



Moving Forward, Together: Exploring the Future of Holocaust Education at Yad Vashem's Partnership Meeting

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03/27/2023. Holocaust education currently faces a number of challenges. As the Holocaust moves further into history, we will soon be in an age where this genocide is no longer in living memory and we cannot hear of the horrors of this atrocity first-hand. Without this tangible connection to the past, there is a very real concern that we must not forget the murder of six million Jews and all victims of Nazi persecution.

But this movement into history is not the only challenge which faces us. Holocaust education in 2023 must compete with misinformation, with Holocaust denial, and even apathy. Educators must learn to challenge false information online, with the growing use of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and inappropriate engagement with Holocaust history on social media platforms.

At the core of these challenges is also the over-arching question of what we must teach about the Holocaust: is it enough to learn about the Holocaust, or must we educate in a manner which prompts others to learn from the Holocaust?

Pedagogically, how do we educate in a way which communicates the facts of the Holocaust (and so challenge misinformation and denial) whilst cultivating in students the desire to combat antisemitism and all forms of racism, and ensure that such horrors do not repeat themselves?

These were some of the questions which were explored at Yad Vashem last week during their partnership forum. At this meeting, Holocaust educators, including the Council of Christians and Jews, government officials, and academics, gathered from across the globe (from as far afield as Venezuela, South Africa, and China) to discuss the theme of the meeting; 'Moving Forward, Together'.

We heard from academics, curators, and leading educators who shared cutting-edge research, informed us about inspirational educational programmes, and facilitated conversations around best practice.

The conversations covered a variety of topics; some of which were brand new areas of interest (and concern). The rapidly expanding use of Artificial Intelligence in text and image creation was a standout example.

In a presentation on this topic, we heard about the relatively new app ChatGPT which allows users to request the creation of text on a particular subject. A user might ask ChatGPT to write an essay for them on the Warsaw Ghetto, for example. The app then gathers information for this task from the internet, and creates a text based on what it finds. A user may even request that ChatGPT writes in a particular style (one might say 'write an essay on the Warsaw Ghetto in the style of Prof Yehuda Bauer', for example). This means that a student could use this app to produce a ready-made essay in mere moments.

These rapid advancements in technology present Holocaust education with a new set of challenges to navigate.

Aside from the obvious problem of the student failing to learn anything in this process, as well as educators struggling to determine authentic authorship, there is also a very serious concern around the factual reliability of the text being produced. Generally, ChatGPT gathers information that is available online but, during the presentation at Yad Vashem on this topic, we were shown examples where the app had inserted factually incorrect information simply to add content. As students are not gathering this information for themselves, they may not have the skills to identify what is correct and what is incorrect. With so much false information about the Holocaust online, this is a pressing concern, and the importance of technological literacy for educators emerged as a priority in this area.

These advances in technology present very current issues for Holocaust education. However, there were also questions which we discussed at the forum that are far more perennial. This included foundational questions about how and why we teach the Holocaust.

A standout question for me was how we balance learning about the Holocaust with learning *from* it.

Recently, I touched upon this question in conversation with an academic historian. I shared with them that I had been thinking about how to make sure that Holocaust education was not just about learning the facts, but about transformation of that person. Very quickly, they responded by saying, 'education is always transformative!' And, to a certain extent, I agreed. Education is always transformative, of course, as it expands our minds, challenges narrow worldviews, and builds up the knowledge of the student.

However, at the partnership forum, a presenter challenged this belief by noting the high level of education amongst the participants of the Wannsee Conference (a meeting of senior government officials from Nazi Germany on 20 January 1942). At Wannsee the implementation of the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' was coordinated by educated, high-ranking officials, several of whom had doctorates in law. Education in and of itself did not seem to prevent many Nazi perpetrators from continuing their actions.

So, the question is whether education about the history of the Holocaust will connect with students on a moral and ethical level today, to ensure that their education precipitates personal and social transformation?

How educators can do this was the topic of fruitful and fascinating conversation during forum sessions. For many organisations, this is a complex process as they determine which values are core to this transformation, and how to connect historical education with these morals.

It struck me that this task already has a firm foundation for the Council of Christians and Jews. By educating Christian clergy and leaders about the Holocaust, one of our core tasks is to highlight the shameful history of antisemitism with which it is linked, and which is embedded in so much Christian thought and practice. There is an important connection to be made, therefore, between learning about the Holocaust, and learning from it in order to challenge and transform systems of anti-Jewish sentiment in Christian theologies today.

The Council of Christians and Jews has a long-standing and fruitful partnership with Yad Vashem in this work. For over 15 years we have been bringing Christian clergy and leaders to complete Yad Vashem's seminar on the Holocaust. Through this, we have educated hundreds of Christians about the Holocaust who have, in turn, shared their learning with their communities back in the UK. Educating about the memory of the Holocaust goes to the core of the mission of CCJ, so it was a privilege to be a part of this conversation, to hear about Yad Vashem's own upcoming projects, learn about contemporary challenges, and to discuss how we can move forward in Holocaust

education together.

Source: [The Council of Christians and Jews \(CCJ\)](#), England.