

Report on the findings and impact of Messaging to Remember

The goal of *Messaging to Remember* is to use technology in order to engage young people in both Holocaust remembrance, and in the development of Holocaust education for future generations. The project uses new technology to achieve this end. The *Messaging to Remember* online exhibit and corresponding survey was created and administered using state-of-the-art survey software called Qualtrics. Qualtrics enables the incorporation of picture, audio and video files into a survey, offers various visualizations for different question types, and allows the survey to run on mobile devices (e.g., Kindle Fire was used to administer the survey in Austria). The presentation of the survey's content is solely digital, and data is gathered on a virtual interface with responses are stored on a central server. This streamlined work method enables for an efficient collection and analysis of survey responses.

In addition to the development and administration of the survey on an innovative technological interface, a primary goal of *Messaging to Remember* is to better understand the use of technology by established Holocaust educational institutions and memorial sites. Given that almost all museums and many sites have curated, interactive websites, it is important to gather information on the effectiveness of students using online materials, and visiting online "exhibitions" – is this experience as informative and/or effective as a physical visit? Should more attention be paid to these online exhibits, or are physical visits students' preference? Our project enabled us to administer the survey in conjunction with a visit to a physical site (i.e. Mauthausen), and without a visit to a museum or memorial site, but rather in a physical "gathering space" as was done with the students in New York.

To demonstrate the impact of *Messaging to Remember* on the use of technology in Holocaust education and remembrance, this report will provide a detailed description of the online exhibit and corresponding survey, followed by highlights of a few key results of the survey and recommendations for how those results could be implemented into Holocaust education, and finally, student reactions to participating in *Messaging to Remember*.

a. DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY:

- The *Messaging to Remember* online exhibit and corresponding survey has two components:
 - **Part 1: The Holocaust**
This first section presents to students seven "methods of delivery" of Holocaust education (fictional movies, documentary films, short animated films, online materials, graphic novels, books and witness testimony), and asks them about both their past exposure to the material and also their level of interest in the material.
 - **Part 2: Genocide and Human Rights**
Part two focuses more broadly on the subjects of genocide and human rights, and is divided into seven sections (e.g., media and news, Darfur (example), child soldiers (example), creating awareness, human rights//video activism). The purpose of this section is to connect Holocaust education to current instance of human rights violations across the world and to ascertain a bit about students' newsgathering and social networking habits.

- The online exhibit and survey contains 20 video segments. The video footage selected met three major requirements:
 1. the length of each clip does not exceed 1.5 minutes
 2. the content of the videos makes a clear and distinct statement in connection to the corresponding question
 3. all videos consist of footage that is publicly available on the internet.
- The survey was administered in the United States to students at New York University, and in Austria to high school students visiting the Mauthausen Memorial
- In the United States, the survey was administered on personal computers, as “stand-alone” programming. In Austria, the survey has been administered on individual computer tablets (Kindle Fire), prior to touring the Mauthausen Memorial.
- The survey takes approximately 45 minutes to complete.

b. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section relays some of the more striking results from the survey and offers recommendations for how this knowledge could be used to impact Holocaust education and remembrance among a younger generation.

Documentary Films

A large majority of students reported to have watched a documentary film about the Holocaust and/or genocide. In the survey students were shown clips from a 1945 American film entitled *Death Mills* – the first documentary film to show what was discovered upon the liberation the Nazi extermination camps. Although 66% of the Austrian students associated the word “entsetzt” (terrified) with these clips, and 57.5% of the American students associate the word “disturbed,” both groups showed a significant interest in watching the entire documentary, and in documentary films as a genre.

Recommendations

The fact that the film used in Messaging to Remember was “old” and students remained compelled by the material, suggests that educators could take advantage of students’ openness to engage also with older films and materials. This interest could also be used to develop curriculum that shows the course of how the Holocaust has been presented through documentary films over the last 70 years, with a range of materials from raw footage of the liberation of the camps, showing the whole dimension of the atrocities, to contemporary “short” documentaries, detailing single events and individual life stories.

Online materials / Digital outreach

Many Holocaust research and education institutions (such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington D.C., Yad Vashem in Jerusalem or the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim) have created comprehensive websites including extensive materials and collections specifically designed for educational purposes. Additionally, over the past few years these institutions have made large efforts to increase their presence on social networks. For example, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has over 93,000 “likes” on Facebook, the USHMM has 74,000 and Yad Vashem has 63,000. On Twitter the USHMM has tweeted more than 8,000 times to its 167,000 followers.

These efforts to enhance the online presence match with the students general interest and focus on

online resources, and specifically on social media. Of the students who participated in the survey, 96% of Austrian and 100% of American students report to use social networks. Further, online news is considered by 30% of the Austrian students and by 78% of the American students as a major source of information. In contrast, a vast minority of the students have ever accessed Holocaust and genocide relevant educational materials on the web. "erinnern.at" is considered the main Holocaust educational platform in Austria, but only 4% of the Austrian students have ever accessed educational materials on this website. The website of the USHMM, the premier Holocaust institution in the United States, has been accessed by only 13% of the American students.

Recommendations

The gap between the students' exuberant interest in digital resources and their poor usage of Holocaust and genocide specific sites is one of the most significant results of the survey. A main reason for this discrepancy might be that the online presence of Holocaust institutions still focuses more on pedagogical efforts to educate teachers (e.g., teacher training programs, online teaching materials), rather than creating and promoting material expressly for student use. Another cause may be that the way information is conveyed does not attract young people.

Therefore, we recommend that Holocaust and genocide institutions, in cooperation with political representatives in the field of education, put considerable effort in the examination and possible revision of their websites, with a specific focus on their young audience. Additionally, information should be imbedded in and shared via social media.

Witness Testimonies

Survivor testimonies have been largely implemented in both Austrian and American curriculums. 71% of the Austrian students and 69% of the American students have previously watched a witness testimony video from a Holocaust or a genocide survivor. However, only 32% of the Austrian students and 40% of the American students have met in person a Holocaust survivor or survivor of another genocide. Many of the students who took the survey believe that witness testimonies are key to ensuring that history does not repeat itself, and along with documentary film, testimonies were the most preferred way for learning about the Holocaust.

Recommendations

Given that students consider witness testimony to be both compelling and important to Holocaust education, and that meeting a survivor in person allows for the ability to ask questions and engage in dialogue, the fact that the last Holocaust survivor will be deceased in the somewhat near future means that educators will have to make an effort to fill this gap. One way to do so could be to increase the involvement of survivors of recent genocides and mass atrocities. This approach could also facilitate the understanding of the permanence, the actuality and the urgency of the subject.

Using a similar strategy to that employed by "Operation: Last Chance" (a campaign launched by the Simon Wiesenthal Center to bring remaining Nazi war criminals to justice), schools, Holocaust memorial and educational institutions, and survivors associations could start an initiative which enables students to meet someone from the ever-shrinking population of Holocaust survivors.

Taking action / Role models

Holocaust and genocide education should go beyond only teaching historical knowledge, with an additional objective being the enhancement of critical thinking and the motivation to personally "take action." The closing question of the survey addresses this belief by asking the students if they

feel a need to learn more about the Holocaust, or genocide and human rights, along with their willingness to personally “take action” on the present issues. The results not only prove a large interest in getting more information about both the Holocaust and other instances of genocide around the world (56% of Austrian students, 54% of American students), but also reveal a considerable willingness to take personal action (28% of Austrian students, 24% of American students).

Recommendations

Simplifying access to information through the internet does not necessarily lead to effective activism, and could also lead to the problem of misconceived activism. Also referred to as “Armchair Advocacy” or “Click-tivism,” these are passive ways of engagement, which, in many cases, have limited prospects. Young people can be taught to understand that a better way to advocate for their positions is in person, through direct action.

Celebrities, especially from the entertainment industry, have a great influencing power on young people today. This fact was reaffirmed in the survey when students were shown five clips, each conveying information about the Darfur conflict. The clip showing George Clooney during an awareness visit to Sudan in 2011 was chosen by the Austrian students as most compelling and by the American students as second most compelling. Although not entirely unproblematic, educators could take a proactive interest in finding ways to integrate some of these popular figures into the material of their courses.

Another way to increase students' desire and ability to “take action” is to encourage stronger collaboration between educational systems, Holocaust and genocide institutions, and human rights organizations. The aim of all three communities should be to develop a network to pool programs, projects, initiatives, campaigns, internships, etc. all offering young people the chance to participate in real human rights activities and memorial projects.

c. STUDENT REACTIONS

The reactions from students who participated in *Messaging to Remember* overwhelmingly have been that it was an informative and unique experience, especially when compared to the education previously received on the Holocaust. We collected a handful of expository responses from students in New York who completed the *Messaging to Remember* survey as part of a pilot test. Included below are excerpts from student reactions to the project. These are presented here to demonstrate the impact of *Messaging to Remember* on individual students, and their experiences of engaging with the material.

1. “From my own experiences with Holocaust education, while I remember most of the facts, it’s the jarring images of concentration camps that have truly unsettled me and have lasted in my memory over the years. And I think that stands also for first-hand accounts; seeing someone who has been through a concentration camp, or a watching a child soldier speak about his or her experiences affects me to a much greater extent than receiving the same information through a less anecdotal channel. (i.e. Watching the “Hitler Killer” child’s interview was enough to convince me of the wrongs of using child soldiers, even if I had never heard of the problem before.)”

2. "I haven't gotten much of a chance to reflect on the ways that these different memorials [previously visited] made me feel, but this survey has allowed me to finally think through that experience."
3. "Additionally, these forms of art communicate information in an intimate and unthreatening manner – allowing more people to not only listen, but appreciate details and facts about the world that they might not have readily accepted or even bothered to listen to on the TV, internet, or radio."
4. "The study embodied this theme of "understanding" across many borders – understanding is in context, engagement, and most important recognizing understanding as the solution to conflict. Given that we live in a society where mass violence is only escalating, why not start from the root- and promote understanding not only among our relationships but also amidst our history."

D. CONCLUSION

The goal of this report was to demonstrate how through the use of an innovative technological platform (i.e. Qualtrics), *Messaging to Remember* gave students an opportunity to engage with material about the Holocaust and other instances of human rights violations around the world in a way that was unique and memorable, and that differed greatly from their previous education on the subject. Additionally, through the collection of responses to the material, we were able to make concrete recommendations for how to improve Holocaust education and remembrance for the next generation. *Messaging to Remember* is a tool that can easily be modified to fit to a particular audience and the goal is that it will continue to be used for Holocaust education, and that it will shape academic and remembrance programs for young people today.