



HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN ADDRESSING ANTISEMITISM IN AUSTRALIA

Professor David Slucki
Dr Lauren Chalk
Noè Harsel
Yaffa Bart

MONASH
INITIATIVE FOR
RAPID RESEARCH
INTO ANTISEMITISM
(MIRRA)

MIRRA



MONASH
University

AUSTRALIAN
CENTRE FOR
JEWISH
CIVILISATION

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Monash University
www.monash.edu
mirra@monash.edu

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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

This qualitative research project forms part of the *Monash Initiative for Rapid Research into Antisemitism* (MIRRA), established in response to the rise in reported antisemitism in Australia after 7 October 2023.² The initiative aims to generate timely insights from key stakeholders across diverse professional sectors in Australia, recognising the urgent need for informed responses to antisemitism as a live issue.

This research project – *Holocaust Education and its Role in Addressing Antisemitism in Australia* – examines the current state of Holocaust education in Australia, with particular attention to its part in addressing contemporary antisemitism. It draws on interviews with educators, researchers and practitioners working in Holocaust education for predominantly non-Jewish audiences.

Today, Holocaust education in Australia takes place across a wide range of settings, including classroom-based programs in both Jewish and non-Jewish schools, university teaching, museum education and other commemorative initiatives. At the university level, a select number of institutions offer courses on the Holocaust, either as part of broader Jewish or genocide studies programs or through dedicated Holocaust-focused study.³ In secondary schools, Holocaust education is currently mandated within the History curriculum in both Victoria and New South Wales, following its formal incorporation into state curricula in 2020 and 2024, respectively.

Curriculum delivery is supported by programs offered by outreach organisations, such as [Courage to Care](#); professional development programs, namely the [Gandel Holocaust Studies Program for Australian Educators](#); and cultural heritage institutions dedicated to Holocaust commemoration and education, including the [Melbourne Holocaust Museum](#), the [Sydney Jewish Museum](#) and the [Adelaide Holocaust Museum](#). In addition, there are newer Holocaust education centres in Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania. The Australian Government is also supporting the development of a National Holocaust Education Centre in Canberra. Together, they form the collaborative network, the Australian Holocaust Museum Alliance (AHMA).

Through conversations with key stakeholders, our research seeks to capture the spectrum of Holocaust education in Australia. This includes museum contexts, university settings, secondary school classrooms (through curriculum and outreach programs), professional development for educators and research on Holocaust education itself. Some contexts, however, are more central to our analysis, and therefore feature more prominently in our key findings and recommendations.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report presents findings from in-depth interviews with 25 educators, scholars and museum professionals who are experts in Holocaust education. Participants include researchers working within university contexts, including those currently engaged in ongoing studies measuring the outcomes of Holocaust education in Australia, as well as representatives of Holocaust education programs and related organisations, including Holocaust and Jewish museums in Australia. They are teaching predominantly non-Jewish audiences about the Holocaust. As leading voices in the field, they are actively shaping discussions on effective pedagogies and informing both scholarly and public discourse on the role of Holocaust education in society today, as well as its key challenges and opportunities.

Drawing on their professional experiences and scholarly perspectives, participants were invited to reflect on the current state of Holocaust education in Australia. To situate these perspectives within a broader transnational context, we also interviewed Holocaust scholars and educators from the UK and USA, engaging with leading centres in both Holocaust and antisemitism education. The discussions that unfolded during the interviews, including those about the role of Holocaust education in combating antisemitism, have gained renewed urgency in recent years. So too have calls for education frameworks to be expanded to address how antisemitism emerges in Australia. Our research contributes to the broader conversation on the relationship between Holocaust education and efforts to combat antisemitism, against the backdrop of the rise in antisemitic incidents in Australia (see: ECAJ 2025).

Designed to support those shaping and delivering Holocaust education through policy and practice, this report provides evidence-based insights to guide the development of robust frameworks for teaching the Holocaust and addressing contemporary antisemitism. In doing so, it seeks not only to support the education sector, but also to contribute to an informed public discussion that has become increasingly urgent.

ABOUT THE EVIDENCE

This report is based on interviews with 25 educators, scholars, museum professionals and practitioners working in Holocaust education in Australia and internationally. It captures expert reflections on the current state of Holocaust education and its relationship to contemporary antisemitism. Each interviewee was selected for their expertise in a specific area of Holocaust education, providing depth and specialist insight relevant to the study. The findings should be read as a thematic account of sector perspectives, not as a representative survey of all Holocaust education programs, educators or organisations in Australia.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AND ANTISEMITISM**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report captures a sector thinking carefully about its purpose, limits and responsibilities after 7 October, amid rising antisemitism in Australia and heightened public debate about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Our research reflects on Holocaust education as a response to antisemitism, while also contributing to a clearer understanding of the relationship between Holocaust education and efforts to address antisemitism.

While the relationship between Holocaust education and antisemitism prevention is often treated as self-evident (Kressel & Kressel 2016; Witherow-Culpepper & Williams 2025), this report shows that it is, in fact, frequently questioned and often contested by those responsible for delivering that very education. While remaining strongly committed to this work, many participants interviewed for this research questioned whether Holocaust education alone can meet the expectations placed on it.

The burden of addressing antisemitism cannot sit squarely on the shoulders of Holocaust educators, and when it is seen to be part of the solution, it needs to be deployed in very deliberate ways.



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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Several key findings, drawn from conversations with our research participants, provide essential context for examining contemporary Holocaust education in Australia, and for understanding the challenges faced by those working and conducting research in this field. These include the challenge of reconciling the recent conflict in Gaza with current teaching and learning practices, while responding to the context of heightened antisemitic incidents and discourses following 7 October.

These interrelated themes establish the context for this research and highlight the central issues it addresses. They also bring attention to broader and longer-term conceptual, pedagogical and practical challenges in Holocaust education, such as the dwindling number of Holocaust survivors available to deliver programming in museum and outreach programs, which has been a core part of how Holocaust education has been delivered in Australia to date.

These key findings apply across all contexts in which Holocaust education occurs in Australia. However, some findings speak more directly to the structural challenges of teaching the Holocaust in formal education settings, particularly in secondary schools and universities (see Key Finding 6).

KEY FINDING 01

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AFTER 7 OCTOBER

The rise in antisemitism following 7 October 2023 has prompted significant reflection within the field of Holocaust education in Australia, with many educators and practitioners questioning the effectiveness of education and confronting a sense of uncertainty about current approaches. Participants described a moment of reckoning in which they raised concerns about gaps in practice and felt scepticism regarding whether decades of Holocaust education had resulted in measurable declines in antisemitic sentiment in Australia. This finding informs our recommendation for stronger evaluation of how audiences engage with this material and the extent to which it shapes their understanding of antisemitism (see Recommendation 8).

Educators face growing pressure to address contemporary issues, particularly the Israel-Palestine conflict, while attempting to avoid politicisation and remaining aligned with their institutional missions. This has revealed a spectrum of approaches across the sector, alongside tensions about scope, responsibility and consistency, highlighting the need for clearer top-level frameworks to guide how Holocaust education engages with contemporary antisemitism. We recommend clearly defining the role of Holocaust education in a top-level educational framework to help reduce uncertainty, particularly during periods of crisis (see Recommendation 1).

KEY FINDING 02

PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF ANTISEMITISM

Participants described antisemitism as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, which resists a singular definition and instead encompasses a range of attitudes, behaviours and expressions. Divergent perspectives emerged on key issues, including the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, and whether antisemitism should be understood as a distinct form of hatred or as part of broader patterns of racism in Australia. Overall, participants emphasised the importance of conceptual clarity, recognising that different forms of antisemitism require distinct analytical and educational responses, and that how antisemitism is defined directly shapes how Holocaust education is approached.

Differing understandings and conceptualisations of antisemitism among participants, often shaped by lived experience and pedagogical training, carry important implications for Holocaust education practice. With many participants drawing on personal or familial connections to the Holocaust, often their identity or background informed both their engagement in the field and their commitment to addressing antisemitism.

Regarding the question of whether Holocaust education can address the full spectrum of anti-Jewish attitudes and behaviours, or if it should focus on a particular expression or manifestation of antisemitism in Australia: We recommend first clarifying which forms or manifestations of antisemitism are being addressed through Holocaust education in contemporary Australia. For instance, can teaching about the Holocaust build understanding of enduring antisemitic tropes and stereotypes, thereby helping students to understand the continuities between historical and contemporary forms of antisemitism, including the ways some contemporary political discourses surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict may cross into antisemitism?

Greater conceptual precision is necessary to ensure that educational approaches are appropriately targeted and effective, and to determine whether different forms and expressions of antisemitism should be addressed outside of Holocaust education frameworks (see Recommendation 3).

KEY FINDING 03

WHY TEACH THE HOLOCAUST?

Participants expressed broad agreement that the Holocaust should be taught for its importance as a historical subject and its lessons for contemporary society. The range of learning objectives or aims identified by participants, including fostering social cohesion, developing critical thinking skills and promoting citizenship within a multicultural society, reflect broader trends toward the universalisation of Holocaust memory and education.

There was less consensus on its primary purpose and its role in addressing contemporary antisemitism. While some view Holocaust education as essential to this end, others questioned its effectiveness across the diverse forms that antisemitism takes today, emphasising the need for greater conceptual clarity and more targeted approaches (see also Key Finding 02). For many participants, Holocaust education was seen as one important tool among many, but insufficient on its own to address contemporary forms or iterations of antisemitism. This finding informs our recommendation for a broad, holistic framework that incorporates clear aims for teaching and learning about the Holocaust in Australia today (see Recommendation 1).

KEY FINDING 04

MAKING HOLOCAUST HISTORIES RELEVANT IN MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

Some participants highlighted the need to maintain the relevance of Holocaust education for the Australian Jewish community, which is largely shaped by the histories of the Holocaust and ongoing experiences of antisemitism. However, and as noted by a number of interviewees, Holocaust education in Australia is seen as most effective when it is outward-facing and relevant to non-Jewish, multicultural audiences, helping students see its connection to their own lives rather than as distant European history.

Educators emphasised adapting teaching approaches to diverse classroom backgrounds and using personal stories, especially survivor testimonies, to foster emotional engagement, though this is becoming more challenging as the number of Holocaust survivors declines. At the same time, there are concerns about over-reliance on Holocaust narratives to represent Australian Jewish identity or counter antisemitism, which can limit understanding of Jewish life and contemporary forms of antisemitism itself.

Participants also highlighted the need to balance universal lessons (e.g. connections to other genocides and human rights issues) with maintaining the Holocaust's specifically Jewish context. Overall, there is a need to ensure relevance by finding ways to connect historical events to present-day Australian society without inappropriately leveraging the histories of the Holocaust.

This finding informs our recommendation for further research on antisemitism in the Australian context. This includes student and audience feedback and evaluation of different pedagogical models to determine how best to teach about the Holocaust in culturally diverse and multicultural settings (see Recommendation 8). This could help assess, for example, the effectiveness of team-teaching models that pair Jewish and non-Jewish educators and volunteers when engaging primarily non-Jewish audiences (see Recommendation 7). Research and evaluation are also needed to determine whether education programs that showcase Australian Jewish identity and community are more effective than those that focus explicitly on teaching about antisemitism (see Recommendation 8).

KEY FINDING 05

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

The recent conflict in Gaza has introduced new challenges for Holocaust education in Australia. This includes intensifying uncertainty, discomfort and hesitation among educators and volunteers to respond to questions from museum audiences and students, particularly in increasingly politicised classrooms and university environments. This has exposed gaps in educator confidence, training and guidance, as well as the emotional and professional strain placed on staff and volunteers in museums and educational outreach organisations, and teachers in universities and schools. Overall, participants' observations underscore the need for greater support, clearer pedagogical frameworks and careful consideration of how (or whether) contemporary conflicts should be incorporated into Holocaust education across the diverse range of delivery settings.

This finding informs our recommendation to create interactive, collaborative spaces for practitioners, researchers and institutions to share strategies, build mutual understanding and draw on collective expertise when navigating periods of tension and sensitive geopolitical events, including the Israel-Palestine conflict (see Recommendations 2, 4 and 5).

KEY FINDING 06

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES OF TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST IN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

Participants identified a range of structural challenges shaping the delivery of Holocaust education in schools and universities, including limited time, competing demands on educators and the complexity of the subject itself. These constraints, combined with the proliferation of antisemitism online and the overwhelming volume of online content about the Holocaust, can hinder effective teaching and risk reinforcing misconceptions if not carefully addressed.

A key concern was the gap between the mandated inclusion of Holocaust education in curricula and its inconsistent implementation, often due to a lack of clear guidance, training and defined objectives from the top down. For this reason, participants emphasised the need for stronger coordination and strategy to ensure consistent professional development and quality across regions (see Recommendation 1). This ensures greater support for educators, particularly in less resourced contexts, and more robust evaluation of current approaches.

Another concern raised by participants in curriculum-based education relates to the risks of teaching the Holocaust poorly — particularly in educational settings where antisemitic incidents and discourses are evident (see Blueprint Institute 2024). In Australian secondary schools, for example, there is a need for training and safeguarding policies that address antisemitism as part of broader inclusion and anti-racism frameworks within educational institutions to safeguard Jewish students. Antisemitism awareness cannot be addressed solely through curriculum teaching alone (see Recommendation 9).

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are informed by the key findings that emerged from our conversations with stakeholders. Several of these insights were expressed directly by participants in response to questions about the future of Holocaust education in Australia. These recommendations see educators as the experts in this field, underscoring the fact that they know what they need to effectively engage their audiences and navigate challenges.

The interviews were highly consistent, highlighting the strong calibre of Holocaust educators and researchers in Australia who are well-informed by the latest developments in scholarship, practice and research. Crucially, what emerges from these interviews is an unspoken need to give practitioners in Holocaust education the space to reflect carefully on its future directions.

Our recommendations apply across all contexts in which Holocaust education occurs, with some recommendations applying to the sector as a whole (see Recommendations 1, 2 and 4) or speaking to the opportunity for cross-sector collaboration (see Recommendations 7 and 8).

RECOMMENDATION 01

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK WITH SHARED GOALS FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

A national framework for Holocaust education that establishes shared aims and standards would allow for consistent yet tailored approaches reflecting the diverse social and cultural contexts of Australian classrooms and local communities. This framework should clearly define the rationale and relevance of Holocaust education in multicultural Australia, including its role in educating about or preventing antisemitism. This national effort could be established and administered by the Federal Government, in collaboration with and building on existing structures such as the Antisemitism Education Taskforce (established as part of the Australian Government's response to the Special Envoy's Plan), the Australian Holocaust Museum Alliance (AHMA), and through consultation with other relevant stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION 02

STRENGTHEN MULTI-ORGANISATIONAL NETWORKS TO DELIVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

A coordinated approach within the Holocaust education sector creates spaces for educators, researchers and institutions to share strategies, build mutual understanding and draw on collective expertise while maintaining their distinct roles. This approach ensures that Holocaust education in Australia is responsive to local contexts and audiences, while remaining informed by existing capacities and networks, such as the Gandel Holocaust Studies Program for Australian Educators, the AHMA, and university-based expertise through consultation with Holocaust education scholars and researchers.

RECOMMENDATION 03

EDUCATION AIMED AT ANTISEMITISM PREVENTION SHOULD BE DISTINCT FROM TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

Education aimed at antisemitism prevention should be developed as a distinct focus separate from, or in addition to, teaching and learning about the Holocaust. A clear thread from participants was the importance of not relying solely on Holocaust education to address or teach about antisemitism, nor of using it as the primary means of improving cultural awareness of the Australian Jewish community among non-Jewish audiences.

RECOMMENDATION 04

TRAIN HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS ON HOW TO NAVIGATE COMPLEX DISCUSSIONS ON THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Contemporary antisemitism education should include guidance on how and when Israel-related discourse might become antisemitic, while maintaining space for criticism of Israeli Government policies and actions and careful discussion of Palestinian experiences of victimhood. Any educational effort to address antisemitism must engage with this dimension thoughtfully and with care.

Many interviewees expressed caution about drawing analogies, or even creating space for such comparisons, between the Holocaust, contemporary antisemitism in Australia and the recent conflict in Gaza. They acknowledged, nonetheless, that both students and teachers (in university, classroom, museum and outreach settings) had questions about the relevance of learning about the Holocaust after 7 October 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 05

FACILITATE SPACES FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND QUESTIONS AMONG EDUCATORS AS PART OF TRAINING

Create interactive and collaborative spaces where educators can raise concerns, ask challenging questions and identify gaps in their knowledge or practice when teaching about the Holocaust. This creates space to question commonly held assumptions about how effectiveness is measured, while also providing an opportunity to collaboratively re-evaluate existing pedagogical approaches and close feedback loops.

Collaborative spaces help close the feedback loop for educators who may already be engaged in professional development and training, and are aware of existing support materials. As one participant, an educator and researcher on Holocaust education in the UK, noted: “Training isn’t just telling [teachers] what to do. It’s [about] holding discussions, sharing problems, validating the challenges that they’re facing. That is empowering – to sit down to work with specialist trainers, to talk through some of the challenges, even if the answers aren’t clear.”⁴ Training ought to incorporate reflexive exercises enabling educators, from museum volunteers to classroom teachers, to critically consider how their identities or positionalities shape their educational practice.⁵

Participants who are not frontline educators, but who inform Holocaust education through their research, scholarship or professional work, also identified a need for forums of their own to grapple with difficult questions in order to better support educators, students and non-Jewish audiences.

RECOMMENDATION 06

PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT AND RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS

This recommendation applies to staff and volunteers who facilitate Holocaust education programs in museum settings and through outreach organisations, secondary school teachers delivering curriculum in classroom and school contexts, as well as academics teaching about the Holocaust in university settings. This recommendation relates to [Holocaust Education Australia](#), a recently launched, government-backed digital platform that supports secondary school teachers with ready-made lesson plans designed to facilitate meaningful conversations connected to contemporary Australian society. Support might otherwise take the form of increased opportunities for professional development.

Complex and sensitive topics can generate anxiety for educators, particularly when they anticipate difficult or confronting questions. This underscores the need for stronger support structures for those engaged in frontline educational work, including the creation of safe and supportive working environments for staff and volunteers. It is especially important to recognise and support Jewish educators, who are often at the forefront of addressing antisemitism and who may carry an added emotional and professional burden in delivering Holocaust education.

RECOMMENDATION 07

MODEL SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST

Efforts to teach the Holocaust may benefit from team-teaching models that pair Jewish and non-Jewish educators and volunteers together. Interviewees noted that Jewish educators often bring lived experience and authenticity, while non-Jewish educators focus on making the material accessible and relevant to broader audiences. To evaluate the effectiveness of this recommendation, however, we recommend further research into pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning about the Holocaust (see Recommendation 08).

RECOMMENDATION 08

PRODUCE FURTHER RESEARCH ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Despite feelings of uncertainty, a number of participants emphasised that Holocaust education in Australia should not lose momentum. Rather, it should be strengthened through a continued commitment to research on its pedagogy and impact, building an evidence base that can support its ongoing relevance and effectiveness or guide it in more productive directions, even where this may extend beyond the scope of current educational strategies. Support for longitudinal research and evaluation mechanisms will help assess how audiences respond to, engage with and make meaning of what they learn about the Holocaust.

RECOMMENDATION 09

ADDRESS ANTISEMITISM IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Antisemitism must be explicitly addressed within the educational environments where it arises, including in the same spaces where Holocaust education occurs, such as schools and university settings. Efforts to address or prevent antisemitism should not be confined to the curriculum alone, but approached through broader safeguarding frameworks or policies, with school leadership playing a critical role in modelling and reinforcing best practice in formal educational settings.





HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN ADDRESSING ANTISEMITISM IN AUSTRALIA



BACKGROUND: HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

The Holocaust refers to the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million European Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators between 1933 and 1945.⁶ The link between Holocaust education and antisemitism is grounded in the understanding that studying the Holocaust creates knowledge of the history of antisemitism in Europe, as well as its development within Nazi ideology. Accordingly, the study of antisemitism is situated and examined through the historical framework of the Holocaust, which represents the historical nadir of anti-Jewish persecution. Similarly, the Holocaust remains central to contemporary debates on antisemitism because of its ongoing resonance in present-day expressions of anti-Jewish hostility, including Holocaust denial and distortion, along with the appropriation and weaponisation of Nazi imagery, which has increasingly appeared in Australian educational settings (Gross & Rutland 2014; Blueprint Institute 2024). There is also the phenomenon of Holocaust or Nazi inversion, which has emerged as a major issue in universities since 7 October (Colombo et al. 2024).

Within the Australian Jewish community, collective memory of the Holocaust informs the perspectives of those who founded and continue to lead Holocaust education initiatives. In Australia, the relationship between Holocaust education and efforts to counter antisemitism can be traced to the emergence of survivor-led commemorative initiatives from the 1970s onwards (Berman 2001; Alba 2007; Cooke & Frieze 2018). Today, the educational spaces and initiatives established by Holocaust survivors are sustained through the involvement of their descendants in delivering programs (Alba 2014). Holocaust education remains largely led by the Australian Jewish community, which as one interviewee noted, is “very much a survivor-based community.”⁷

In recent years, however, there has been a conceptual shift in Holocaust education in Australia, from a community- and family-driven sense of obligation to commemorate victims and survivors (Rutland & Hampel 2021), towards addressing the need to educate young citizens of multicultural societies and promote intercultural understanding between diverse racial, ethnic and cultural groups (Clark 2003). In line with broader trends globally, Holocaust education in Australia has become more outward-looking or universal in its concerns. Participants’ insights reflect ongoing sector-wide debates, particularly regarding how Holocaust museums and educational programs incorporate and draw connections between the Holocaust, human rights abuses and other genocides (Alba 2016; Barrett et al. 2025).

In response to universalising processes, there have been concerns that such approaches risk obscuring the specifically Jewish experience of Nazi genocide, sometimes to the extent that even once central terms, such as ‘antisemitism’, are omitted from Holocaust education programs and their learning outcomes altogether (Flennegård 2025). The events of 7 October, and the subsequent rise in antisemitic incidents worldwide, have prompted renewed scrutiny of universalising trends within the Australian context – concerns that were also implied or reflected in the perspectives of some of the participants in our research study.

Over the years, Holocaust education has increasingly come to be seen as a potential means of addressing contemporary forms of antisemitism. A rise in reported incidents has prompted legislative and policy initiatives aimed at establishing more consistent educational efforts across all Australian states (Rutland & Hampel 2021). In the aftermath of 7 October 2023, Holocaust education continues to feature prominently in national discussions, frameworks and strategies on how to address antisemitism in Australia today.

Following the antisemitic terror attack at Sydney’s Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025, there has been heightened focus on the role that teaching and learning about the Holocaust can play in addressing antisemitism in Australia today. Notably, the Antisemitism Education Taskforce, as part of the Special Envoy’s Plan to Combat Antisemitism, includes consideration of how Holocaust education will continue to support antisemitism prevention in Australia (ASECA 2025; Australian Government Department of Education 2025). Our research contributes to the broader and ongoing national conversation about how, and to what extent, Holocaust education can support effective responses to contemporary antisemitism in Australia.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AFTER 7 OCTOBER

The global resurgence of antisemitism since 7 October 2023 has prompted closer scrutiny of current approaches to teaching and learning about the Holocaust, as well as the relationship between Holocaust education and efforts to address antisemitism. In this context, many stakeholders working in or researching Holocaust education were experiencing varying forms of uncertainty, concern or disillusionment. Some expressed such feelings through language that implied an awareness of potential failings, gaps and the urgent need to change how they approach their practice. As one participant noted: “We all knew that antisemitism was growing. However, after 7 October, [antisemitism] just exploded and that makes you question how effective [Holocaust education] really is.”⁸ Two Jewish educators working at Holocaust museums suggested that the field at large faces an existential crisis:

What has [Holocaust education] achieved? And – if it had achieved anything – it hadn’t clearly achieved enough ... It was even more important that we didn’t continue to do the same thing and expect a different outcome. So then we had to ask hard questions: What are the gaps? What’s missing? Why hasn’t it worked? Where have we gone wrong?⁹

To see what’s happened in the post–October 7 world has completely shocked me and that makes me wonder about how we have taught the Holocaust – I thought I was doing a good job but [now] I’m not so sure.¹⁰

What emerges strongly across interviews is a sense of uncertainty, even among those who remain committed to the transformative potential of Holocaust education and to the museum settings in which these programs are often delivered. A number of participants in this sample who work as Holocaust educators in universities and museums noted:

Since October 7, we find ourselves being asked questions that perhaps we weren’t asked so much before – how do you respond to issues or questions that come up about the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict? We’re now teaching about the Holocaust in difficult times [and] we’re thinking very carefully about it.¹¹

I think that the current [Israel-Hamas] war will have a big impact on Holocaust education, especially in multicultural countries. I would say that it is a valid question to keep asking why we teach it and how we teach it – and students will be asking these questions too. But, in all honesty, I feel like we all struggle with this and we don’t know what to do about it.¹²

We’re witnessing a significant moment and so it’s beholden on all of us to think again about what we do and how we do it as an organisation which is devoted and determined to make a difference – how do we do that now?¹³

Amid a rise in antisemitism in Australia, participants conveyed a broader tension felt by educators and practitioners working in Holocaust studies and Holocaust education who are facing growing pressure to more prominently address the Israel-Palestine conflict. Crucially, interviewees expressed wanting to keep politics separate from the educational realm of the Holocaust, while also staying true to their organisational or pedagogical ethos. Participants also noted heightened pressures from their local Jewish communities during a period of rising antisemitism, alongside renewed interest in how Holocaust education might be used to address it. This can make the planning or delivery of projects in this space complicated by “energised communities that are keen to share their strong views [which are] right at the front of their minds at the moment,” as one interviewee, a museum professional involved in establishing a new Holocaust museum, noted.¹⁴ Two museum professionals, working at Holocaust museums at the time of our interview, also spoke to heightened community stakeholder concerns:

I think the other pressure here is that a lot of antisemitism is directed at Israel at the moment, therefore [the expectation is that we] should be doing more programming about Israel. [However] we’re not running commentary on what’s happening in the Middle East ... What our lane is (in terms of what and how we educate) is something that we all have to think very carefully about.¹⁵

We have a duty to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust that their story is told, that is our mission and purpose, and we have to do that. We’re not a museum about October 7th – they also need their own space for their stories. Everybody deserves 100 per cent of their space to tell their narrative ... We’ve tried to stay in our lane while making [learning about the Holocaust] relevant to the current context.¹⁶

The implication is that these immediate pressures give rise to longer-term challenges regarding the extent to which discussions of the ongoing situation between Israel and Palestine, and the antisemitism that resurfaces during periods of heightened tension, should form part of an organisation’s mission, educational mandate or pedagogical remit when it comes to Holocaust education. This tension between being responsive without becoming reactive is a recurring theme, and it also reflects the spectrum of current approaches to teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Across the diverse spaces and practices that make up Holocaust education in Australia, participants recognised that education in specific contexts will necessarily pursue different intended outcomes. For example, language used by participants – such as “staying in our lane” – indicates divergence among stakeholders and their affiliated organisations, reflecting a spectrum of approaches to teaching about the Holocaust and addressing antisemitism as part of that remit.

The diversity of educational interventions might be understood as ‘part of a continuum’ of opportunities for students to develop their understanding about the Australian Jewish community, the Holocaust and antisemitism: “I think it’s about multiple touch-points – different organisations and institutions can each contribute to a lifelong, multi-

pronged [educational] journey with different touch-points,” explained a representative of an Australian Jewish museum.¹⁷ However, tensions between distinct approaches and the desire for greater uniformity often surface when stakeholders’ personal or professional commitments to Holocaust pedagogy come into conflict. A representative from a state-based Holocaust museum described feeling shocked when comparing different approaches to Holocaust education, particularly in relation to whether – and how – contemporary forms of antisemitism should be addressed:

I kept on asking: ‘What are you going to do now?’ And they were like: ‘We’re Holocaust[-focused] – we go up until 1945, we stay in our lane.’ And I was pretty shocked to hear that. Where is everyone? ... I suppose people have different approaches [to Holocaust education].¹⁸

The dynamics reflected in participants’ perspectives suggest that, while diverse educational approaches can productively coexist, they are most effective when situated within a coordinated framework. Such a framework would foster coherence across the sector by promoting a shared and clearly articulated understanding of each organisation’s remit, alongside communication that conveys these respective, yet broadly aligned, roles effectively to the public.





PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF ANTISEMITISM(S)

Participants were invited to describe their understanding of antisemitism to establish a frame of reference for discussing the relationship between antisemitism and Holocaust education. Outlining their respective understandings of antisemitism, stakeholders described a matrix of often overlapping behaviours and attitudes, including stereotypes and negative perspectives of Jewish people, as well as Holocaust denial and distortion. Within this sample, some educators teaching at schools or working at Holocaust museums pointed to the existence of ignorance, rather than ideology, which informs antisemitism today. "I think basically it's hatred out of lack of knowledge," explained one interviewee, while another described it as stemming from "wilful ignorance."¹⁹

Similarly, some participants' observations reflect a perceived correlation between antisemitism in Australia and limited everyday contact with Jewish communities. For example, one Holocaust education researcher in Australia argued that "people who hold antisemitic beliefs don't actually encounter Jewish people that often. [They] have [few] daily encounters [with Jewish people]."²⁰ Another participant, a Jewish and Holocaust studies and education scholar, noted: "Most people in Australia have never met a Jew. They have no idea what Judaism is about."²¹ Several interviewees in this research, working across Holocaust museums, educational programs and school settings, observed that such encounters can sometimes be the turning point between holding antisemitic attitudes and acting on them; however, this outcome is by no means guaranteed:

The most important thing we do is go to that regional school that has never met a Jewish person who has never heard of the Holocaust. [The priority is] outreach into the [non-Jewish] community ... because that's where the antisemites/racists are.²²

I think that the further people are [from Jewish communities] and haven't seen a Jew, the more they hate us. It seems that the worst antisemitism [is] where they've never seen a Jew.²³

I think we try to do too much. We try to explain and unpack every part of a Jew because we think that if someone understands a Jew – and you can meet a Jew and you can break challah with a Jew – then everything is going to be okay. And I don't know if it is – I mean, so many people know Jews and still hate Jews.²⁴

These observations speak to the rationale that already underpins both global strategies and localised approaches – such as efforts by Holocaust museums to deliver regional educational programs for delivering Holocaust education. As noted by Greene et al. (2021: 2), "many people believe that intolerance in general, and antisemitism in particular, are a function of ignorance, and the solution [is] improved Holocaust education or expanded diversity, equity and inclusion training." As reflected in participants' perspectives, this presumed remedy for anti-Jewish beliefs and behaviours is met with a degree of scepticism or uncertainty. As one participant, a Holocaust education scholar in a US university noted: "I think we probably need to do a better job understanding [and addressing] the factors that are leading to a rise in contemporary antisemitism."²⁵ Such reflections should be understood within the broader context of collective calls for greater scrutiny of current pedagogical approaches, as well as for more robust assessment of the impact of Holocaust education on antisemitism. Calls for

more reliable, longitudinal and cross-disciplinary research into the effects of teaching and learning about the Holocaust are not new (Pistone et al. 2021).

In their responses, participants also referred to varying scales and types of contemporary antisemitism, from immediate and visible incidents such as firebombings or vandalism of synagogues in Melbourne and Sydney, to more ambiguous boundaries between anti-Zionism, anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism. Some pointed out that anti-Israel rhetoric can, at times, cross into antisemitism, making it harder to separate political critique of Israel's government from anti-Jewish hate. One participant noted: "I mean, anti-Zionism these days is pretty much equivalent to antisemitism [because] all the antisemitic tropes of recent years have centred on Israel."²⁶ This comment is significant because, although distinctions may be drawn between antisemitism and anti-Zionism (or anti-Israel discourse), anti-Zionist discourse becomes antisemitic when it mobilises longstanding tropes and stereotypes about Jews in its criticism of Israel, thereby endangering Jews globally.

One interviewee recognised the interconnectedness of the two concepts, while arguing for a clear distinction between them:

There's the confusing question of the relation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. Some people almost equate both, others separate them, which I probably would side with. Although I understand that Zionism (for a significant part of the Jewish community) is integral to their identity. At the same time, I think that there is a distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. We need to understand that and stick to that.²⁷

When asked to define antisemitism, however, most participants hesitated, describing the concept as complex and therefore difficult to capture within a single framework. One stakeholder explained: "I find it difficult to define [antisemitism] in a neat little box."²⁸ Another reflected: "What is antisemitism? It's many things."²⁹ Although a singular term, 'antisemitism' is regularly used in public discourse to encompass all forms of anti-Jewish hatred (Gouttman 2005). This framing can obscure important differences between multiple expressions, forms and sources of antisemitism.

A striking pattern emerged as many participants included in this study resisted using a formal definition of antisemitism as a guiding framework. One interviewee, a non-Jewish professional working on delivering Holocaust-related education programs, explained that the "people who plan to do harm" to Jewish individuals and communities do not necessarily "read the definition of antisemitism" established by entities such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) beforehand.³⁰ Such statements highlight the contested nature of definitions, pointing to the limitations of definitional frameworks in fully capturing antisemitism, while speaking to the unproductive nature of singular concepts.

Geddes (2026) argues that different forms of antisemitism (or 'antisemitisms'), whether they arise on social media, within political discourse, on university campuses or in physical incidents across public spaces, require distinct responses. Indeed, this connection was implied by one participant who highlighted the need to first "think critically about what your idea of antisemitism is" to better leverage strategies to address it.³¹ Another interviewee (a Holocaust education scholar at a university in the

US) emphasised the importance of distinctions between “different types of antisemitism” for Holocaust education specifically:

[I] probably spend way too much time thinking about the different definitions, debates and distinctions [of antisemitism and] how useful [they are] ... [However], I do think it's really important for us to be specific about what we mean in a given context – and to be as precise as we can be in terms of what we're talking about.

Someone who's a neo-Nazi or Holocaust denier [is] operating from a different conception than somebody who hates Jews because they hate Israel. I think it's actually important for us to understand the distinctions of where that discrimination against Jews (or hatred of Jews) comes from because then we have to think about what we're asking Holocaust education to do.³²

In short, recognition of the existence of different iterations of antisemitism is necessary for creating different educational responses, informing critical consideration of whether Holocaust education is effective in addressing them at all. Divergences in how participants believe antisemitism in Australia should be understood – whether situated within broader frameworks of racism and colonialism, or interpreted through the historical lens of Jewish persecution and experience – aligned with their distinct educational approaches. For instance, some participants described antisemitism as a persistent historical and communal experience, as an “eternal problem” or “age-old” hatred.³³ Another explained that while they use the term “contemporary antisemitism,” they believe it to be “not really different from Jew hatred, *l'dor va'dor* [from generation to generation], in every generation. So this is our time, right?”³⁴ Conversely, two professionals involved in delivering Holocaust education programs in museums or through outreach initiatives emphasised that antisemitism is not an isolated phenomenon, but intersects with broader forms of racism and exclusion embedded in Australia's structures and cultures of prejudice:

The reason I'm here [in the Holocaust education space] is because what I'm seeing is un-Australian. [Antisemitism] is wrong because it's un-Australian, not [because] 'I'm Jewish and because antisemitism has been going on for 3000 years.'³⁵

Australia doesn't just have a problem with the Jews. There is a racial problem in Australia [and] by singling us out – [saying] that we are just going to talk about the Jews – I think we are doing ourselves a disservice because we identify ourselves as something separate, instead of showing that antisemitism is part of a bigger picture of exclusionist thinking in Australia.³⁶

These variations in participants' understandings of antisemitism help explain why and how pedagogical approaches to teaching the Holocaust differ between educators, organisations and programs in Australia. These accounts also highlight a key challenge: Equipping teachers with clear, context-specific guidance on how to navigate the conceptual complexity, including their personal perspectives and contested definitional frameworks, of antisemitism through pedagogical frameworks tailored to particular learning settings.

WHY TEACH THE HOLOCAUST? THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AND ANTISEMITISM

Among research participants, there was general agreement that teaching the Holocaust is important. One Holocaust educator at a university affirmed: “I think it’s important to teach it as a historical event.”³⁷ However, there was no consensus about the primary objective of teaching about the Holocaust, revealing competing, albeit interrelated, understandings of the aims of Holocaust education today. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust was invariably framed as a means of fostering social cohesion, intercultural understanding, empathy, critical thinking, moral development and upstander behaviour. One of the most notable insights emerging from the interviews was the underlying assumption that these objectives, such as improving social cohesion, function as an indirect buffer against contemporary antisemitism. Several participants, either researching Holocaust education in Australia or working in museum settings that deliver Holocaust education programs, outlined their understanding of why the Holocaust is taught in their respective contexts:

If we build a compassionate society that encourages active citizenship and critical thinking, then there is no way those compassionate, active citizens are going to be antisemites.³⁸

Some guides and volunteers that I’ve talked to [argue that] remembering this event and understanding its impact on Jewish people is [the priority] and, as a net effect, it will make things better in the current environment.³⁹

So it’s not only about countering antisemitism, but how do you think about strengthening social cohesion? They’re intertwined.⁴⁰

Participants differed in their views on the role of Holocaust education in directly addressing antisemitism and whether it is effective to that end, with one participant, a Holocaust education scholar at a university in the US, noting: “I don’t think necessarily the [reason] why we teach the Holocaust is [due to] some belief that we can inoculate people against antisemitism. I don’t have that on my list of ‘why we teach the Holocaust’.”⁴¹ Some interviewees observed that, while relevant, combating antisemitism is not the primary objective of teaching the Holocaust, and educators are met with an unrealistic expectation to resolve antisemitism through Holocaust education. Two Holocaust education scholars and researchers noted:

[Holocaust education is] not going to stop prejudice [and] antisemitism completely. What I think we can hope for is that it will raise awareness and knowledge about what antisemitism is and how it has manifested historically.⁴²

I don’t know whether [Holocaust education] does anything [to reduce] antisemitic sentiment. How do we measure? We don’t have a way of measuring antisemitism in the past, so we don’t really have a control. We don’t have definitive ways of actually measuring antisemitism either ... I think it’s a fraught area.⁴³

When participants reflected on the relationship between Holocaust education and efforts to counter antisemitism, their responses underscored the need for greater specificity in how antisemitism is

conceptualised. For example, some argued that Holocaust education is directly relevant, and indeed essential, to addressing Holocaust denial and distortion as contemporary iterations or forms of antisemitism.⁴⁴ One Jewish scholar in Holocaust education connected a sense of personal obligation on the part of survivors and their families to the concept of ‘historical literacy’ against Holocaust denial:

There is a memorial obligation that exists to those who died or who asked us to make sure that we tell their stories. [Also] the seeds of Holocaust denial were planted within the event itself – so there’s an obligation to history as well.⁴⁵

A Jewish educator working at a Holocaust museum suggested that it may be more effective to focus on examples from the immediate post-Holocaust period, in part to help audiences understand the continuity of antisemitism:

I think we fell into the same trap as everybody else. We talked about antisemitism as something that happened before the Second World War and we had the end of the Second World War as the end of antisemitism. We addressed historicity very well, but not post-Holocaust antisemitism.

[Survivors often share in their testimony] returning home after the Holocaust and their neighbours bemoaning the fact that not enough [Jews] died ... Hungarian Jews in 1946, after the end of the war and returning to their homes, were in hiding again because the Hungarians were coming to murder them. So, we didn’t talk enough about how antisemitism didn’t disappear after the end of the Holocaust.⁴⁶

For Holocaust education to be effective in an Australian context, another Jewish educator working at a Holocaust museum noted, “you have to have a look at what is the current state of antisemitism in Australia today.”⁴⁷ A number of stakeholders acknowledged both the need and the growing pressure from community groups to address contemporary forms of antisemitism and how they manifest in the Australian context. Speaking to this sentiment, one interviewee remarked: “We want the perspective on Australian soil – what antisemitism looks like for us.”⁴⁸

In thinking about the current context of antisemitism in Australia, participants (working in Holocaust museums, both in Melbourne and beyond) made reference to recent high-profile incidents, such as the firebombing of the Adass Israel Synagogue in December 2024, enabling direct connections between historical and contemporary antisemitism.⁴⁹ For example, one participant noted: “You can talk about Kristallnacht and say: ‘Well, this is [what] actually [happened] down the road less than 12 months ago’.”⁵⁰ However, several participants, including professionals and educators working in Holocaust museums, raised concerns about conflating the state-sponsored antisemitism of Nazi Germany with contemporary manifestations of antisemitism in Australia. One participant, a Holocaust educator within a university, noted that it is unhelpful to “compare the current situation for Jewish people in the world with the situation in the 1930s” and potentially “disrespectful to the victims of the Holocaust who had no way of protection in the countries they lived” in Nazi-occupied Europe.⁵¹

Several participants spoke to the conflation of ‘antisemitism’ and ‘genocide’ through the lens of Holocaust education, namely the implications of taking the “most extreme version of antisemitism and [reading] current forms [of antisemitism] into it” (Geddes 2026; Judaken 2024). This framing makes it difficult to explain contemporary antisemitism in Australia, where it is neither state-supported nor embedded in law, an issue several participants identified as problematic:

I think people can sometimes make very poor analogies with the past and I’m always very suspicious of that. When there was this explosion of antisemitism post–October 7th, immediately people went to the Holocaust. I understand it, but I also would caution against it because we’re not in a space (thankfully) where the police are enacting anti-Jewish laws. [There’s] certainly not a sense of state-sponsored antisemitism, which was the case in Nazi Germany, right?

[However] I think the analogy can be made with things like propaganda, misinformation and conspiracy theory ... It is not the same but you can see some points of continuity [or] similarity ... I do think there’s something to that argument that blood libel now has become part of the anti-Israel discourse. So I’m not discounting [analogies] but I actually think it’s more subtle than that.⁵²

Current approaches to teaching the Holocaust typically trace the origins of the genocide to the enactment of discriminatory laws in Nazi Germany from 1933 onward. This forms a crucial foundation for teaching the Holocaust effectively, while encouraging students to identify and recognise the potential for the escalation of antisemitism to violence and genocide. Such an approach was reflected in comments made by participants, such as “antisemitism leads to violence [so] we all know where antisemitism leads when people don’t stand up and stop it,”⁵³ and “the worst incarnation of antisemitism [is] genocide.”⁵⁴ While it would be naïve to dismiss the danger that antisemitism poses to Jewish life today (Geddes 2026), it is, as one participant noted, “too simplistic” to “jump” from antisemitism to genocide.⁵⁵ Although the conditions for genocidal antisemitism are not present in contemporary Australia, persistent antisemitic narratives should not be underestimated, given their capacity to re-emerge across different historical, social and political contexts (see, for example, Fox & Topor 2021).

In summary, those working in this field face significant challenges in deriving contemporary relevance from the histories of the Holocaust and mobilising its lessons to address present-day iterations of antisemitism, which as one participant noted, “takes on a different guise from its historical forms.”⁵⁶ Framing the Holocaust as a model case study of antisemitism risks impeding audiences in their understanding of how antisemitism operates in the present. In practical terms, the multifaceted nature of antisemitism, and its capacity to adapt to new environments and ideologies, make it difficult to address within the limited time teachers have to cover the Holocaust in their curricula (Cowan 2025) or in the context of a single visit to a Holocaust museum, for example.



MAKING HOLOCAUST HISTORIES RELEVANT IN MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

There appears to be two competing demands placed on Holocaust education. On the one hand, it is increasingly expected to respond to a contemporary landscape in which rising antisemitism is a threat to Jewish lives and wellbeing, reassuring Jewish communities that the lessons of the Holocaust are being actively applied. For many of the educators and professionals we spoke with, engaging with contemporary iterations of antisemitism is essential to keeping Holocaust education relevant. It also often reflects a sense of personal obligation among Jewish participants, frequently rooted in their familial connection to the Nazi genocide, to use their expertise to address an issue that resonates closely – as noted by one Jewish educator working across the Holocaust commemoration and education sector in Australia:

My father was a Holocaust survivor and lost everybody ... The Holocaust has always been a pervasive presence in my life, forever. I always thought that he must have survived for a reason and maybe that reason was to tell me what happened so I could make the world a better place ... [I thought that] antisemitism won't happen in Australia and we'll be the guardians of that.⁵⁷

At the same time, Holocaust histories are expected to resonate with non-Jewish audiences in culturally diverse Australia, with most participants emphasising the importance of engaging this broader public. As previously mentioned, however, several participants observed that, in the aftermath of 7 October, conceiving of Holocaust education as a response to antisemitism risks making their teaching or practice increasingly Jewish community bound and inward-looking. However, a Jewish educator working at a Holocaust museum noted the need to “create something that is not inward-focused for our community. If we want to see behavioural changes in society, [Holocaust education] has to be outward-focused.” With non-Jewish audiences in mind, this participant reflected on the practical dimensions of pedagogy: how, where and by whom the Holocaust is taught, and how this shapes meaning-making on behalf of the student or audience. For this participant, the imperative to demonstrate the relevance of teaching and learning about the Holocaust in the Australian context is closely tied to perceptions of its effectiveness:

People have to see themselves in this, otherwise they can't connect to it. It's not their story to tell. They don't see themselves in the story and they don't feel that it relates to them in any way today. So how are we going to overcome this disconnect, but still tell the narrative that needs to be told?⁵⁸

In Australia's multicultural context, several other stakeholders emphasised the need for pedagogical frameworks that address the dissonance some students may experience when engaging with this subject matter. As one educator reflected: “Anything that makes it feel like not a history on the other side of the world.”⁵⁹ Educators highlighted the importance of adapting Holocaust teaching to diverse classroom contexts, taking into account students' cultural and religious backgrounds, prior knowledge and potential sensitivities. In many cases, such adaptation is already common practice, typically exercised at the discretion of individual teachers. There was also support for the adaptation or personalisation of Holocaust education at the curriculum

level to better engage specific audiences. This is an approach that is well established in existing research and scholarship (Rutland 2010, 2015). Several participants with backgrounds as Holocaust educators and researchers in museums and universities spoke about their experiences and perspectives on this issue:

How my students were reacting to the Holocaust was quite different depending on where they had come from: I had Sudanese kids who had experienced the refugee camps and I had other kids who had no concept of mass violence whatsoever. It was a really diverse range [of students learning about] such a difficult subject.⁶⁰

[When] teaching the history of the Holocaust, [teachers] go back to the historical roots of antisemitism. Obviously you have to be very careful when in a [Catholic] school setting. I'm probably a little bit more careful with highlighting religious antisemitism to avoid bringing the concept of shame into the conversation.⁶¹

We need different approaches to Holocaust teaching for different age groups and different racial groups. If you don't take into consideration the students sitting in the classroom, it's not going to be effective.⁶²

For decades, the lived experiences and stories of Holocaust survivors have played a central role in facilitating connection with non-Jewish audiences, bridging the geographic distance, cultural dissonance and temporal gap between Europe and Australia. What emerges from discussions about survivors is the recognition of a secondary outcome of Holocaust education programs delivered through Jewish institutions and outreach initiatives: the opportunity for interpersonal encounters.

For many Australians, Holocaust education programs may constitute one of the few instances of direct and in-person engagement with a Jewish individual. For this reason, one Jewish professional delivering Holocaust education programs emphasised the urgency of connecting students with survivors while still possible: "There are not many survivors left. For me, a priority is to get as many people connected to those survivors as we can whilst they are still around."⁶³ These observations are generally centred around the presumed affective or emotive resonance of in-person encounters with Holocaust survivors, as a means to create a "profound" and "deep emotional connection" with audiences.⁶⁴ However, one participant (an educator and researcher on Holocaust education) admitted:

I think for students meeting a survivor and hearing their story is the most powerful experience they can possibly have. But I've got no proof of that. There's so little research done on the actual impact of survivor testimony on students. Most of it is anecdotal.⁶⁵

In their exploration of Holocaust museums in Australia, Cooke and Frieze (2025) examine the "affective encounter" in these spaces, exploring how meeting survivors shapes students' worldviews and attitudes. They observe that, while available data often capture students' immediate emotional responses on-site, there remains a need for innovative methodological approaches to assess the effectiveness

and long-term impact of how students carry such affective encounters with them beyond the museum walls.

Many participants articulated potential futures of Holocaust education without first-hand survivor story-telling, moving away from reliance on survivor testimony towards virtual technologies or “custodian speakers.”⁶⁶ One interviewee, a representative of a Holocaust museum, noted that having young Jewish facilitators speak to students “who are just a few years younger” is a “powerful” way to create connection: “They connect with somebody who is genuine.”⁶⁷ One non-Jewish participant working in a Holocaust museum spoke to the importance of team-teaching in Australia, where the “vast majority of students taking part in a Holocaust education program are not Jewish,” which allowed them (in their previous experience as an educator) to build rapport with their audience:

Many of them may have never met a Jewish person ... [so] it was easier to build rapport because they saw somebody like them [i.e. non-Jewish] who they could relate to. Having said that, my [Jewish] colleague and I would often team-teach. And I actually think that was the most powerful approach – when we taught together.⁶⁸

As the sector increasingly turns to alternative forms of in-person facilitation, there is a clear need for further research and evaluation of their effectiveness, whether delivered by Holocaust survivors, survivors of Nazi persecution, descendants, members of the Jewish community more broadly or non-Jewish educators. However, a number of interviewees reflected on the implications of presenting Australian Jewish identity solely through the lens of antisemitism and the Holocaust. They pointed to what they saw as an inherent limitation in cross-cultural encounters framed exclusively by historical trauma. Some raised concerns about relying on Holocaust education as the primary means of teaching about antisemitism, given that encounters with Jewish people in Australia often occur only through narratives of historical tragedy and victimhood.

For several people interviewed for this research, including Holocaust education scholars and university researchers in the United States and Australia, as well as professionals from leading Australian Jewish museums, this is an approach that risks reinforcing, rather than countering antisemitism:

One of the challenges is that – for most students – if the first and only class that they’re ever going to learn about the Jews is through the lens of the Holocaust, then [Holocaust education] introduces Jews through the lens of Nazi antisemitism and then presents the Jews on the path to destruction and annihilation. I think that’s very problematic, right?⁶⁹

I don’t like using antisemitism to counter antisemitism. Learning about antisemitism is not the same as actually countering it. We don’t include antisemitic imagery – why would we replicate negative images of Jews? I don’t think we need a program titled “countering antisemitism” to be countering antisemitism.⁷⁰

For many students, the first Jews they meet are dead Jews. And so, in terms of empathy-building, [Holocaust education] achieves very little. You're not humanising the victims of the Holocaust and it's that humanising aspect that is so important.⁷¹

Surely we can't base the idea of Jewish identity solely on the victimhood narrative [of the Holocaust]?⁷²

There is an implication that Holocaust education compensates for a broader lack of interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish Australians. While such programs can provide meaningful points of contact, there are clear risks in positioning Holocaust education as the primary or sole site of exposure to Jewish life and identity. One participant working in a Holocaust museum noted that narrating Jewish identity through the prism of antisemitism in Holocaust education must avoid becoming an exercise in "making people feel guilty," referencing secondary antisemitism in which reminders of the Holocaust can trigger uncomfortable feelings of guilt that are then projected back onto Jews (Henri 2008). Rather, this participant advocates for "confidently, purposefully and authentically talking about the beauty of Jewish culture and Jewish achievements, specifically [contributions to] building modern Australia. [It] is such a powerful and positive message."⁷³

Participants' reflections align with broader universalising trends in Holocaust education that aim to ensure the continued relevance of approaches, particularly the use of comparative frameworks that situate the Holocaust alongside other instances of genocide and human rights abuses. However, one interviewee, a Jewish studies and Holocaust scholar labelled this trend as problematic for its sidelining of antisemitism: "Teachers tend to focus on the universal messages and not on antisemitism per se ... Human rights issues are at the centre [and] antisemitism is to the side."⁷⁴ Recent research indicates that Holocaust education often prioritises universalistic messages over particularistic ones, often rendering invisible the "obvious role of antisemitism leading to the Holocaust," thereby limiting the prevention-oriented potential of teaching and learning about the Holocaust to meaningfully address antisemitism in the present (Pistone et al. 2021).

One UK-based interviewee reflected on findings from the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education report (Foster et al. 2016), which showed that, despite the Holocaust's mandatory inclusion in England's national curriculum, around 68% of students did not understand the term 'antisemitism.' The interviewee expressed concern about the extent to which antisemitism is meaningfully addressed within Holocaust education in classrooms. In response, they have focused their work, which involves training Holocaust educators and school teachers, on emphasising the central role of antisemitism in the Nazi genocide of European Jewry: "It's crucial that when we teach about the Holocaust, we teach about this form of antisemitism [as] the driving ideology."⁷⁵ Indeed, the broader literature highlights the consequences of failing to incorporate both discussion of, and meaningful engagement with, antisemitism within Holocaust education curricula (Flennegård 2025), as well as in Holocaust educational programs more broadly (Pistone et al. 2021).

One participant, who researches Holocaust education in Australia, argued for situating the Holocaust within broader frameworks of genocide “because there’s other contemporary genocides that often get ignored. Anything that brings consciousness of genocide to the fore – [teaching] that [genocide is] not just something of the past.”⁷⁶ There is also a consensus that the Australian context should be foregrounded. Framing learning about the Holocaust within broader analytical frameworks creates opportunities to draw meaningful connections to Indigenous Australian experiences of displacement and legacies of genocide (Kennedy & Graefenstein 2019). However, it seems that efforts to universalise the lessons of the Holocaust bring underlying frictions to the surface, particularly around comparative genocide frameworks and the need to remain relevant and responsive to current socio-political landscapes. In discussing geo-cultural relevance, one participant, a Holocaust educator at an Australian university, observed that university students are asking questions about genocides closer to home:

I think it is a valid question: ‘Why teach [the Holocaust] in Australia and why make it compulsory in Australia?’ And here I am a bit unsure about the answer ... Why is it relevant to talk about something which happened 80 years ago in Europe? ... Why do we have a [university or educational] course on the Holocaust and we don’t have a course on the Indigenous genocide in Australia?⁷⁷

The exercise of critical thinking is encouraged among students, but it also exposes an often unspoken challenge faced by educators: How to situate Holocaust education within broader frameworks, while navigating complex, potentially divisive topics and addressing often confronting questions in a culturally sensitive and productive way. Perhaps most significantly, several participants recognised that it is increasingly untenable to treat the Holocaust, contemporary antisemitism and the conflict in the Middle East as entirely separate topics.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

The question of how to reconcile the recent conflict in Gaza with contemporary Holocaust education in Australia formed a central backdrop to conversations with stakeholders. In the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel and Israel's subsequent invasion of Gaza, a number of immediate challenges and disruptions were identified, including recurring concerns about engaging teachers who may be hesitant or resistant to teaching the Holocaust in a post-7 October context. While participants could only speculate on the reasons behind this, whether they are reluctant to engage with the Holocaust as subject matter or with spaces that support its teaching, their accounts point to a deeper, more widespread issue: a lack of confidence, uncertainty or discomfort among educators.

A researcher on Holocaust education in Australia commented that “most competent teachers” are having “careful conversations” with their students about “the events of October 7, how that’s produced a spike in antisemitic feeling [and] negative sentiments towards Israel [and] how that falls into how we should understand and make sense of the Holocaust.”⁷⁸ Another interviewee, who is a secondary school educator, noted their approach to discussing the conflict in the Middle East sensitively, particularly in relation to its connections with the Holocaust:

Why do we have ongoing conflict in Israel-Palestine at the moment – is the Holocaust connected to that? I want the kids to think about it not being as simple as the ‘Israel exists because of the Holocaust’ explanation. It’s much more complicated than that. I used to teach about the Nakba because I think it’s impossible to separate the creation of Israel from the Nakba ... It’s really important to show there is a connection between the two.⁷⁹

What becomes apparent is the importance of pedagogical competence and cultural sensitivity in determining how, when or indeed whether such connections between the Holocaust, the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and antisemitism can be made in meaningful and responsible ways. To ensure pedagogical competence, there is a need to “support teachers in feeling a little more confident about doing their work in a climate where issues do come into the classroom space,” as one interviewee working in Holocaust education in the UK put it.⁸⁰ The need for support is particularly important for school teachers and tertiary-level educators who are navigating an increasingly polarised climate surrounding Israel and Palestine in Australia’s schools and universities. Another interviewee reflected on the dual impact both on their research about Holocaust education and on teaching the Holocaust more broadly:

... a number of teachers [dropped] out of the project [as research participants] saying they had nothing more to offer because they weren’t going to be teaching about the Holocaust in the foreseeable future. I’m not critical of those teachers, because I understand where they’re coming from. In their particular settings, it would have been quite impossible to teach about [the Holocaust] so they’d made the decision not to do so.⁸¹

Several other participants pointed to disruptions impacting the delivery of teacher training and professional development programs, and a decline in school group visits to their museums, all of which rely on close collaboration with teachers. One interviewee, referencing a reduced number of applications for a professional development program for Australian teachers and educators, noted having “lost a number of teachers who are no longer supportive [of our work] and don’t want to have anything to do with the program anymore ... I don’t know how we get to them – you can’t make them come to anything.”⁸² Another participant described teachers as their “biggest challenge,” explaining that educators working in Holocaust museums often “only meet those who want to be there” and are open to learning:

How do I get to the teachers who say: ‘Oh, the Holocaust museum? I’m not going there because they are all child-killing, murdering Jews.’ And they are the ones who are now in a position in a classroom to tell their students their own version of what is going on. I’m not scared of being criticised in the building. I’m not scared of people asking challenging questions or saying silly things, because I get to respond to it [and] have a conversation. My problem is with the people who are not engaged in a conversation.⁸³

Overall, these observations highlight a key challenge within Holocaust education: the crucial role of teachers in enhancing or potentially undermining the effectiveness of Holocaust education programs and curricula. In her recent study of Australian schools, Rutland (2025) highlights the role of “unconscious biases” among teachers and school leadership in the mishandling and dismissal of antisemitic bullying, and of antisemitism more broadly as an issue, within classrooms and playgrounds. This is an important consideration when examining the role of teachers in delivering or potentially neglecting Holocaust education within mandated curricula.

While these comments highlight immediate challenges during periods of heightened tension or conflict in the Middle East, participants also indicated longer-term challenges ahead, particularly regarding the ongoing universalisation of learning objectives in Holocaust education as a means to make learning about this historical event relevant to contemporary, non-Jewish audiences. Several interviewees spoke about the tensions of situating the Holocaust in a comparative framework informed by current or recent global events, including the Israeli offensive in Gaza in response to the Hamas-led attacks of 7 October. Some are navigating pressure to respond to allegations of genocide against Palestinians, as initially raised in reports by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory regarding Israel’s actions in Gaza, in the context of their museum space, educational programming or classrooms (OHCHR 2025).

While acknowledging that students and audiences might be “wondering what the connections are” between current geopolitical events and historical ones, two participants (a Holocaust scholar and museum professional, and a university-based Holocaust educator, respectively) spoke directly to a sense of feeling confronted by comparisons between the events of the Holocaust and those of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East:

My colleagues were really shocked [when] they talked to students about starving kids in the [Warsaw] Ghetto. At the same time, students saw [images of] starving kids in Gaza and that has caused a huge problem for young educators – they’re not used [to that].⁸⁴

In the teaching of the course, you want to be sensitive to both sides of the conflict and recognise that there is suffering on both sides. At the same time, you want to avoid supporting the idea of comparisons which I personally don’t feel are appropriate. But if I can say a personal reflection or feeling is that – and I don’t compare anything – you have the image of how the ghetto looked like at the end of the [Warsaw Ghetto] Uprising and it immediately evokes the features from Gaza. Now, even if you don’t want to make the comparison, and context needs to be taken into consideration – and I want to emphasise that here – that struck me.⁸⁵

Turning to other settings where both Jewish and non-Jewish volunteer educators and guides support the delivery of educational programming or general visitor orientation, observations about the difficulty in facilitating conversations are noted across organisations, regardless of their stance on venturing into the politics related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. One participant, a representative of a Holocaust education program, noted that their organisational remit does not include “debate about the Middle East” or whether “what’s happening now [in Gaza] is a genocide.”⁸⁶ Another stakeholder noted that their organisation (a Holocaust museum) is “just not ready to have those conversations” and “there’s more to be done” in facilitating dialogue around contemporary socio-political and global issues related to genocide, human rights and antisemitism when teaching about the Holocaust.⁸⁷

Interviews indicated that senior staff within each organisation have a clear understanding of their specific remit in relation to Holocaust education. However, this clarity and confidence is not always shared by public-facing staff or volunteers within organisations, who are often confronted with questions from members of the public unaware of the distinctions between organisations. As one representative of an educational outreach program noted:

Our volunteers were anxious and fearful of the potential [questions they would face]. [They] have a level of anxiety when they go into the school environment. Not that they’re there to address those issues, but we know if they’re confronted by those issues [it’s a challenge for them].⁸⁸

Many participants expressed caution around the subject matter and the questions it may raise for facilitators without personal experience to draw upon, often resulting in hesitation or a reluctance to facilitate more complex discussions. Two participants explained that, for many non-Jewish guides delivering programming in the context of their Jewish or Holocaust museum space, there are heightened feelings of discomfort and anxiety when having conversations about Israel:

It's been really difficult when members of the public come in and they want to talk about what's happening currently in the Middle East. And, you know, we're trying to remain a neutral educational entity [and] it's obviously such a heightened issue. [In] training our volunteers – because it is such a volatile kind of space, and we want to keep our volunteers safe – we just give them the line of: 'Well, that's a really good question [but] we are principally a Holocaust Museum and I'm here as a guide to talk to you about the Holocaust from 1933 to 1945' – but it is difficult. We have [an exhibition panel about genocides after the Holocaust] in our space. And we have had a few people saying things like: 'Israel should be on the wall.' We don't want our [Jewish] volunteers to have to engage in these very complex, convoluted political discussions with members of the public.⁸⁹

While the general public is actually very open to moving between contemporary and historic antisemitism, and wanting to draw comparisons and particularly bringing Israel into that discussion, that sits for many of our volunteers as a very difficult bridge if they're not Jewish, and they don't have family or friends with experience of modern day Israel. [Some guides] will shut that conversation down by saying: 'I'm a *Holocaust* guide.'⁹⁰

Some participants suggested that facilitating meaningful dialogue about the relationship between antisemitism, the Holocaust and Israel requires a certain level of expertise and depth of knowledge among educators and museum volunteers. One interviewee, a Jewish educator in a Holocaust museum setting, reflected on the existing gaps in Holocaust education at the curriculum level based on teachers' lack of knowledge or confidence to engage with the subject matter:

I feel that we have to have a whole Middle Eastern Studies piece [because] teachers are very scared to teach this. They either have a very strong opinion and might be bringing that into the classroom, or really don't know enough [about it] and are very scared because they know they're not supposed to bring their own personal [views] into the classroom and they don't know how to talk about it – they don't know how to have this conversation.⁹¹

A number of participants reflected on their unease around determining whether the recent conflict in Gaza constitutes genocide and the comparisons with the Holocaust that such a characterisation might invite. This hesitation might be partly shaped by frameworks such as the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, within which practices like Holocaust inversion – invoking the Jewish trauma of the Holocaust to frame contemporary political critique – are understood as antisemitic and harmful to Jewish communities, including in the Australian context. This is not to suggest an equivalence between the Holocaust and the war in Gaza. Rather, such comments made by participants in the context of this research study highlight that students and museum visitors are raising questions about contemporary conflict within Holocaust education settings, and that practitioners require support to respond in ways that are historically responsible, culturally sensitive and pedagogically sound.



STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES OF TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST IN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

The challenges outlined previously relate to broader conceptual and pedagogical issues within the global sphere of Holocaust memory and education. There are also wider structural issues within Australia's federal and state education systems, such as limited time for lesson planning and the competing demands placed on school teachers and university educators, that make the work around Holocaust education in schools challenging, particularly given its complexity and the need for sustained and critical engagement. As one Holocaust educator and researcher noted:

Often there will be a question like: 'Why the Jews? Why were the Jews targeted by the Nazis?' And implicit in that question, when it comes from many students, is: Surely there was a reason why the Nazis didn't like the Jews so much. So that simple question is often loaded with other questions.⁹²

Such observations highlight the implications of teaching this subject poorly or quickly: Holocaust education risks inadvertently reinforcing the very antisemitism it seeks to challenge, including in the educational settings in which it takes place in Australia (see Rutland & Allington 2019 on university campuses; Rutland 2025, Gross & Rutland 2014 on schools). As one participant, a Holocaust and Jewish studies scholar who spoke about a prominent case of institutional antisemitism at a Melbourne secondary school, noted: "I do believe in the importance of Holocaust education, but the big problem is that it's got to be done correctly – if [the Holocaust is] taught badly, it actually increases antisemitism."⁹³ The implication is that exposure to the historical event of the Holocaust and Nazism, without robust learning outcomes, may even provide material that can be used to harm Jewish students, for example the misuse of Nazi symbolism (see Blueprint Institute's 2024 report on students' use of swastikas in Australian schools). When incidents of peer bullying occur in school settings, the harm is often compounded by teachers and school leaders' minimisation or denial of Jewish students' experiences, constituting a distinct form of harm in itself (Rutland 2025).

One research participant working in Holocaust education in the UK and involved in global initiatives focused on antisemitism prevention through education, noted that schools have a role to play in taking antisemitism seriously:

[Antisemitism prevention] isn't solely [achieved] through the curriculum space of Holocaust education. Rather, it is something that a whole school should consider as part of its safeguarding, as part of its school ethos, as part of its values, and to, where possible, bring in strategies and policies ... to make parents aware that the school is clear on not being a space for antisemitism to spread or thrive, and that understanding [is shared] across the school community.

[We need to support those who engage directly with young people] in their understanding and awareness of the dangers of antisemitism. [They need to be] given the best training and [ensure] that this happens (where possible) at the initial teacher training space before they qualify. That's what I would recommend. And I'm not saying [we should have training] exclusively about antisemitism.⁹⁴

Such observations can help inform the Australian setting. They highlight the importance of addressing antisemitism beyond the formal curriculum, as part of an institution's broader responsibility to support and safeguard students and staff from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They also highlight antisemitism as a structural issue requiring systematic and holistic interventions, in contrast to perspectives that reduce it to isolated incidents (Pistone et al. 2021).

Conversations with interviewees revealed other challenges of teaching and learning about the Holocaust today. Teachers and other educators must also navigate forms of information circulating beyond the classroom or museum space that may undermine educational efforts, particularly online antisemitism. As one US-based interviewee observed, "the spread of myth and rumours and disinformation through online technologies" demonstrates how digital platforms enable the dissemination of antisemitic discourses, including Holocaust distortion, denial and Nazi analogy (Becker et al. 2024). Speaking to a related issue, the interviewee added:

[Also] there's so much material that's available that teachers don't know where to begin ... They're not sure what is reliable information, what is a credible source, what is academically verified. So [the problem is both] disinformation [and] too much information.

This participant continued to explain that, while legislation requires teaching of the Holocaust, when teachers are provided with "zero guidance on how to do it," it can lead to a "disconnect" between existing curricula, available training and implementation of Holocaust education.⁹⁵ Such observations point not only to the need for resources and guidance that reflect the realities of contemporary teaching and learning environments, but also to what many participants perceive as a gap between the mandated inclusion of Holocaust education in curricula and its actual implementation in classrooms. This is an issue that is especially pronounced in contexts where guidance for the mandated subject is lacking. Similarly, a Sydney-based participant emphasised the need to make teacher training and professional development compulsory in line with efforts to mandate Holocaust education in Australian secondary schools: "If [the Holocaust] is going to be compulsory in the school curriculum," it ought to also be a "compulsory part of teacher education," training and ongoing professional development.⁹⁶

Interviews also revealed broad agreement that Holocaust education in Australia would benefit from clearly defined goals. One research participant, a teacher at a secondary school in New South Wales, noted the need for clearer top-down guidance on the intended outcomes of Holocaust education in Australia, particularly given that its inclusion in the History curriculum is mandated inconsistently across states:

I think [Holocaust education] needs to be whatever the system (government, federal, state) – whatever they want it to be. But I think it needs to be articulated what the purpose actually is, because at the moment there is no clear articulation on whether we're teaching an important historical event, whether we're teaching citizenship, or whether we're instrumentalising the Holocaust to promote social tolerance, social cohesion and anti-racism programs.

This participant explained that “in the absence of any directive from anywhere else, I’ve taken upon myself to instrumentalise the Holocaust, to teach it for a particular purpose – tolerance and empathy.”⁹⁷ While flexible, audience - and context-specific approaches can be effective, the absence of consistent guidance leaves objectives open to individual interpretation, creating inconsistency and the risk of politicisation. Without adequate professional development, teachers and museum guides may also present content through subjective or incomplete understandings.

Several participants emphasised the need for a clear strategy to guide both Holocaust education and educational responses to antisemitism in order to avoid overly “reactive” approaches during periods of rising antisemitism or heightened conflict between Israel and Palestine.⁹⁸ Such strategic approaches ought to ensure consistent quality in Holocaust education across states and regions of Australia. Many praised the quality of existing teaching programs and the teaching profession in Australia itself, including one interviewee who suggested that greater impact could be achieved by harnessing the expertise currently available in Sydney and Melbourne, because:

I think to [teach the Holocaust] really well, you have to have great educators ... And I think we do have a good core ... but [it] can’t be left to a few experts in Holocaust museums and universities to do the work properly.⁹⁹

An interview with another participant at a recently opened Holocaust museum concluded with a question that spoke earnestly to a need for greater support in contexts where Holocaust education is less established and resourced. This was particularly evident where it is delivered by educators and facilitators who do not draw on lived experience as a source of authority on the subject matter:

What are other museums doing [in terms of engaging in modern politics]? What are Melbourne and Sydney doing? ... As you know, we’re new, and I’m a teacher, and I’m not Jewish myself, and you want to do things correctly – you want to do what’s right. So it would be great to have that space [to share approaches] with others, you know.¹⁰⁰

Finally, the broader sense of uncertainty among participants about the effectiveness of Holocaust education in contemporary Australia underscores the need for more robust evaluation and a critical reassessment of current approaches. For example, one participant, a Jewish educator and Holocaust scholar working in a university setting, reflected on current or existing approaches of getting “more students through the door” as not necessarily being an effective approach to teaching the Holocaust:

I would see groups of students herded through in their masses. Maybe it’s better to have 30 students a day who are given a really intensive program and do really good work. I don’t think it’s a numbers game.

Conversations with experts and practitioners leading Holocaust education reflect a sector actively rethinking its approaches, effectiveness and purpose. The aforementioned interviewee observed that there is a need for a “multi-pronged” approach to prevent such anti-Jewish prejudices from “becoming lethal in our societies. [Education is not] going to be the only thing that can stop it.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, a number of interviewees cautioned against viewing Holocaust education as a singular solution to addressing antisemitism, describing it instead as one tool among many others. Another participant noted: “I don’t think we should think of [Holocaust education] as the sole tool in our arsenal to make sure that people don’t hate Jews today.” When it comes to addressing antisemitism, this participant (as well as others interviewed for this project) suggested a need for a holistic and multi-layered approach to achieve attitudinal change, one that extends beyond classroom, curriculum and educational settings to the broader societal level. This is not to say that Holocaust education becomes redundant, but “Holocaust education can be a part of” the wider effort to combat antisemitism.¹⁰² Overall, participants pointed to the need for more robust evaluation, stronger feedback mechanisms across states and organisations, and clearer national direction. These are some of the issues that have become particularly urgent during times of crisis, namely after 7 October 2023.



DISCUSSION

Efforts to make Holocaust education meaningful in contemporary Australia often invite comparisons with present-day experiences, whether in relation to antisemitism or global conflicts. Such comparisons can help audiences find points of connection and better understand the significance of the Holocaust. However, participants expressed caution about drawing direct parallels, especially between the Nazi state-sponsored genocide and contemporary antisemitism in Australia, or between the Holocaust and current conflicts such as the war in Gaza, where analogies risk distortion, oversimplification or politicisation. These challenges, in particular, give rise to several interconnected tensions. One challenge concerns how individuals draw on their own identity and lived experience while avoiding overly subjective interpretations.

Another tension arises in how relevance is defined in relation to the intended audience and purpose of Holocaust education in Australia today, raising questions about who it is for and who holds responsibility for shaping and safeguarding its narratives. The survivor-based community continues to play a central role in stewarding Holocaust education in Australia. Remembering the Holocaust is a core component of Australian Jewish identity and this sense of obligation within the community will likely extend beyond the third generation (Alba 2014). This raises important questions about how the sector can better support Jewish educators who teach traumatic histories that are closely tied to their own identity. At the same time, Holocaust education is no longer

solely the domain of the Jewish community, as it is increasingly framed within broader genocide and human rights education in multicultural, migrant societies like Australia. A key challenge is how to navigate the transition of Holocaust education from its historical guardianship within the Australian Jewish community to broader involvement by non-Jewish educators, professionals and organisations – and the teaching of the histories of the Holocaust in the context of state curricula in non-Jewish schools.

Collectively, participants' accounts do not point to a clear rift in how the Holocaust is framed and taught today (Klein 2026), but rather to a spectrum of approaches. These range from efforts to universalise what Rutland and Hampel (2021) describe as the “particularistic tragedy” of the Holocaust. However, one participant articulated the need to balance particularist and universal approaches in Holocaust education in Australia, broadening its resonance while maintaining a clear focus on Jewish experiences. They explained that their pedagogical approach to teaching about the Holocaust centres on the postwar experiences of Jewish survivors in Australia:

I started with a story – it's not about antisemitism – it's a story about one survivor who lived in Sydney [and] still lived with his memory [of the Holocaust] and still lived in the world of his family that was murdered in the Holocaust. The argument I put forward is that the Holocaust never really ended for survivors and then we can have a discussion about intergenerational trauma.¹⁰³

For this educator, there is an ongoing relevance and importance in teaching about the Holocaust to provide an understanding of how this genocide and its legacies have shaped, and continue to shape, the Australian Jewish community. Such pedagogical frameworks foreground the lasting impacts of trauma, displacement and resettlement on Jewish identity in Australia, while fostering connections with other minoritised, migrant and refugee communities shaped by histories of displacement, state violence and genocide.

Our findings therefore raise the question of whether efforts to address antisemitism might be better served through intercultural dialogue that shifts the focus away from the Holocaust as a singular historical event and toward its contemporary legacies. Such an approach could deepen understanding of the longevity, complexity and multifaceted nature of antisemitism, while creating greater opportunities to build empathy among non-Jewish audiences by highlighting its enduring impact on Jewish life across centuries.

CONCLUSION

The rise of antisemitism after 7 October 2023 has intensified expectations on Holocaust museums, Holocaust educational programs, Holocaust educators and teachers responsible for teaching Holocaust history in schools. At a moment when Holocaust education is being asked to play a prominent role in national responses to antisemitism, this report argues for a more precise understanding of what Holocaust education can and cannot do.

Such calls are not new and can be contextualised within a longer and broader conversation about whether the learning outcomes associated with Holocaust education are being achieved, and whether adequate evaluation frameworks or studies are currently in place to measure the success of those outcomes (see, for example, Pistone et al. 2021). Similarly, explorations of the relationship between Holocaust education and antisemitism education in response to challenges that have emerged since 7 October are not unique to this research study (Cowan 2025).

Contemporary antisemitism cannot be addressed through Holocaust education alone. In Australian educational settings where Holocaust education is mandated, broader efforts to prevent antisemitic behaviour and incidents within those

environments ought to include cultural awareness training and institutional policies that situate antisemitism prevention within wider diversity, inclusion and anti-racism frameworks. Antisemitism, like other forms of racism or discrimination towards racialised or minoritised groups, is a structural issue that requires a holistic approach and educational responses (Pistone et al. 2021).

Holocaust education and educators should not be expected to carry the full burden of antisemitism prevention. Treating it as the primary answer risks placing too much responsibility on a field already under pressure, and too much emotional labour on the educators, many of them Jewish, who primarily sustain it. There is also a broader question, raised by Greene et al. (2021), about whether education (including Holocaust education, teaching about antisemitism or cultural awareness programs on the Australian Jewish experience) is positively correlated with reductions in antisemitism in society. To this end, further research is required.

1. To what extent has Holocaust education in Australia effectively prevented or addressed antisemitism?
 2. How are Holocaust educators and institutions responding to the post–October 7 rise in antisemitism, and what does this reveal about the perceived gaps in existing educational approaches?
 3. What underlying assumptions or structures within Holocaust education may hinder its relevance or impact in addressing contemporary iterations/forms of antisemitism?
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LITERATURE REVIEW

We conducted an overview of academic literature on Holocaust education and antisemitism, identifying significant scholarly contributions and sourcing potential research participants. We anticipated an intimate relationship between scholarship and interviewees' insights since most were scholars and historians informed by the latest research in the field. A symbiotic relationship developed between the reviewed literature and interview data: insights from interviewees shaped our engagement with existing scholarship, while the literature review and conceptual framework evolved in response to emerging themes from the interviews.

Beyond the academic literature, we also consulted a range of reports, policy guidelines and educational frameworks. These included *Antisemitism in Australian Schools: An Examination* (Blueprint Institute 2024); *What Do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust?* (Foster et al. 2016); the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's *Recommendations for Teaching and Learning About the Holocaust* (2019); UNESCO's *Education about the Holocaust and Preventing Genocide: A Policy Guide* (2017); UNESCO and OSCE ODIHR's *Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (2018) and *Monash University's Gen17 Report* (Graham & Markus 2018).

INTERVIEWS

Our project builds on existing qualitative research through semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in Holocaust education programs (Rutland 2015). These interviews facilitated in-depth insights, functioning as – to borrow the language from one interviewee – “structured reflections” between the interviewer and research participant.¹⁰⁴

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Interviews were conducted in two phases: i) between March and May 2025, with participants from the inaugural MIRRA study (*Antisemitism in the Cultural and Creative Industries*), primarily working in Jewish and Holocaust museums; and ii) between October and November 2025, with stakeholders engaged broadly in Holocaust education. Once interviews were transcribed, we coded the interview data to identify recurrent themes and narratives. Stakeholders' articulated experiences revealed patterns that were organised into overarching thematic categories and emergent subthemes.

In line with Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) procedures, all stakeholders received an explanatory statement and consent form ahead of participation. Participants could choose whether they, as individuals and/or representatives of organisations, and their affiliated institutions were named in the publication of research findings. Where de-identification was preferred, names and organisational identifiers were removed or referred to generically. All participants cited in this report have been assigned generic 'stakeholder' designations to ensure consistency and ease of reading.

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ENDNOTES

1. This report uses the terms ‘stakeholder’, ‘interviewee’ and ‘participant’ interchangeably to refer to the individuals interviewed for this research project.
2. We use ‘7 October [2023]’ and ‘October 7th’ interchangeably to refer to the date of the Hamas-led terrorist attack in Israel that killed 1200 Israelis and kidnapped about 250 others. This was followed by Israel’s invasion into Gaza and subsequent Hamas-Israel war, which forms part of a longer Israel-Palestine conflict.
3. Examples include Monash University (‘Holocaust and Genocide Studies’), the University of NSW (‘The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath’), Flinders University (‘The Holocaust’), The University of Melbourne (‘The Holocaust & and Genocide’), Deakin University (‘The Holocaust’) and The University of Sydney (‘The Holocaust: History and Aftermath’).
4. Stakeholder AK
5. Positionality is a key concept in qualitative research that refers to the social and political contexts shaping an individual’s identity and perspective. It acknowledges that social, cultural, political and personal experiences influence how knowledge is understood and interpreted.
6. We use the term ‘Holocaust’ to refer specifically to the attempted extermination of Jews, while acknowledging that the Nazis targeted non-Jewish groups for extermination and persecution, including Roma and Sinti people, Poles (Polish), Jehovah’s Witnesses, gay men and people with disabilities.
7. Stakeholder SH
8. Stakeholder GF
9. Stakeholder UA
10. Stakeholder SH
11. Stakeholder AK
12. Stakeholder IR
13. Stakeholder SC
14. Stakeholder OR
15. Stakeholder SC
16. Stakeholder CJ
17. Stakeholder SM
18. Stakeholder UA
19. Stakeholders OL; UA
20. Stakeholder AS
21. Stakeholder SR
22. Stakeholder MZ
23. Stakeholder OL
24. Stakeholder UA
25. Stakeholder AP
26. Stakeholder GF
27. Stakeholder IR
28. Stakeholder HR
29. Stakeholder MV
30. Stakeholder MZ
31. Stakeholder HR
32. Stakeholder AP
33. Stakeholder KK
34. Stakeholder UA
35. Stakeholder MZ

36. Stakeholder AO
37. Stakeholder IR
38. Stakeholder AO
39. Stakeholder AS
40. Stakeholder SC
41. Stakeholder AP
42. Stakeholder AA
43. Stakeholder HR
44. Stakeholder AK
45. Stakeholder AP
46. Stakeholder AO
47. Stakeholder SH
48. Stakeholder NB
49. Stakeholders SC; CJ;
50. Kristallnacht refers to the Night of Broken Glass, which was anti-Jewish attack carried out across Nazi Germany on 9-10 November 1938 by Nazi paramilitary forces, with support from the Hitler Youth and some German civilians.
51. Stakeholder IR
52. Stakeholder AA
53. Stakeholder AK
54. Stakeholder HR
55. Stakeholder AK
56. Stakeholder SM
57. Stakeholder SH
58. Stakeholder UA
59. Stakeholder CJ
60. Stakeholder GK
61. Stakeholder AO
62. Stakeholder SR
63. Stakeholder NB
64. Stakeholders MZ; GK
65. Stakeholder GK
66. Stakeholder MZ
67. Stakeholder AO
68. Stakeholder CJ
69. Stakeholder AP
70. Stakeholder SM
71. Stakeholder GK
72. Stakeholder HR
73. Stakeholder EU
74. Stakeholder SR
75. Stakeholder AK
76. Stakeholder AS
77. Stakeholder IR
78. Stakeholder AS
79. Stakeholder GK
80. Stakeholder AK
81. Stakeholder GK
82. Stakeholder NB
83. Stakeholder AO
84. Stakeholder KK
85. Stakeholder IR
86. Stakeholder MZ
87. Stakeholder CJ
88. Stakeholder MZ
89. Stakeholder MR
90. Stakeholder EU
91. Stakeholder UA
92. Stakeholder GK
93. Stakeholder SR
94. Stakeholder AK
95. Stakeholder AP
96. Stakeholder SR
97. Stakeholder GK
98. Stakeholder UA
99. Stakeholder AA
100. Stakeholder MR
101. Stakeholder AA
102. Stakeholder AP
103. Stakeholder IR
104. Stakeholder HR

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Disclaimer:

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Contact Us

For further information about this report or the MIRRA project, please contact:

Professor David Slucki

ACJC Director and Loti Smorgon
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E: mirra@monash.edu