

Director's Decision re a Learning Resource

Course CHG38M: Genocide: Historical and Contemporary Implications

In accordance with Operational Procedure PR.532: Handling Concerns About Learning Resources, I have considered the report of the Genocide Curriculum Review Committee, dated April 29, 2008 (attached), and have decided:

- (a) That the Review Committee's Recommendations 1 to 8 be approved;
- (b) That Recommendation 9 be replaced with the following:

That the Ministry of Education be requested to immediately change the title of course CHG38M to "Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity."

Gerry Connelly
Director of Education

May 8, 2008

Therefore, in summary, the Director decided:

- 1. That a course on Genocide be taught by the TDSB at the Grade 11 level;
- 2. That the module on Armenia be included in the course and should be taught as a case of genocide, but note taken that some respected scholars disagree;
- 3. That students be taught the importance of establishing intent when characterizing a crime against humanity as a genocide;
- 4. That the number of actual case studies not be expanded at this time;
- 5. That a teacher course review committee be set up in the third year with a view to re-examining the curriculum content and the course description;
- 6. That Barbara Coloroso's book, *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide*, be removed from the resource list;
- 7. That the resources be reviewed by a committee of academic experts as determined by Program staff and in alignment with Board procedure with a view to deleting some items and adding others;
- 8. That the bibliography be organized by topic as well as by nature of the work (i.e. memoirs, encyclopedia, social psychology, theoretical works) and that the resource list be grouped into items recommended for use by teachers and items recommended for use by students;
- 9. That the Ministry of Education be requested to immediately change the title of course CHG38M to "Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity."

Program and School Services Committee
June 2, 2008

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MEMORANDUM

Date April 29, 2008

To **Gerry Connelly,**
Director of Education

From Melanie Parrack, Chair
Genocide Curriculum Review Committee

Subject **GENOCIDE CURRICULUM REVIEW**
"Genocide: Historical and Contemporary Implications"

BACKGROUND

Ministry of Education approval was received in August 2007 to implement the course "Genocide: Historical and Contemporary Implications". Subsequent to that, TDSB received concerns from members of the public regarding the development and content of the course.

A number of submissions was received from members of several specific communities, some advocating for the course and others objecting to the course, with the greatest controversy surrounding inclusion or exclusion of the Armenian case study. The submissions are listed in Appendix A.

In accordance with Operational Procedure PR.532CUR System Superintendent Nadine Segal received hundreds of completed Forms 532B – Request for Reconsideration of a Learning Resource. In response to these concerns and in accordance with Board approved Procedure 532 "Handling Concerns about Learning Resources" the Associate Director of Education established a Review Committee in February of 2008.

CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF REVIEW COMMITTEE

TDSB Program and Equity Department staff members were selected based on Procedure 532. Specific criteria were used to determine the selection of community resource personnel who could address the issues in an impartial way:

- At least two external resource persons from legal, political or academic areas;
- Background in policy and curriculum development;
- Consultation with universities that have departments of genocide studies in history, faculties of law or human rights for recommendations of scholars: McGill, Concordia, OISE, U of T, Nipissing, Western, Queens, Virginia, and Minnesota. Consultation also occurred with history departments in Ontario universities;
- Community members who previously responded either orally or in writing and members of the steering committee that developed the course were not eligible for the Review Committee.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Melanie Parrack, Executive Superintendent – Student Success, Chair

Karen Grose, Superintendent of Program

Patricia Hayes, Manager, Human Rights, TDSB

Professor Howard Adelman,¹ Professor Emeritus, Philosophy, York University

Professor Doris Bergen,¹ Department of History, University of Toronto

Professor Darryl Robinson,¹ Faculty of Law, University of Toronto

REVIEW COMMITTEE PROCESS

The Review Committee met on March 3, 2008 and April 9, 2008.

The members of the Committee were provided with an overview and background on the development of the curriculum for the genocide course; the guidelines for course approval provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education; a set of procedures for selecting, approving and handling concerns about learning resources; the submissions and responses by academics, politicians and community organizations and individuals as well as some newspaper articles. After surveying the material, the Review Committee members agreed to review the material in depth and the expert academic members of the Committee agreed to undertake different specific assignments and write drafts on the different issues for distribution to the whole Committee. Upon review and revision of those drafts, the Committee would then prepare its report. The Committee discussed its drafts during the second meeting and continued its work through online collaboration and communication.

¹ Academic Biographies are found in Appendix B

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Review Committee took as its terms of reference that it would only deal with the issues raised by community responses to the approved course that were appropriate to a pedagogical review. Upon review of the submissions of various academic, political and community inputs, the Committee summarized the issues that emerged from the materials received:

- 1) Some persons submitting communications and requests for reconsideration do not accept that the atrocities against Armenians constituted genocide and want either the course cancelled or the module removed from the course. Some argued that the 1915 events regarding the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian population are disputed by historians as is the validity of some documentation.
- 2) Some persons submitting communications and requests for reconsideration argued that Armenian texts and bibliography were one-sided, that Turkish resources and perspectives were not included in the course outline and that historians disputing that the deaths of the Armenians constituted genocide were overlooked.
- 3) A claim was made that the course was based on Barbara Coloroso's book *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide* and that Barbara Coloroso is not considered to be a historian.
- 4) Some persons submitting communications and requests for reconsideration raised procedural concerns arguing that the Ministry of Education guideline for approving a locally developed course was not followed or objecting that representatives of the Turkish community in Ontario were not consulted in the development of the course.
- 5) Some communications referred to political recognition or non-recognition of historical events. For example, it was submitted that the Government of Canada is considering changing its position on the Armenian genocide or that The United Nations did not acknowledge the Armenian case as a genocide.
- 6) Some communications argued that Turkish children would be victimized if this material were taught.
- 7) Individuals and representatives of other communities advocated inclusion of additional examples of genocides and crimes against humanity, specifically the Ukrainian Famine and the mistreatment of First Nations.

The Review Committee decided that the course would be evaluated on its academic merits rather than on the current political context or debates. The Committee decided to address the basis of remaining issues under the following topics:

- Rationale for the Course
- Course Description and Content
- Resources for the Course
- Other Issues

RATIONALE FOR THE COURSE

The course rationale for "Genocide: Contemporary and Historical Implications" approved by the Ministry of Education states as follows:

"Members of the Toronto educational community including teachers, administrators, trustees, students, parents, and community groups believe that the study of the tragedies and horrors of genocidal acts in the past and present must be studied and addressed. Democracy, justice, and the rule of law must be understood, claimed, and defended by each generation of citizens if we are to confront this demonstration of human evil. It is believed that a full-credit course will engage students and allow them to study genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in a systematic and thoughtful way.

Many students within the Toronto District School Board and their families have experienced bias, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination both in their home countries and here in Canada. Our community includes refugee students, as well as the children and grandchildren of people who have experienced genocidal acts and extreme human rights abuses. Given the specific multi-cultural and multi-ethnic diversity within Toronto, it is felt that it is essential that students born within and outside Canada have the opportunity to explore in depth the causes and consequences of genocide and the lived realities of the aggressors, targets, bystanders, and resisters to these horrific acts of violence. A study of these experiences will help foster a sense of empathy for the targets of these violent acts and encourage students to understand the connections they have to their fellow human beings.

A full-credit course on genocide will foster an open exploration of the controversial and sensitive issues surrounding genocide. The course as proposed has not only pedagogical and historical value, but would be of interest to students and would possibly support the development of civic virtues in students. This exploration will provide a context for students to begin to think critically about the world they have inherited and in which they currently live. This critical reflection will provide a context for students to begin to understand the notion of moral judgment in relation to history. As well, it will allow students the opportunity to understand their rights and responsibilities as global citizens and challenge them to take action to ensure that human rights are protected and that genocide be confronted."

The Review Committee found the rationale for the course to be convincing. The Committee expressed some skepticism about the expectations of teaching empathy and engendering responsible citizenship, but nonetheless felt that these were laudable goals. The goals and expectations for the course might ultimately need recalibration based on experience acquired as the course is taught.

Members of the Review Committee considered it important to emphasize that the material to be covered in a course on genocide is primarily historical. As a record of the human past, history reflects the full range of individual and collective behaviour. It might be comforting to create a version of the past that tells us only what we want to hear, but doing so is not only dishonest, it is self-defeating. Studying history can only help deepen our understanding of the present if it is done with an

open mind – and that means a mind open to acknowledging the painful realities that are part of every human life and every society. It is essential to approach the past, like the present, with respect for the complex situations that ordinary people and leaders faced and sensitivity to the impact that our depictions of individuals, events, and societies can have on our view of the world.

It is also important to recognize that any historical account is incomplete. There will never be access to every piece of information about the past. Nor will there ever be the wisdom to understand perfectly what is known. Imperfect as it is, history cannot be revised in order to remove reference to acts of violence and destruction or to expunge the memory of people's victimization and suffering at the hands of others. This approach might serve the short-term interests of some people but it cannot be defended in the long run.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that a course on Genocide be taught by the TDSB at the Grade 11 level.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND CONTENT

The course description for "Genocide: Contemporary and Historical Implications" approved by the Ministry of Education states as follows:

"This course investigates examples of genocide in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including the Holocaust, Armenia, and Rwanda. Students will investigate the terms genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes and explore them through the lens of historical analysis. Students will examine identity formation and how "in groups" and "out groups" are created, including an analysis of how bias, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination impact on various groups. As the course unfolds students will be challenged to draw appropriate connections between the history of genocide and Canadian history and between the lives of the people they are investigating and their own lives. Students will use critical thinking skills to look at the themes of judgment, memory, and legacy and will evaluate the ways in which active citizens may empower themselves to stop future genocides. Throughout the course, students will gain an understanding of the role of perpetrator, victim, bystander, rescuer, opportunist, and resister."

Two issues were discussed in response to concerns raised: (1) inclusion of the Armenian case study as a genocide and (2) exclusion of the Ukrainian Famine and other cases, such as the mistreatment and destruction of First Nations.

1) Inclusion of the Armenian case study as a genocide:

The Committee examined the communications supporting and objecting to the inclusion of the Armenian case study, and discussed the various views and findings of scholars in the area.

Some submissions are based on the assumption that events disputed by historians do not fall within the realm of legitimate history. In fact, there are elements of every event, no matter how well documented, that are open to debate. Arguing about facts and how to interpret them is an essential part of the critical process that produces serious history. For example, historians can – and do – argue about the causes of World War I. Credible history is based on evidence that can be cited and re-examined by others so that they can check the facts and assess the strength of different interpretations.

Some submissions argue that the existence of tainted or inauthentic evidence is grounds to dismiss the claim that the Armenians were victims of genocide in 1915. It would be poor history to base an entire narrative of events on a small number of documents. In fact, the range of sources on which descriptions of the attacks on Armenians are based is wide and includes many kinds of material, from Ottoman government records to diplomatic correspondence and eyewitness accounts.

The real issue of historical dispute is whether genocidal intent was present, i.e. whether the atrocities were a result of “a badly mismanaged war-time security measure” or an intention to destroy the Armenian people. All serious scholars, however, accept that enormous numbers of Armenians were killed in 1915. As Guenter Lewy noted in his submission to the Board, “Both sides agree that several hundred thousand men, women and children were forced from their homes, and during a harrowing trek over mountains and through deserts uncounted multitudes died of starvation and disease or were murdered.”

Given that the vast majority of scholars who have studied the case (particularly those who specialize in the study of genocide) concur that what occurred was genocide, the module should be taught as case of genocide. At the same time, students should be taught the importance of establishing intent, and the various indirect as well as direct ways that intent can be established in order to draw a conclusion whether or not a particular case constitutes genocide. Further, they should also be taught that a crime against humanity (a broader category than genocide) can be just as horrific, criminal and deserving of attention.

Even though the Committee believes the evidence overwhelmingly supports the contention that the atrocities committed against the Armenians constituted a genocide, the label of “genocide” in the Armenian case may not be as self-evident as it is for the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide. This does not mean the characterization as a genocide need be qualified, but it does indicate that respected scholars who disagree should be read and heard.

The Committee believes that Grade 11 students can appreciate - and, more importantly, should appreciate - that history is a contested area without somehow suggesting that everything is relative. That events and interpretations are contested is also true of contemporary slaughters. Some scholars and members of the international judiciary dispute the characterization of the deaths of Darfurians from 2003

until the present as a genocide while others apply that label. Such disputes do not in themselves provide reasons for not teaching a course which, in accordance with the available evidence, characterizes the atrocity as a genocide. Disagreeing about the appropriateness of the label of genocide is not the same as denying that the killings occurred. Genuine historical controversies do belong in a high school curriculum and can be beneficial in giving students an in-depth understanding of complex events and in teaching students critical thinking.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the module on Armenia be included in the course and should be taught as a case of genocide, but note taken that some respected scholars disagree.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that students be taught the importance of establishing intent when characterizing a crime against humanity as a genocide.

- 2) Exclusion of Ukrainian Famine and other cases, such as the mistreatment and destruction of First Nations

As a study of the dynamics of extreme violence, the course, "Genocide: Historical and Contemporary Implications", is built around three cases: the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the Holocaust and Rwanda. These are not the only historical cases that might have been included, but, in the assessment of members of the Review Committee, this selection is appropriate for a number of reasons. Given the complexity of the subject matter, it is essential to examine specific historical cases to give concreteness to the general concepts involved. It would be very difficult to cover more than three cases in a year-long course. These particular cases range geographically and chronologically from the early decades of the twentieth century to its end, from Central Asia to Europe and Africa. There is adequate documentation for each of these cases so that students and teachers can work with a variety of types of materials: eyewitness accounts, government records, and after-the-fact representations. Each of the cases is distinct, and the particularities of the historical contexts allow certain themes or patterns to be investigated and assessed. Examples of these themes and patterns may include the role of pre-existing prejudices, the role of the state and international responses. Students will be expected to study other examples of genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, war crimes and human rights abuses in the 20th and 21st centuries based on their personal interests and appropriate academic resources. These examples might include Cambodia, Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, the Ukrainian Famine, East Timor, Bosnia, Darfur, the former Yugoslavia and others.

While it is noted that more people died in the Ukrainian Famine than in all of the genocides that are included in the course, the Review Committee did not recommend altering the course at this time but this should be considered when the course is reviewed.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the number of actual case studies not be expanded at this time.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that a teacher course review committee be set up in the third year with a view to re-examining the curriculum content and the course description.

RESOURCES FOR COURSE

A concern was raised regarding the appropriateness of Barbara Coloroso's book, *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide*. The Committee felt that this book was not a good example of rigorous historical scholarship. It might be considered for inclusion among readings on the social psychology of genocide because of her thesis that genocide is the extreme extension of bullying.

Though the vast majority of scholars agree that the Armenian atrocities constituted a genocide, there are reputable scholars who disagree. Works by Guenter Lewy and Bernard Lewis should be examined for inclusion as reference material in a course that develops critical historical thinking.

Because this course deals with an extremely complicated subject matter, the resources that underpin the course will need to be regularly reviewed and updated.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that Barbara Coloroso's book, *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide*, be removed from the resource list.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that the resources be reviewed by a committee of academic experts as determined by Program staff and in alignment with Board procedure with a view to deleting some items and adding others.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that the bibliography be organized by topic as well as by nature of the work (i.e. memoirs, encyclopedia, social psychology, theoretical works) and that the resource list be grouped into items recommended for use by teachers and items recommended for use by students.

OTHER ISSUES

The Committee responded to three other issues:

- 1) The relevance of governmental decisions
- 2) Procedural issues and consultation
- 3) Title of the Course

- 1) The relevance of governmental decisions

Some petitioners have argued that, although the Canadian Parliament has passed a motion recognizing the Armenian genocide, the governmental position may be changing. However, the current or future position of the federal Parliament or executive branch does not appear to be germane to the question at hand. The study of history must be based on the evidence and the quality of the critical assessment of that evidence. No legislature, in Canada or elsewhere, has jurisdiction to legislatively determine the past. Legislative motions and executive statements are of interest as they can provide insights into the politics of denial, acknowledgement and debate that surround contested historical events. In this sense, the reactions of various communities and governments are a valuable topic for inquiry and discussion in the described course.

In addition, some petitioners have argued, as a reason to withdraw references to the Armenian genocide, that the events of 1915 have not been officially recognized by the United Nations as a genocide. The premise of non-recognition is empirically open to question.² In any event, and more importantly, while there are many organizations and offices of the United Nations that may take action in response to evidence of genocide,³ none are charged with making exclusive authoritative de-

² UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub. 2/416/1985/6, 2 July 1985, adopted by the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

³ Examples include the General Assembly, the Security Council, the International Court of Justice, the Office of the Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, and the Human Rights Council.

terminations of genocide, particularly with respect to events that long preceded the existence of the United Nations. A United Nations determination is not a legal prerequisite to recognition of genocide, nor is it an empirical prerequisite to evaluation and discussion of historic events in terms of the concept of genocide. Genocide related decisions of governing bodies are irrelevant to the consideration of course appropriateness.

2) Procedural issues and consultation

Some of the requests for reconsideration objected that Ministry procedures had not been followed. Many complainants protested that members of the Canadian Turkish communities had not been consulted in the preparation of the course materials. The Review Committee found that such procedural questions fell outside of its mandate and expertise and should be addressed to the Toronto District School Board. In the course of its work, the Committee did however review these objections, the responses from the TDSB, and the relevant procedures – such as the Ministry of Education *Guide to Locally Developed Courses, Grades 9 to 12: Development and Approval Procedures*, and found no indications of departure from the prescribed procedures. For example, some complaints or requests for reconsideration note that the course of study mentions consultations with post-secondary and community partners, and raise the objection that members of the Canadian Turkish communities were not consulted. As the Ministry of Education *Guide to Locally Developed Courses, Grades 9 to 12: Development and Approval Procedures* makes clear, however, consultation with partners refers to “appropriate postsecondary partners (i.e. universities, colleges, trade associations or workplaces)” in connection with “destination-related courses (i.e. university, university/college, college or workplace preparation course)”. The course of study reference to community partners involved in the writing of the courses refers to organizations with teacher education outreach programs (e.g. UNICEF, Facing History and Ourselves, the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem, the Canadian Centre for Genocide Education).

3) Title of the Course

The Committee considered whether the course should be called “Genocide” or “Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity”. Objections to adding “Crimes Against Humanity” to the title had largely to do with the length and awkwardness as well as a reluctance to make unnecessary changes.

Judging from the origins and rationale of the course, the intention was to create a course on crimes against humanity and war crimes as well as genocide. The Committee suggests that a course entitled “Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity” might be more appropriate if only to underscore that some cases of crimes against humanity took more lives than many or even any recognized cases of genocide. Further, by including in the title the phrase “Crimes Against Humanity”, one would

better be able to distinguish between different types of atrocities. Broadening the title could also help avoid undue focus on the legal and technical issues surrounding the definition and use of the term "genocide". These issues sometimes distract from the matters of life and death at stake in these cases. Finally, the foremost encyclopedia on the subject is entitled *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*.

Recommendation 9

It is recommended that consideration be given at the time of course review to changing the course title, if feasible and practicable, to "Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity".

NOTE: Recommendation 9 has been amended by the Director (see the Director's decision)

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that a course on Genocide be taught by the TDSB at the Grade 11 level.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the module on Armenia be included in the course and should be taught as a case of genocide, but note taken that some respected scholars disagree.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that students be taught the importance of establishing intent when characterizing a crime against humanity as a genocide.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the number of actual case studies not be expanded at this time.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that a teacher course review committee be set up in the third year with a view to re-examining the curriculum content and the course description.

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Recommendation 9

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APPENDIX A

Submissions from Community Representatives

Federation of Canadian Turkish Associations

Turkish – Canadian Society in Vancouver

Canadian Turkish Cypriot Association

Turkish Society of Nova Scotia

Council of Turkish Canadians

Turkish – Canadian Cultural Association of Calgary

Representatives from the Turkish Community: Toronto, Ottawa, Markham,
Brampton, Mississauga, Pickering, Kanata, Windsor, Turkey

Ukrainian National Federation

Canadian Ukrainian Opera Association

Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood of Canada

Canadian Ukrainian Immigrant Aid Society

League of Ukrainian Canadians

Ukrainian Canadian Congress

Ukrainian Youth Association of Ontario

Representatives from the Ukrainian community: Toronto, Windsor, Kitchener

Canadian Croatian Congress

Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Student Union of Canada

Azerbaijani Community Association

Canadian Arab Federation

Canadian for Genocide Education (Canadians for Genocide Museum)

North American Bosniaks

Bosnian Islamic Association

Lithuanian Canadian Community

Serbian National Shield Society of Canada

Association of Serbian Women
Cypriot Federation of Canada

APPENDIX B

**Biographies of Academic Expert Members
of the
Genocide Curriculum Review Committee**

Professor Howard Adelman

Professor Adelman was Professor of Philosophy at York University where he was the founding Director of the Centre for Refugee Studies. He has been a Visiting Fellow at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. His many books and articles are on topics related to genocide, with a special focus on Rwanda, theories of explanation and the role of bystanders regarding prevention and intervention. He has written extensively on the Middle East, humanitarian intervention, membership rights and ethics.

Professor Doris Bergen

Professor Bergen is the Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor of Holocaust Studies, University of Toronto. Her research focuses on issues of religion, gender and ethnicity in the Holocaust and World War II and comparatively in other cases of extreme violence. A winner of prestigious research grants and awards for excellence in teaching, Professor Bergen is author of numerous books and articles. She has held many grants and fellowships and has taught at the Universities of Warsaw, Notre Dame and Vermont.

Professor Darryl Robinson

Professor Robinson currently teaches the international human rights law clinic in the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto and will soon join the law faculty of Queen's University. He has served as Legal Officer at Foreign Affairs Canada, working on international criminal law, human rights law and humanitarian law. His primary focus was international criminal justice, including the negotiation of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and

the development of Canadian legislation on genocide and crimes against humanity. He received a Minister's citation and Minister's Award for Foreign Policy Excellence.

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