

Why was controlling education so important to the Nazi Party?

History - Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1919 - 1939

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Why did Hitler target the German youth?

Hitler believed that young people were crucial to the longevity of the **Third Reich**. He envisioned that the **Third Reich** would last for a thousand years, but he knew he wouldn't be around for that length of time. So for this to happen he would need the young people of Germany to support the Nazi Party and continue these ideas. There were two main areas in which **Hitler** targeted the German youth, **education** and **youth groups**.



Hitler also believed that the young people of Germany were easier to influence with propaganda and that they were easier to **indoctrinate** into Nazi beliefs. **Indoctrination** is when something (like an ideology) is taught to a person or people and they believe it without questioning or challenging it. So **Hitler** wanted to **indoctrinate** the German youth to follow the Nazi Party and their beliefs without questioning or challenging them. Any kind of critical thought in school was actively discouraged.



The German education system

In 1934, a leading Nazi **Bernhard Rust** was made **Education Minister**. He believed that the purpose of education was to **indoctrinate** the German youth in order to continue the **Third Reich**. He believed that if you targeted people at a young age to believe in and follow **Hitler**, then they would not question the Reich, as it was something they had always done. This contrasts with the adults in Germany who knew a different way of life before **Hitler** was the **Führer**.



In Nazi Germany, girls and boys went to **separate schools**. This was mainly because what they were taught was very different, because they were **educated to have different roles**. Everyone in Germany had to go to school from the age of **6 until 14**, then school became voluntary. Schools and education had previously been the responsibility of the local areas, the **Länder**. However, it changed and became the responsibility of the **central government** after 1934.



How did the Nazis use what was taught as a way to control the German youth?

The **curriculum** was different for girls and boys. The **curriculum** for boys focused on giving them knowledge and skills which would be required for their future roles as workers or soldiers. Whereas for girls, their curriculum focused on knowledge and skills to prepare them for their future roles as housewives and mothers. As a result, girls were taught **domestic science**, which included learning **how to cook** and **how to sew**.



This would also be reinforced during activities outside of school as part of the **League of German Maidens**. The Nazis also wanted fit and healthy German people. Therefore the amount of time given in schools for **sport and PE** was doubled. Some subjects within the German curriculum such as history, geography and maths remained. However, the knowledge and direction of the learning was changed to make sure that these subjects gave messages which were approved by the Nazis. For example, history lessons taught of the harshness and suffering caused by the **Treaty of Versailles**, that **communism** was evil; it glorified Germany's past and the rise of the Nazi Party.



Geography lessons taught about land which was once part of Germany and the need for more **lebensraum** for the German people. Maths questions and scenarios were changed to fit the ideas the Nazis wanted to **indoctrinate** the young people to believe. This would include questions asking children to calculate the weight of an aircraft after it had flown to Poland and dropped bombs over Jewish people living in the capital city of Warsaw. These questions pushed the **anti-Semitic** views of the Nazis as well as reinforcing the idea of military power and war within the minds of school children.



There were also entirely new subjects added to the curriculum within schools in Nazi Germany and these included **Eugenics** and **Race Studies**. **Eugenics** was a subject which taught about **selective breeding**: in particular how to choose a partner to have children with which would allow for the creation of a superior **Aryan** race. Children were taught not to marry people which the Nazis considered to be inferior such as Jews. **Race studies** reinforced these ideas further by teaching children how to classify or identify racial groups based on physical features stereotypically associated with these groups of people. It taught about race, in particular the superiority of the **Aryan** race, and within these lessons, as with most lessons, there was a heavy amount of **anti-Semitic** ideas and beliefs being taught to the German youth.



Textbooks were used in lessons to encourage Nazi messages and beliefs. From 1935, all textbooks had to be approved by the Nazis before they could be used in schools. They were used to reinforce **anti-Semitic** ideas and made Jews appear to be evil and villainous within the textbooks. Another method to **indoctrinate** the young people to support Nazi beliefs was by the texts being made compulsory within school. **Mein Kampf**, **Hitler's** autobiography which he published in 1925, became a **compulsory school text**; this again reinforced Nazi ideology even further. There were also some **routines** which were used within schools to help to reinforce Nazi messages and to support the **indoctrination** of young people. Each lesson began with pupils doing the **Nazi salute** and saying **'Heil Hitler'** as a demonstration of their respect for the **Führer**. Pupils would also be brought to school halls to listen to any important political speech on the radio.



How did the Nazis control how the curriculum was delivered to the German youth?

The job of a teacher is an extremely important responsibility and also gives a teacher a large amount of power and control over shaping the minds and attitudes of young people. So how did Hitler control teachers in order to control what was being taught in Nazi Germany? Firstly, school teachers had to **swear an oath of loyalty** to **Hitler**.

In **April 1933** a law was passed which gave the Nazis the power to sack any teacher or headteacher they did not approve of. Teachers also had to join the **Nazi Teachers' League** which ran courses for teachers on how to teach Nazi beliefs. Teachers were then expected to promote Nazi policies, attitudes and to teach children to do the same. For example, doing the **Nazi salute** and saying **'Heil Hitler'** at the start of every lesson, as well as making sure their **classrooms were decorated** with propaganda posters, images of Hitler and Nazi flags. Teachers who did not show their loyalty and commitment to the Nazi Party were **removed from their jobs**.



Glossary

Anti-Semitism - Discrimination, hostility or prejudice towards Jewish people because of their faith, Judaism.

Aryan - People of European descent who are often born with blonde hair and blue eyes. The Nazis viewed Aryans as the superior race.

Curriculum - The subjects and knowledge taught within schools.

Führer - A title used by Hitler after 1934 which combined the powers of the President and the Chancellor.

Indoctrination - When someone is taught to believe something when questioning or challenging it.

Lebensraum - German word meaning 'living space'.

Third Reich - The name which refers to Germany under Nazi rule between 1933 and 1945.



Source B

An extract from a speech made
by Hitler in 1933.

When an opponent declares “I will not support you.” I calmly say, “Your child belongs to us already. How important are you? You will soon be gone. Your children however now stand in our camp.”

1. What does this source suggest about **why** Hitler targeted the German youth?
2. **Which part** of this source made you think that?
3. ‘*Your child belongs to us already.*’ What knowledge could you use to explain **how** Hitler targeted young people to get them to support Hitler and Nazi Germany?
4. What **knowledge** could you use to **question the accuracy** of the quote ‘When an opponent declares “*I will not support you.*” I calmly say,...’
5. **Challenge question:** Based on this source, do you think Hitler kept his plan to **indoctrinate** the German youth a secret? What makes you think that?

