talk, the students by and large integrated the teacher's way of talking about the Holocaust.

However, the students' elaborations on the "why" dimension of the Holocaust, such as perpetrator-related reasoning, indicate the limitations of the Berbo educational practice's aim and overarching strategy. Some students believed that the victims were persecuted because they did not have light skin, a misconception disguising significant features of national socialist ideology. Furthermore, without any explanatory approaches presented to them, except general racism, students mentioned Hitler's will as the only driving force for the Holocaust. Being perhaps the most problematic issue from an educational perspective, students integrated the offered discursive practice of conceptualizing the Holocaust as inexplicable. The combination of the discursive practices of (1) articulating the victims' suffering as the significant issue to concentrate on, (2) the continuity of racism, and (3) Hitler's will as the single causal factor of the Holocaust, made antisemitism irrelevant. Therefore, it was left out. With respect to this way of understanding the "what" and "why" dimensions of the Holocaust, the suggestion is to term the discursive order that guides the teachers' and students' meaning-making processes as *decontextualized racist evilness*.

Considering previous research, this study of the Swedish TLH-practice study trips to Holocaust memorial sites demonstrates that humans' equal value, one tenet of democratic framing of the Holocaust, is at the core of the educational practice. In this case, antisemitism as educational content was deliberately pushed out of the educational context. Hence, the findings confirm the strong democratic framing of Swedish TLH (Flennegård, 2024; Flennegård & Mattsson, 2021, 2023; Wibaeus, 2010), adding to countering racism as a salient aim of this framing. The findings also indicate, that the neglect of research on education about, and prevention of, antisemitism, found in the systematic research overview (Pistone et al., 2021), corresponds to the practice. This in-depth study demonstrates how TLH connected to a study trip is made possible and carried out when antisemitism education is left out. Additionally, it indicates that a completely victim-centered teaching approach risks opting out of explanatory approaches. In this case, learning, in terms of cognitive processes, was blocked by the discursive order that conceptualized the Holocaust as inexplicable, which corresponded to maintaining the focus on the victims.

Concerning the findings, it is questionable whether study trips for students to Holocaust memorial sites should be legitimized as a specific educational method that constitutes a bulwark against antisemitism. As with many other educational activities, the study trips are embedded in didactics

and pedagogics, where the discursive practice is an essential part of the whole educational practice. If students are not systematically invited to contribute to and negotiate the discursive practice, the potential to encourage further inquiry to challenge the discursive order will not be addressed. Thus, from a CDA perspective, the discursive order will heavily influence not only what is brought to the sites, but also what the students will and will not bring back home. In other words, if antisemitism in a wider society is understood solely as a form of racism among others, teachers must be educated to appreciate the distinct features of antisemitism and how to convey the historical context of the Holocaust. Only then will the potential of transferring relevant conclusions from the Holocaust to the present time be taken care of.

Another implication of the study is the relevance of the findings for both researchers and practitioners interested in studying trips for students to memorial sites. Visiting historical sites may be an impressive way of conceptualizing the “what” dimension of past atrocities. However, even if not addressed by the teaching, understanding of the “why” dimension will be stimulated, and students start to elaborate on what they know. An aspect of this dimension is “why the Jews?” At this critical moment of the learning process, practitioners’ relationship to the purpose of the study trip will be challenged, and they must opt for complexity or inexplicability. Choosing the former alternative contributes to demystifying the Holocaust, however demanding it may be.

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