

# **Using Video-Conferencing to Combine Survivors' Testimonies in Educational Programs on the Holocaust**

## **Rational and Model**

### **Part One**

#### **RATIONAL**

##### **Using digital media in education**

The last two decades are characterized by a growing integration of digital media into various aspects of life. Today, as in the past, educational systems are making big efforts to mold new technology to their purposes. Many of the world's education systems are in the process of discovering the correct way to combine new technologies into their activities. Since the establishment of the Internet, the World Wide Web, in 1995, the use of the Internet has become a focal interest for these systems. Many educators see the Internet, and its many applications, as an educational tool of great potential for three main reasons:

1. It's incredible ability to handle information – including storing it, organizing it, creating and retrieving information.
2. Multi-directional work tool: unlike the television, which could only impart information the Internet enables students to create information and receive responses to it. The student is not passive but an active part in the processing of the information.
3. Communication platform between student, students and teachers, and between teachers.

##### **The Internet and Collaborative Learning**

The collaborative learning methods are gaining more and more appreciation in different educational arenas. In the light of the above-mentioned characteristics of internet as an educational tool, it is clear why collaborative learning is also becoming a common form of Internet usage for educational purposes. In the Collaborative learning process each group member makes a unique contribution to the learning product. The student is an active partner in acquiring information instead of just absorbing it, and the final product is greater than the sum of its parts. The students have the majority of the responsibility both for the process and the product; this allows them to advance as independent learners who can rely on themselves, instead of relying on someone else as their authority and knowledge source. Collaborative learning on the Internet also allows for international projects by the collaboration of students from different countries, which gives an added value to the studying.

Research shows the development of positive feelings among those students who are using on-line collaborative learning method. One of the advantages of working as a group on-line is that it neutralizes any judgment that would have arisen from looks, accent, speech, etc. communication seems to become far more matter-of-fact and the group members pay more attention to the messages than to the sender.

##### **Video-Conferencing as an Educational Tool**

Video-conferencing is only one of the synchronized communication forms that the Internet offers. This form of communication allows for a large face-to-face "meeting". Such a meeting requires a great deal of pre-planning and therefore is more appropriate as a one-time event, a culmination of an educational on-line process using other studying methods (forum conversations, chatting, etc.).

Research shows that there are some common failings among educational systems who are trying to assimilate new technology:

1. The use of the technology is for its own sake instead of being a part of a long-term educational vision.
2. The technology is integrated into existing teaching methods. In this way it does not raise or lower the quality of the studying.

In light of all that has been described, we are offering two guide lines for building a learning process that includes video-conferencing:

1. The videoconference must supply the students with a unique experience, which they would not have had without it.
2. The video-conferencing will be part of a learning process that integrates other digital communication methods, i.e. on-line studying. The process will be guided by the pedagogical concept which ties in directly to the technological means and the advantages they hold:
  - The students will have a center roll in determining the educational path, gathering information and designing the results of their studies. The Internet will provide an educational environment as well as a tool with which to find and create information.
  - The students will use the Internet as a communication tool for joint study sessions with geographically distant students.
  - The video-conferencing will be a culmination of the joint on-line study process and will include a meeting with a Holocaust/Genocide survivor. It will also provide an opportunity for the on-line students to meet one another.

In the last part of this document you'll find a suggested model for an educational process, based on e learning, which includes meeting survivors through video-conferencing. However, being aware of the fact that this model is not always applicable, we provide here some guidelines for a shorter framework of using the videoconference media for meeting survivors.

## **Preparing students for meeting Holocaust survivors**

### **Why prepare?**

A meeting between school students and a Holocaust survivor involves some complexity. This complexity derives mainly from the age gap, from the special situation the students face when meeting someone that has been "there" (that is, experienced the events of the Holocaust), and from the emotional challenge that the survivor faces when recounting his/ her experience from a difficult, many time traumatic period. Our experience shows that such a meeting is much more successful if the students are well prepared for it. Following, are some recommended elements of preparation:

### **Providing historical and personal context**

One of the most important steps is to provide both historical and personal context for the testimony.

1. **Providing historical context on the Holocaust.** A survivor's testimony is micro-history, one person's story told from a specific and subjective perspective. Although it has great power in itself, its fuller meaning, especially in the educational sense, is gleaned when it is set in a specific context. Therefore, it is the teacher's obligation to provide students with sufficient historical context before they meet the survivor face-to-face. The historical context includes terms of importance in understanding of the testimony, e.g., ghetto, labor / transit / concentration / extermination camp, roundup etc. If the students are not familiar with those terms, they may obtain only a partial understanding of the story.
2. **Providing materials on the survivor and his/ her experience.** The added value of meeting a Holocaust survivor (rather than watching a recorded testimony or reading a memoir) is the human encounter. This is why; the meeting itself should not be the occasion in which the students are exposed to the chronological narrative of the

survivor for the first time. Students who have been given the basic information about the whereabouts of the survivor during the war will be able to concentrate more on the human experience, rather than on “technical” details.

3. What to expect and what not to expect . It is important for the teacher to probe the students’ expectations of their meeting with the survivor. “Human memory is a marvelous but fallacious instrument. This is a threadbare truth known not only to psychologists but also to anyone who has paid attention to the behavior of those who surround him, or even to his own behavior.”<sup>1</sup> Thus Primo Levi notes one of the main limitations of survivors’ testimonies. The human memory is influenced by various elements that shape it. Beliefs, personality traits, life experiences, posterior knowledge, repression, and erosion caused by passing time are just a few of the elements that affect the way our memory is shaped. Inaccuracies in dates and details are also an integral part of the medium of testimony. Most survivors are not historians and testimonies should not be considered a primary source of historical knowledge and understanding. It is the teacher’s duty to be aware of this and discuss it with the students as well. Students should be guided not to express doubts regarding the historical correctness, or any other detail, which could seriously impair the flow of communication.
4. Discussing the position of the survivor in the meeting. Finally, it is important to make the students aware of what might it mean for the survivor to tell his/ her story. Following are a few points that may be brought up with students:
  - a. Lea went out of her hiding place in order to bring food to her family. She came back with two bread loafs hidden in her clothes but found no one. Till to day, she has seen no one of her loved ones. Lea’s daughter says that her mother recounts the details of this event compulsorily. Mina witnessed her mother’s execution during a death march. She continued to march and for 40 yeas never told anyone about this. Theses two women are examples of two main trends common to Holocaust survivors. Some of them have always had a strong urge to tell their story while others could not or chose not to. There are those who began to tell their story when realizing that they were getting older and the following years are would be their last chance or after experiencing a significant event like meeting with their rescuer or going through a road accident. It is important that the students realize that those who choose to tell their story are often ambivalent about it and are having a hard time doing it.
  - b. Why do survivors talk? Different things motivate survivors to tell their story.
    - Leaving a testament. Some believe that learning about the holocaust, in general, and listening to their personal experience in this context is significant for future generations. They feel that telling their story is a way of leaving something significant for the future.
    - Therapeutic act:
      - Sharing for the sake of relieve. Telling a personal story can also be a way of dealing with psychological distress by sharing with others. One should bear in mind though, that many survivors would share the story, but not entirely. Students should be encouraged to ask questions, but they should also understand that if the survivor is reluctant to answer, they should not insist.

- Verifying the experience. One aspect of a traumatic experience is the difficulty to integrate it in the person's life story. Therefore traumatic events may seem as somewhat unrealistic (expressed sometimes in the use of expressions like: "it was miraculous" "unbelievable" etc.). Sharing the experience with others may serve as a way of verifying the event.

## **Meeting Holocaust Survivor through Video-Conferencing – Preliminarily and Follow-up Activities**

Based on the above rational for preparations as well as on our educational experience we suggest the following educational route:

1. Presenting the students with materials on the survivor's biography.
2. Presenting the students with the historical context, that is:
  - Historical definition of the Holocaust.
  - Main points in the history of the Holocaust including main terms relevant to the testimony.
3. Putting the life story of the survivor in the historical context.
4. Conducting a discussion about memory and commemoration.
5. Preparing the students for meeting the survivors, according to the above bullet-points.
6. The students will prepare questions for the survivor with the guidance of the teacher. The questions will be sent to Yad Vashem staff that will discuss them shortly with the survivor.
7. Conducting the Videoconference.
8. Follow-up activities. These can bear different forms:
  - A videoconference with Yad Vashem staff
  - Creating an exhibition on the survivor or on another related theme. The exhibition can be built in the school and/ or on-line in a special website.
  - Writing letters to the survivor.

To get some ideas about methods and sources, you may attend to the following elaborated model.

## **Model for and Educational Process based on E-learning that Includes Video-Conferencing**

Below is the model, any one of the components can be varied: countries participating, length of time, topics.

**Theme: Holocaust and other Genocides – The Jewish Holocaust and Gypsy Genocide during World War Two.**

Joint educational project for a class from Europe and from Israel or for two European classes.

**Time:** 12 weeks

**Rational:** This educational model was designed to expose student to the subject of the Holocaust in the context of Genocide, while learning about another case of Genocide, that of gypsy's during the Second World War. During their studies the students will learn new concepts

and definitions regarding genocide, the special characteristics of every case they study and the meeting points between them.

The joint studying between an Israeli class and a European class (or two classes from different countries in Europe) allows each of the classes to make a unique contribution to the studies and to learn about new subjects: the Israeli class will learn about the Genocide of the gypsy's, which is not a very known topic in Israel, while the European class will learn about the Holocaust as paradigm of Genocide and the place of the Holocaust and its survivors in the Israeli society. The program will enable both classes to make links between the topics they are studying and current events such as: standing by, treatment of refugees, accepting those who are different, caring for survivors as well as personal and social responsibilities.

### **Objectives:**

1. Introduction to main concepts and chapters in Jewish history.
2. Introduction to main concepts and chapters in Gypsy history.
3. Genocide & Holocaust – introduction to main concepts and definitions.
4. Learning about main characteristics and processes in the murdering of Jews during the Holocaust, and the murder of gypsy's during the Second World War.
5. Learning about the unique characteristics of each case, what they have in common, and looking at the Holocaust as paradigm of Genocide.
6. Discussing the big questions regarding Genocide: such as:
  - a. How was it humanly possible? Under what circumstances does a person participate in methodical murder? What is the place of those who stand by in face of those persecuted and why do many not assist those persecuted?
  - b. What leads a person to rescue another?
  - c. Why learn about Genocide?
7. Dealing with the question: Can we prevent Genocide, and if yes, in what ways?
8. Linking the historic knowledge to current relevant issues: attitude towards refugees, attitude towards those who are different, personal and social responsibility, etc.

### **Means:**

The studying will be done through a variety of means including:

- a. Searching database's (Yad-Vashem web site, The Washington Museum, relevant archives in the countries of both participating classes, and more.).
- b. Dealing with primary sources including official papers, which will expose the students to the historical dimension, and personal papers (diary's, letters, pictures, testimonies), which will expose them to the personal dimension.
- c. Group discussion via synchronized (chat, video-conferencing) and un-synchronized (emails, forum) means.
- d. Holding interviews with survivors/second generation or other relevant people.
- e. Watching Videos.
- f. Creating web sites, database's, filming short movies, building power-point presentations.
- g. Visiting sites: memorial sites/survivors homes/etc. + filming clips.

## **GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS**

### **Part 1 – Learning about the Jewish Holocaust and the murder of Gypsy in the context of the term "Genocide"**

1. The students of both classes will meet and get to know each other through the forum.
2. Familiarization task: "The Holocaust and Me" – each student will present, in his own way, what the terms "Holocaust" and "Genocide" mean to him. The presentation will be done by power point/movie/song/text/or any other form chosen by the student. The products of these presentations will be put on a special web site, which will be built gradually throughout the learning process by the students, with teacher's assistance.
3. Historical studying phase: the moderators (teacher of the classes) will introduce 10 tasks within the forum meeting. Each student will choose a task that interests him. Groups will be formed according to chosen tasks, consisting of students from both classes.

- The tasks:
- 1) Biographical background of a Jewish survivor.
  - 2) Biographical background of a Gypsy survivor.
  - 3) Holocaust and Genocide – definitions (work through Yad Vashem, UN and other relevant websites).
  - 4) The Jewish Nation – main points in history and Jewish traditions.
  - 5) The Gypsy's – main points in history and identity.
  - 6) The Jewish image and the Gypsy image in the Nazi ideology.
  - 7) Main points in the history of the Holocaust.
  - 8) Main points in the History of the Gypsy murders.
  - 9) The Jews after the Holocaust.
  - 10) The Gypsy's after the Holocaust.

4. The groups will work on their tasks for a pre-determined amount of time; the products of these combined studies will be put on the Internet site.
5. Evaluation session according to teacher's choice. The purpose of which will be to make sure that all the students know all of the materials.
6. Preparing questions for survivors.
7. Videoconference led by Yad Vashem in two parts: Part A – meeting between the classes and a summation of the educational process up to that point. Part B – hearing testimonies and speaking with survivors.

**An**

**Part 2 – Processing information: integration, comparisons, dealing with the “Why” factor, self reflection**

1. The teachers introduce a second set of tasks:
  - 1) What is unique to each murder case you've studied?
  - 2) What is the place of bystanders in determining the fate of those persecuted? What are the factors involved in going from bystander to upstander<sup>2</sup>?
  - 3) Who are the perpetrators? What makes a person take part in Genocide?
  - 4) Why learn about Genocide?
  - 5) Can Genocide be prevented? How?
  - 6) How is all this relevant to my life?
2. Dividing into groups again according to task choice. The groups work on their different tasks and put the products of their studies on the course website.
3. Students react to the different products in a way that allows for a joint discussion of all the different issues that have arisen.
4. Videoconference led by Fundamental Rights Agency (of the EU) – a representative of each class will summarize the process that his class went through: What did the process give the class, and what did the class contribute to the process.

---

<sup>2</sup> Term coined by Samantha Power (2003), referring to people who acted against the system in times of Genocide.