

Holocaust Education Week provides opportunity to discuss world issues

[Nancy King](#)

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SYDNEY - The lessons that are learned during Holocaust Education Week can be applied to a wide range of social justice issues in schools, an educator says.



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Amanda Reddick, the keynote speaker during the Temple Sons of Israel Synagogue's annual Holocaust Education Week, is part of Fighting Anti-Semitism Together (FAST), a coalition of non-Jewish Canadian business and community leaders who speak out against anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination.

The sixth annual Holocaust Education Week was held Monday at the Temple Sons of Israel Synagogue in Sydney, with Amanda Reddick taking the podium as keynote speaker.

Reddick is part of Fighting Anti-Semitism Together (FAST), a coalition of non-Jewish Canadian business and community leaders who speak out against anti-Semitism.

“This curriculum is structure in history and based on evidence ... and from that conversation, you sort of catapult into, ‘well, now what? Now that we know this, what do we need to hold on to and stay aware of and to even recognize that these things are percolating again,” Reddick said in an interview.

The FAST program was developed in 2004 in response to a wave of anti-Semitism, in an effort to provide a curriculum that teachers anywhere could use for free to educate

students about genocide, hatred, discrimination and prejudice, Reddick said.

She noted that in their early stages, it can be difficult to recognize the potential seriousness of those issues.

Monday's session focused largely on how the curriculum can be applied in teaching about the Holocaust, because it was held as part of Holocaust Education Week, but Reddick noted it also discusses other situations such as Bosnia, Rwanda, slavery in the United States.

In their discussions, the teachers themselves brought up its relevance to such issues as Canada's treatment of First Nations and the varying approaches that countries have taken to dealing with Syrian refugees.

About 70 people took part in Monday's session, with most of them teachers from schools under the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board.

Diane Lewis, a teacher with the Cape Breton-Victoria board, said the goal is to ensure the Holocaust continues to be a part of the school curriculum, so that it doesn't become a footnote in a history book.

"The lessons that we should have gleaned from that have not fully been realized," Lewis said. "I think it's reminding people what happens when you forget about human rights. It's something we always have to be vigilant about."

Human rights education is now embedded in everything that teachers do with their students all year, Lewis said, and they try to help give teachers materials and provide them with tips on how to use them. It also goes beyond anti-Semitism, to address issues such as bullying and homophobia.

Second World War veteran Charlie Palmer was also on hand during the day to address the gathering.