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VIDEOTAPED TESTIMONIES OF VICTIMS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: THE EXAMPLE OF USC SHOAH FOUNDATION'S ONLINE PLATFORM IWITNESS

Education and Evaluation Methodology

This paper explores how testimony-based education is delivered across several geographical locations through *IWitness*, the *USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education* (referred to as the Institute) educational platform. Evaluating *IWitness* programs in order to check that they reach their objectives is a major part of our educational work. This paper references the most recent evaluation of *IWitness* to demonstrate the potential of testimony-based education. It also explores the opportunities of *IWalks* – a geographic learning experience that blends testimony with an interrogation of historical spaces in contemporary time. The Institute is guided by the *Theory of Change*, which says that if individuals such as students and teachers engage with testimony they will experience attitudinal and behavioral changes that will make them more likely to contribute to civil society. |1 The Institute defines contributing to civil society at minimum as making responsible choices – refusing to tolerate racist ideas or prejudicial treatment, and countering attitudes and acts of hatred. In order to effect this change, the Institute develops educational programs based on a methodology designed specifically to leverage the unique power of audiovisual testimony. The educational methodology developed combines four core elements: testimony, localization, outcomes, and critical and constructivist theory – and together they harness the universal tool of stories through the testimonies in the *Visual History Archive (VHA)* to engage students in powerful learning experiences. With these

testimonies at the center of our methodology, all content and programming is made relevant and accessible to broad and highly diverse audiences of educators, students and decision-makers. The education programs of the Institute contribute to Holocaust education and genocide studies, as well as other fields ranging from ethics and psychology to law and linguistics. We show that – combined with the tools of critical and constructivist theory, specific and assessable learning outcomes, and localization of materials to meet the needs of specific disciplines or geographies – audiovisual testimony is a robust tool for achieving deep learning and development. Because the testimonies are life histories and the design of IWitness is flexible, educators can build customized teaching activities using testimony for historical specificity, while also exploring universal themes in the human experience such as identity, courage and resilience. The evaluation of the educational programs tests the Theory of Change and is firmly grounded in education and social science research. Our work follows a framework for designing, implementing, and analyzing studies that is modeled on the *Scientific Method* (see Krathwohl 1993). Through a continually reflective process, the findings from one evaluation study are used to inform the development of the next study. This approach not only helps to develop an evolving understanding of the areas under consideration but also serves as a way to “retest” and refine our hypotheses. This reflective process increases the reliability of our work, and helps inform program revisions and ensures consistently high quality programs. The evaluation program follows a systematic process that emphasizes consistency, duplication, and saturation. Careful attention is given to following good research practices at each step of the process to ensure reliability, validity, and usefulness of the research (Bryman 2015; Cohen et al., 2013; Creswell 2013; Creswell/Clark 2011; Neuman 2005). This focus on methodological rigor helps to ensure confidence in the evaluations’ conclusions (Braverman/Arnold 2008). Furthermore, our evaluations follow a mixed methods approach – using both quantitative and qualitative methods – to capture the full breadth and depth of the subjects being studied (Creswell/Clark 2011; Denzin/ Lincoln 2011; Johnson et al. 2007; Merriam 1998, Strauss/Corbin 1990).

Defining IWitness and Types of Testimony-Based Learning within IWitness

Today's young learners are highly mobile and connected with each other through the many forms of technology available to them, and they have easy access to a rapidly expanding range of visual and digital media. In this context, the Institute strives to create attitudinal and positive behavioral change in students worldwide. And by creating content that integrates the testimony of survivors and witnesses to genocide in the VHA with today's new media literacy demands of our participatory culture, the Institute is in a position to realize its Theory of Change.

The scope and sequence of all testimony-based content and resources aligns to the following:

- It engages students in a problem of emerging relevance.
- It structures the learning experience around conceptual understanding.
- It values and builds on students' points of view and personal experience.
- It assesses learning in authentic ways and multiple format put testimony at the center of the learning engagement.

All content follows a general scope and sequence of the four Cs: consider, collect, construct and communicate. These reflect phases of learning that generally correspond to a taxonomy of exercises that reinforce students' cognitive skills – from simple to complex and concrete to abstract. As students move through the scope and sequence, they also reinforce multiple forms of literacy – from reading and writing to digital and information literacy skills. In addition, all the digital content includes student learning outcomes or aims that are mapped against the main student learning outcomes of all education programming. IWalks are a new testimony-based learning asset available through IWitness. Similar to other activities and lessons in IWitness, these are digitally-based learning modules. IWalks are based on connecting testimony with historical events and authentic sites/geographies by combining them to engage learners in an active, immersive experience. IWalks aim to promote historical knowledge, critical thinking, empathy and digital literacy skills through a guided learning experience. They are available online or on

the ground; that is to say, people can engage in an IWalk sitting at their computer or walking through the authentic site/geography with a handheld device to listen to the integrated testimonies. Early research suggests that like other activities in IWitness, IWalks resonate with learners and offer a new way to meet learning objectives.

Demonstrated Impact: Recent Findings – After School Matters Program and Media Literacy

“The testimonies helped me as a person because it showed me that taking a stand for something you believe in will impact/change the way someone acts.” *A student’s reflection on using IWitness in the After School Matters program.*

In order to demonstrate the impact of testimony-based learning and IWitness, the Institute evaluated the use of an IWitness activity in a supplemental program put on by the US non-profit organization *After School Matters*. *After School Matters* works with students in Chicago to develop skills from art through to media literacy and leadership. Its *C.O.O.L. Communicators Program* focused on developing communication and leadership among high school students. Students in C.O.O.L participated in a special program: *Skittles, Deplorables, and All Lives Matter*. Through this program, the Institute evaluated a group of students aged 16 to 18, focusing on developing leadership and media literacy skills. The activity used a broad range of testimonies from survivors of and witnesses to National Socialism. As a central finding in this evaluation, the use of testimony in this activity was especially valuable to students because it made the abstract concepts of political rhetoric and hate speech more real and relevant to their own lives, and because they felt a personal connection to the testimonies that made the lesson more meaningful to them. After participating in the program, students recognized the value of testimony. And, through the use of testimony, they learned about media messaging in political discourse and the types and uses of rhetoric, as well as how to design their own social media campaign. As a result of

participating, students gained essential communication skills, critical thinking ability, and respect for themselves and others. They also developed historical understanding and made connections with current events that indicated a critical understanding. Ultimately, the program helped students become more informed consumers and creators of social media messages and inspired them to stand up for others and to be more active participants in their communities. These findings further support an emerging trend in IWitness evaluations that students' engagement with testimony helps them to become more responsible participants in civil society. The following comment from the student focus group helps to illustrate this point:

"I learned that we need to be mindful when presenting our ideas on social media and that we must support our opinions with facts to be taken seriously. I learned that to be worldly knowledgeable, we must learn from multiple sources and be well-informed, especially if we wish to speak of these matters and use our voice" (USC SF internal evaluation report – After School Matters 2017).

Students found that the testimony brought events of the past to life, helping them to connect the stories of survivors to their own lives in a meaningful way, as reflected in the following student's comment:

"I connected to one [of the testimonies] and it made me think of my role as a person and the responsibilities that I have to live up to" (Ibid.).

The evaluation showed that the Skittles, Deplorables, and All Lives Matter activity was especially effective in teaching students about rhetoric and media literacy and helping them to connect these topics to the lessons of leadership and responsible participation in society, the established learning outcomes of the program it was intended to complement. These topics were closely aligned with the broader After School Matters C.O.O.L. Communicators program. Even though students had other lessons that touched on these topics as part of the After School Matters program, the data

showed that students gained significant insights from this activity, above and beyond what they had learned previously in the C.O.O.L. program. The program taught students how to develop their own social media campaigns and inspired them to stand up for themselves and others. Following are key evaluation findings:

1. The use of testimony was compelling and meaningful to students' lives.
2. Students developed a detailed understanding of rhetoric, its uses in political discourse, and how to make informed judgements about media messaging in the future.
3. Students showed notable gains on several key student learning outcomes, including communication skills, critical thinking, self-respect and respect for others.
4. The After School Matters program empowered students to create effective, ethical social media campaigns and inspired them to find their voice.

Given the length of the paper, only the second of these findings will be explored here.

Understanding about Rhetoric, its Uses in Political Discourse, and how to Make Informed Judgments about Media Messaging in the Future

Evaluation results indicate that students learned about the different types of rhetoric, particularly propaganda and its use for political persuasion. More importantly, students gained a broader perspective on the existence of competing viewpoints and learned about the need to be well-informed and how to recognize bias in the media. Set within the context of current events and supported with relevant testimonies, students gained a deep understanding of the topics but also made connections to the material on a personal level. The quantitative data provides strong evidence that students learned about the key topics of the activity, including the different types of rhetoric and hate speech and how it can impact people. In the post-program survey, 88% of students agreed they understood how to identify different types of rhetoric and that they had learned about hate speech and its impact.

Figure 1 shows the before and after comparisons of students who strongly agree with these two statements, and the percentage point change. There were 27 respondents prior to the program and 17 respondents after the program.

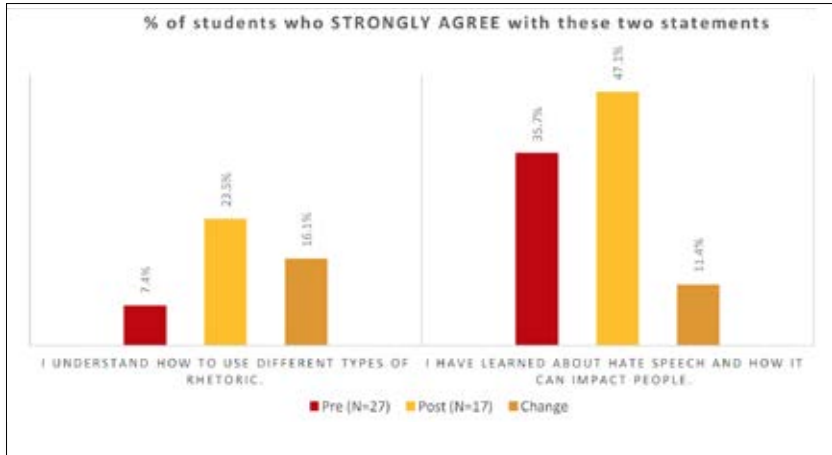


Figure 1: Student Survey Results: Pre/Post Comparisons of Level of Agreement

As shown in Figure 1, the greatest percentage change was in students who strongly agreed that they understand how to use different types of rhetoric, which trebled from 7.4% to 23.5% (up 217%). (Students completed the post-program survey at least a week after the initial engagement and completion rates were affected by normal absenteeism in the C.O.O.L. program, a non-compulsory after school program). Students also showed a greater understanding of the impacts that rhetoric and hate speech can have – in this case, that words can be used to harm people.

Figure 2 compares responses to the statement, “It is harmless for a person to use words to attack a person or group if there is no physical contact.” There were 28 respondents before and 17 respondents after the program.

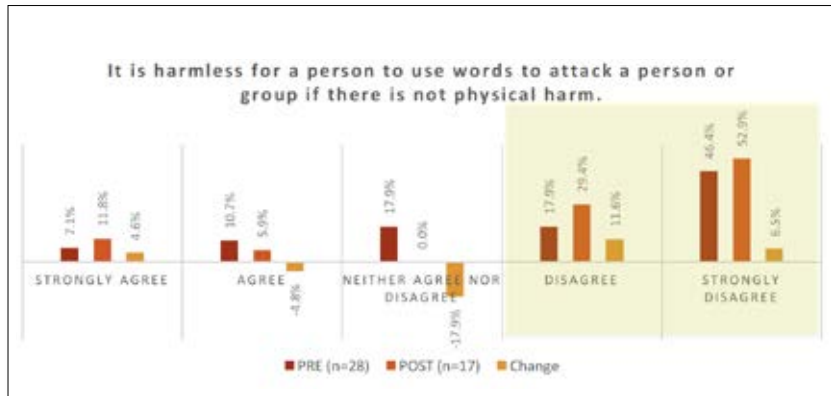


Figure 2: Student Survey Results: Pre/Post Comparisons of Level of Agreement

Figure 2 shows a general trend for students to be more likely to disagree with the statement in the post-program survey, and recognize that words can create actual harm to people or groups. In fact, the “disagrees” and “strongly disagrees” rose from 64% before to 82% after, an increase of 28%. This understanding that words can harm is essential to grasping a main point about political rhetoric and hate speech. The wealth of qualitative data from the surveys and focus groups further strengthens the assertions that students not only gained a depth of knowledge about the topics of rhetoric and hate speech, but also are deeply committed to using this knowledge to help them be more informed citizens in the future. When asked about the most important thing they had learned, many students mentioned the need to pay attention to the purposes and biases behind political messages and how the media can influence people.

One student said:

"There is always a purpose behind every article written or any recorded video and audio. This means that you have to think critically after getting information." (Ibid.)

These sentiments are further supported in the focus group, where students elaborated on what they had learned about propaganda and political rhetoric, showing that they had gained a more nuanced understanding of these concepts. For example, one student commented:

"Propaganda is often associated with . . . , it has like a negative connotation to it and today we just learned the example of where it is not necessarily a bad thing . . . with the whole Obama poster and we can also bring about good." (Ibid.)

Other students gave examples from the 2016 US presidential election campaigns, particularly Donald Trump's use of the slogan *Make America Great Again* to persuade people to vote for him. The VHA testimonies helped students to better understand the real risks of political rhetoric. As one student said: "It made me more aware of the struggles of people [...] and how propaganda could ruin people's lives." The testimony of Esther Clifford (1996) who told of her experiences as a child seeing people read a propaganda-filled newspaper with distorted depictions of Jews was especially effective in telling this story of the harmful effects of rhetoric and how it may be taken at face value by many. An excerpt from the focus group explains this point in the students' words:

Female speaker: "Listening to testimony really impacted me because I got a glimpse of how they felt and it wasn't just . . . I didn't have to put my opinion in by reading it. I actually heard how they felt and I actually got some background knowledge on their experience."

Female speaker: "Yeah, these primary sources make it much more like real. It's not just facts and statistics but now you have this person and a face to these problems."

Male speaker: "Not only that, what she said, but also it shows the effects of hate speech,

like what happens and the effects it has by seeing what happens after the Holocaust and having testimony by people who went through that. It actually shows what can happen if you let these things just go by.” (Ibid.)

As this exchange suggests, the lessons about rhetoric and hate speech became more powerful when told through testimonies because they are authentic stories of lived experiences. Testimonies included those of Holocaust survivors Esther Clifford (1996) and Ruth Pearl (2014), and Paul Parks (1995), an African American who, as a former member of the US armed forces, participated in liberating Dachau. They were presented together with examples of political rhetoric relevant to students at the time of the activity, including the 2016 election cycle and the *Black Lives Matter* movement. ¹² Students connected with the testimonies both logically and emotionally, identifying with the examples as observers of the public narratives unfolding at the time as well as on a personal level as individuals who had experienced similar things, such as discrimination, first-hand. A quote from the focus group provides a student’s perspective:

“And then with the testimonies that we watched [...] I can connect to it because with the man, he said how he had to fight and stuff, and that connected me back to how like Black Lives Matter and all lives matter, and you just have to fight. Well, with me being black and stuff, and how it’s like there’s so many killings, for innocent people that are being killed by police officers and by just other people; how you just have to fight every day to live and how it’s getting harder.”

Students related personally to the discussion about Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter because they knew about the Black Lives Matter movement from the news and people around them, and because these students as a group could relate collectively – and many personally – to experiences of discrimination and racism. Thus, the activity helped students gain insights about rhetoric and its uses and connect it to their own lives, making it more engaging and meaningful to them.

Moving Forward and Conclusion

The evaluation findings suggest that testimony-based education can have an impact on students' learning across cognitive and conative areas. While this case study refers to a particular group of students in a particular urban environment, the findings are consistent with the balance of evaluation on IWitness. The gains achieved in Chicago through testimony-based education are consistent with trends found in Australia, Italy and Rwanda, and in other locations within the US among students ranging in age from eight to 18. In the case of IWalks, an emerging content type on the IWitness platform that triangulates location, personal story and pedagogical context, the learning takes place by zooming in on specific locations through the testimonies. The visit to the place – whether physical or virtual – magnifies the personal experience and the relevance today. This new program was informed by the evaluations of IWitness and testimony-based learning generally, and applied specifically to a new format. Although IWalks have as yet not been fully evaluated for their impact on learning, the anecdotal evidence shares many features with studies of other IWitness activities. Results of the early evaluations of IWalks suggest that students have much the same experience as using IWitness:

1. The use of testimony in the geographical space was compelling and meaningful to students' lives; it connected them to the past.
2. Students developed a detailed understanding of the geographical space and historical events, as well as contemporary issues.
3. Students seem to demonstrate gains on several key learning outcomes, including communication skills, critical thinking, self-respect and respect for others.
4. Students are empowered to create connections between themselves and local history, and to see what happened in the past as relevant to their future.
5. Students are helped to find their voice.

There is every indication that inside and outside the classroom, engaging

students digitally with well-conceived, theoretically sound testimony-based education resources will result in cognitive and conative gains in students of all ages and across all disciplines. This is indicated in student feedback from the IWalk in Hungary:

“It was the first time I ever heard that there had been a synagogue in Aszód. I find it a problem that I knew nothing about the history of the Jews before.”

And: “I am still interested to learn about what Jewish traces there are in my home town. I want to know why people did not help the persecuted. I would like to know why people were so cruel.” (Internal evaluation report, Initial Investigation of IWalks in Hungary, USC Shoah Foundation, 2017)



Students Participating in Iwalk at Shoes Memorial, Budapest.
Photo: Tamas Reichel

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1 <http://sfi.usc.edu/education/evaluation>, accessed 17 October 2017.

2 For further detail see www.blacklivesmatter.com, accessed 21 September 2017.