

## MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The importance of collaboration between research and practice is increasingly acknowledged lately. In this paper, we assert the transformative power of the educators present in the research by highlighting the main principles of the two authentic educational philosophies that have highly influenced the world. Shulamit Imber, initially a history teacher, developed into one of the leading creators of the Holocaust education philosophy, contributing her practical experience and methods to give the past meaning and ‘humanize’ the teaching about Holocaust. Luigi Giussani, the man who wanted to bring the Christian experience in high school environment, considered that the primary concern for an educator is educating the human heart, which is one, regardless of cultures, habits and ways of expression. Basing our research on qualitative methods, i.e. the content analysis technique, we claim that a ‘true’ education embracing the human being goes beyond the border of its subject even if it preserves its singularity.*

**Keywords:** education, Luigi Giussani, Holocaust, Shulamit Imber, philosophy;

### INTRODUCTION

Shulamit Imber, a history teacher in the 1970s, became one of the Yad Vashem brilliant creators of the Holocaust Education philosophy and pedagogy, contributing her practical experience and methods to the ‘humanization’ of teaching about the Holocaust. ‘Safely in, safely out’ phrase inspired by the Service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur has mastered her activity and was her major preoccupation with teaching the trauma, “without traumatizing the students” (Goldstein, 2021, p. 28). Her pedagogy and vision of Holocaust Education derived from her pioneering work was then refined and promoted worldwide through hundreds of projects that highly influenced academics, educators and students. At the time when the passionate and esteemed Pedagogical Director of the International School for Holocaust Studies ended her fecund carrier of over three decades in the field of Holocaust Education, we should remember her meaningful contribution and learn her lesson.

Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) completed his studies at the Theological Faculty of Venegono (VA), being interested in Eastern Christian Theology and American Protestantism. Giussani began teaching at the Venegono Seminary, which he left at his request in the early 1950s to teach in high schools. Then he was a professor of Introduction to Theology at the Catholic University of Milan for about three decades. In 1954, he gave life to the

Communion and Liberation movement, which developed in Italy and in more than seventy countries. “The Educational Risk” is one of his fascinating and valuable texts, reflecting his educational philosophy and method. Published first in 1977, the book found its final version in 2005. The book reflects his major preoccupation of 1960s when tried to bring the Christian experience in high schools environment.

## 1. FINDINGS

In this paper, we argue for the transformative power of the voices of the practitioners present in research and collaboration between educators and academics, with Shulamit Imber's professional experience as a paradigm. Then, we highlight some of the milestones of the philosophy of Holocaust Education derived from the pedagogical view of Imber in connection to the leading considerations of Luigi Giussani on education reflected in his book “The Educational Risk” (2005). Moreover, we aim to highlight that the two authentic educational visions, although they are related to different subject, converge and have very similar principles. Finally, we seek to highlight that a ‘true’ education embracing the human being goes beyond the border of its subject even if it preserves its singularity.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

To achieve these goals, we base our research on qualitative methods, namely the content analysis technique, using secondary sources such as interviews, studies, pamphlets, articles and newspaper articles concerning Holocaust education, i.e. the vision of Shulamit Imber, who foster and inspired the philosophy of Holocaust education. Three important institution mainly publishes some of the materials used in this paper, namely Yad Vashem, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education, London. Moreover, we use Luigi Giussani book “The Educational Risk” (2005) that can offer a deep understanding of Christian educational philosophy. Comparing the two authentic visions on education, we hope to open a dialogue between Holocaust education and Christian education.

## 3. PRACTITIONERS’ VOICE IN RESEARCH. The 3rd place

The importance of collaboration between research and practice is increasingly acknowledged lately. Educators and practitioners who have been usually “subjects of research or the anticipated audience for it” (Richardson, 2022, p. 1) are more and more encouraged to get involved in research.

Using different papers, especially Sarah Parson’s article concerning the relationships between research and practice, and the type of knowledge generated within this framework, Alasdair Richardson (2022, p. 10) highlights the importance of “opening a ‘third place’ in Holocaust Education, by including a range of practitioners’ voices”. She based her point of view on the IHRA’s ‘refreshed’ Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust, which are meant to “contribute to an ongoing conversation between academics, policymakers, practitioners and wider society about the relevance and importance of teaching and learning about the Holocaust today” (IHRA, 2022, p. 7).

Sarah Parsons clarifies the phrase ‘third place’ presenting it as “more a ‘synergistic’ space between research and practice which can offer new insights and theories for both research and practice” (Parsons, 2021, para. 9). “Committed to participatory methodologies and methods in research conducted with marginalized groups”, Parson claims the important

role of a “more democratic place (...) with practice rather than on or about it” (Parsons, 2021, para. 7). She underlines the specificity of the ‘knowledge co-construction’ that is “contrastive stance with knowledge transfer or exchange” (Parsons, 2021, para. 8). Therefore, the collaboration between research and practice effects “new knowledge creation (the what) through the shared endeavors of research and practice working together equally (the how)” (Parsons, 2021, para. 8). She stresses that “addressing the research-practice gap cannot be achieved by simply making research findings more easily discoverable and accessible to practice, or by maintaining an unhelpful dichotomy between research knowledge (implied to be superior) and practice-based knowledge (implied to be inferior)” (Parsons, 2021, para. 7).

If we look back to the beginnings of Holocaust education, we notice that this gap was deeply felt by all educational stakeholders involved in the process. Shulamit Imber remembers that in the 1970s when she was a history teacher, the situation was a bit desperate. There was any philosophy of Holocaust education, little suitable materials and almost no training programs for teachers. At the time Imber arrived at Yad Vashem to study ‘Yahadut zmaneinu’ (contemporary Judaism), she had already developed “her unique brand of pedagogy”, “including interdisciplinary teaching”; interactive methods and materials, movies and human story (Goldstein, 2021, p. 29). Then, she developed an interdisciplinary program, teaching history together with Jewish philosophy and art. At the university, she met academics such as Professor Yehuda Bauer, Professor Israel Gutman, and Professor David Bankier, from whom she learned a lot. However, there was no 'translation' of academic information into pedagogy.

In 1993, when Avner Shalev was appointed Chairman of the Directorate of Yad Vashem, he established International School for Holocaust Studies and the International Institute for Holocaust Research, inviting Shulamit Imber to further develop her vision on Holocaust Education and pedagogy, greatly shaping the educational philosophy of the subject. Therefore, Shulamit Imber’s contribution to the field of Holocaust education can be considered a very good paradigm of the fruitful collaboration between practitioners and academics, effecting a new educational philosophy, which still has a great impact on academics, educators, practitioners and students worldwide. Moreover, it can serve as model for different educational pedagogies, i.e. those concerning other genocides.

#### 4. TWO EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

The essence of the philosophy of education about the Holocaust seems to us closely akin to the philosophical scenario proposed by Luigi Giussani in his book “The Risk of Education”. Although Giussani was referring to the education from the morals point of view, the pillars of the educational philosophy remain the same. Therefore, we will approach the two educational philosophies, by emphasizing some of their main principles.

##### **The awareness of the past**

When distinguishing between historian and educator, Shulamit Imber shapes two axes of teaching about the Holocaust such as the historical axis and the educational axis. “The historical axis refers to teaching the Holocaust itself”, deals with “what” and “how” questions and includes several themes like: “Nazi ideology; the stages of development of the anti-Jewish policies both inside and outside of Germany; the response of the Jewish population to this policy; the establishment of ghettos; the ‘Final Solution’ – the extermination of the Jews; rescue; the world's reaction to the Holocaust.” (Imber, <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/pedagogical-philosophy.html>)

The educational axis is meant to reveal the meaning of past events. While “the historian talks about the past”, “the educator has to give the past meaning” (Goldstein, 2021), developing critical thinking, empathy and confront the past with the present reality of the student. This means he/she introduces the student to reality, according to Giussani (J.A. Jungmann, as cited in Giussani, 2005, p. 35). From both educational visions, we observe that education is closely connected to the ‘meaning’. Jung has expressed before the idea: “...we never truly affirm reality unless we affirm the existence of its meaning” (Jung, as cited in Giussani, 2005, p. 36).

Now we retain the term ‘meaning’, which defines the educational process of teaching the Holocaust. The educator should teach it starting from the Jewish world before the Holocaust, focusing on how the Jews survived and faced moral dilemmas in the world of chaos during the Holocaust and understanding survivors’ stories and what they mean by “revenge”.

Shulamit Imber gives special importance to unveiling the “creative and complex” interwar Jewish world, “a rich mosaic, full of change and hope for the future” and glimpse the Jewish Life before the Holocaust (<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/educational-videos>). Bearer of an old spiritual and civilized world, who had created the “infrastructure of human ethics”, through the legacy of the Ten Commandments (Imber, <https://www.yadvashem.org>); Jews were trying to integrate into the modern world and adapt to the societies in which they lived. They contributed to the prosperity of their adopted country, often without being citizens. (Ghenciulescu, 2022, p.9).

The educator has to propose adequately this past as a “working hypothesis” (Giussani, 2005, p. 5), using interactive methods, resources, and especially by challenging students to ask questions: “How did they live in the modern world? What music did they enjoy, which hobbies did they chose?” (Goldstein, 2021, p. 30) Therefore, in Imber's educational-philosophical vision, the educator should build the meaning of the past from the perspective of personal stories of the people involved in the events.

### **Proposing the past within a present, lived experience**

The second educational principle issued by Giussani “concerns the fact that the past may only be proposed to young people if it is presented within a present, lived experience” (Giussani, 2005, p. 6). If we consider his vision in relation with the philosophy of the Holocaust Education, then we emphasize maybe the main aspect of it, namely the story of the survivors. Shulamit Imber claims their crucial role in educating the students. “Survivors were our ‘backbone’ in developing our educational philosophy, and they will never be replaced”, observed she (Goldstein, 2021, p. 32).

The story of the survivors “is vital to comprehending” the events and has profound “educational significance”, offering the student “something extra besides hearing the testimony itself” (Lachmanovich & Weizmann, <https://www.yadvashem.org>). Imber explains what ‘extra’ means, using the phrase ‘empathic unsettlement’ issued by the historian and theoretician Dominick LaCapra. Therefore, Imber explains that the:

“...empathic unsettlement the students undergo after hearing the testimony doesn’t occur due to some profound universal realization about human suffering, but because a connection was made to something that is close enough to be recognized. The survivor who stands in front of the students experienced something, and they can connect to it.” (Lachmanovich & Weizmann, <https://www.yadvashem.org>)

Moreover, authentic encounters, testimonies heard from a survivor “instils a feeling of commitment to the memory of the Holocaust, much more than a history lesson does” (Lachmanovich & Weizmann, <https://www.yadvashem.org>). Therefore, the presence and the testimony of a witness create a powerful present experience that addresses to the “ultimate needs” of the student’s heart. “Anyone who participates in a meeting with survivor feels their moral authority, which creates an obligation in each one of us to remember what happened, and understand its meanings today”, considers Imber (Goldstein, 2021, p. 32).

Aware that there will come a time when students will not be able to hear directly from the survivors, professionals have created educational programs to preserve survivors’ witnesses. The International School for Holocaust Studies in partnership with the Center for Multimedia Assisted Instruction at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Claims Conference and the Adelson Family Foundation create “Witnesses and Education”, “consisting of many series of testimony films in which survivors recount their life stories at the locations in which the events transpired.” (Lachmanovich & Weizmann, <https://www.yadvashem.org>) Professionals guide the witnesses present in this program, so that “the orientation of the questions is pedagogical in nature” and thus, the program has an educational character.

#### **“Educating of the human heart as God made it”**

Giussani demonstrates in his book (2005) that educating the “human heart” or “the original element present in all of us” is the key of a “true” education, able to foster critical thinking. The etymology of “critical” is the Greek “krinein, krisis” that express the ability to judge, evaluate, make choices and decisions or “sift through what is inside” (Giussani, 2005, p. 6)

Shulamit Imber claims the importance of bringing into the class the moral, ethical and educational questions raised during the Holocaust, for they reflect the fact that in the world of chaos, the Nazi did not manage to destroy the capacity of asking “moral questions” and making choice. “Facing a choice between two values shows the desire to preserve human norms.” (Imber, <https://www.yadvashem.org>) According to her, the two questions related to the educational process of teaching about Holocaust should be “How did people live in the shadow of death - what choices did they make in a world that was fraught with ‘choiceless choices’?” (Imber, <https://echoesandreflections.org>). The phrase ‘choiceless choices’ used by Imber, was coined by the scholar Lawrence Langer “to describe a situation where every action had a consequence that was often life and death; where decisions had to be made between one abnormal result and another in the crushing reality of life in the Holocaust.” (Imber, <https://echoesandreflections.org>)

Imber explains, “The educational aspect is in the dilemma itself, the moral question, rather than its outcome”. They can teach students “about the complexity of life in those horrific times and of the struggle to maintain humanity in a world of dehumanizing” (Imber, <https://echoesandreflections.org>). They should not point on what somebody in the classroom would have done if he/she were there, for this kind of approach implies dangerous effects on both the people involved in the process and the subject to teach. Therefore, it is not recommended role-playing. Rather, the educators should let speak the evidence of the past such as photographs or film or artefacts, case studies, documents museum sites. They should withhold answers to the students, but open them possibilities to grapple with the questions and explore the subject. Therefore, the purpose of using “moral dilemmas” in teaching is “to develop along that journey some of the critical thinking skills that are needed to interpret this

past” and the “independent thinking” (Imber, <https://echoesandreflections.org>). Thus, the students should be challenged to create their own meanings, against the “ultimate criterion”, namely, “the need for what is true, beautiful, and good”.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of collaboration between research and practice is increasingly acknowledged and encouraged recently. The contemporary history of education proves that transformational voices of inspired educators are capable of bringing about significant improvements in the area of educational research. Shulamit Imber and Luigi Giussani are two examples of educators who developed into researchers by refining their pioneering work in the environment of school and creating two sound philosophies of education that highly influenced academics, educators and students worldwide. Although their philosophies belong to different and yet related traditions and have been shaped in different geographies and cultural environments, they converge in the similarity of the principles around which they were built. Moreover, they demonstrate that ‘true’ education, which embrace the human being, transcends the boundary of its subject though it preserves its singularity. Further research is needed to open the dialogue between Holocaust education and Christian education and increase the awareness of collaboration to heal the wounds of the past and create new insights for joint research.

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