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**Evaluation of the Educational Programs
of the International School for Holocaust Studies
at Yad Vashem- 2008**

Executive summary

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Executive summary

The summative report of the evaluation of the educational programs of the International School for Holocaust Studies is presented at the end of the first year of research, upon completion of the actions that were planned in the research proposal. The evaluation activities had two main goals: as a summative evaluation, the first goal was to examine the extent to which the educational goals of the programs were achieved, and to propose recommendations for future actions. The second goal, as a formative evaluation, was to discuss the goals of the programs with program staff, to break them down into objectives and modes of action, to provide feedback to program staff in real time and to suggest improvements or directions for thought during the activity.

Six programs, operated by different departments of the school, were examined: 1) A study day for high school students, 2) A study day for soldiers, 3) A study day for in-service teachers and pre-service student teachers – all in the Yad Vashem site, 4) Courses for teachers (28-56 hours) in different educational centers in the periphery, 5) Seminars for educators both Jews and non Jews from abroad (in 4 languages) at Yad Vashem, 6) The 6th International Conference on Holocaust Education.

In general, it can be concluded that the participants of all the evaluated programs expressed great satisfaction. There is no doubt that the International School for Holocaust Studies makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of the subject of the Holocaust and to the commitment to preserve its memory. The pedagogic principles which were formulated by the International School for Holocaust Studies and which are expressed in the learning materials and in the teaching method of the subject, focus on the authentic and personal story and thus enable students of all ages to draw nearer to the subject, according to their stage of development and environment. In the new pedagogy, the moral dilemmas of the Jews and of those who stood by during the years of the Holocaust comprise a focus for the internalization of the significance of the Holocaust for all of humanity and the lessons that must be imparted to the entire world as to the obligation of people everywhere not to remain silent in the face of injustices to which they are exposed.

We conclude that these principles, and in some of the programs also the ways for their implementation, were well-absorbed by the participants of the various programs that already speak in the new language of Yad Vashem.

- **Satisfaction**

The participants in the various programs express great to very great satisfaction (with a mean of over 8 on a scale of 1-10) in every examined aspect: contents, way they were transmitted and organization of the program. All the participants undergo a meaningful experience in these programs. This finding indicates that the laborious work, the dedication and the sense of mission which the evaluators noticed among the staff of the International School for Holocaust Studies bear fruit and succeed in preserving and even intensifying the interest in various aspects of the Holocaust and in adapting the contents to diverse audiences of different types. Many of the participants praised the staff of the International School for Holocaust Studies in hundreds of comments, at different levels. Many of the participants of the seminars for educators from abroad wanted to pass their thanks through us to the contributors and the organizations which enabled them to come to Yad Vashem and participate in programs in which they could not have participated without this help.

- **Achievement of the goals**

Before the evaluation began with field work, conversations were held with all program managers and senior staff at the International School for Holocaust Studies. These conversations indicated that the ideological cohesion is high and the major goals are accepted by most staff persons, although on several issues there is a diversity of viewpoints. This finding indicates that that team mostly works in one direction, and this is usually a condition for an organization's success.

Two major goals were defined for the students and soldier populations: expanding the knowledge and encouraging in-depth thinking about dilemmas that arise from dealing with the Holocaust. Students and soldiers did indeed receive, according to their testimony, a great amount of knowledge which was transmitted in the best mode and feel an obligation to think about the meaning of the Holocaust for their lives.

A unique goal for the population of the educators was added in all programs, in addition to the above-mentioned goals: imparting the educational approach of Yad Vashem on teaching the Holocaust at the theoretical level and exposure to

instructional methods and learning materials which serve this approach. The research findings indicate that the goals for the educators were achieved in full.

Another declared goal of the International School for Holocaust Studies was to create a catalyst that would cause different participants to want to continue with learning and in-service training on this subject. In this respect, too, the school achieved its goals.

However, different participants were unable to differentiate between different aspects within the learning experience at Yad Vashem.

This phenomenon of vagueness can have different explanations:

- A. The halo effect: The participants' emotional experience in the different programs that deal in the Holocaust is so powerful that they are unable, certainly not immediately after the end of the activity, to identify details within their general impression.
- B. Usually, when vagueness is found in a research at the end point, the search for its cause should focus on the starting point: definition of the goals and aims by the program planners.

The new educational approach of the school is constructed on two axes: on the one hand the holistic axis which is expressed in the architecture of the museum and in the pedagogic approach, the other axis of the approach is focusing on the personal story of the living person. Both axes are apparently important for presenting the Holocaust not as a historic event that took place and ended, but rather as a chapter in the life of the Jewish People and in the life of humankind that has effects, implications and lessons that are relevant to our times and to the next generations. The collision between these two axes may perhaps explain the vagueness and inability to differentiate between details.

Recommendation: to discuss the seeming discrepancy between these two axes, to set afloat the pedagogic dilemmas that stem from it and to try and define the combination and dosage for the coordinators and instructors which may enable a holistic outlook on the one hand, while focusing on the details, on the other hand.

- **The academic contribution**

The findings of this research indicate that every program made a great contribution of new knowledge. A specific finding for the seminars for educators from abroad indicates that the academic contribution is divided into three fields of content: 1.

historic content; 2. exposure to moral dilemmas and current issues of new anti-Semitism, denial of the Holocaust, etc.; 3. knowledge about the State of Israel and the Jews (the subject of the survivors is represented in both latter fields).

The main contribution to the participants of the seminar was in fields 2 and 3. It may be said that whereas the historic knowledge is a traditional field in teaching the Holocaust since it can be acquired from different sources and many of the participants did indeed deal in it in the past, the two other fields are the core contents of the unique approach of Yad Vashem and the pedagogy developed by the International School for Holocaust Studies for which the contribution of the seminar at Yad Vashem is more significant.

Recommendation: in planning the seminars, it is worthwhile to focus more on the aspects that are unique to Yad Vashem at the expense of time and resources that are devoted to impart historic knowledge

- **The pedagogic contribution**

The pedagogic contribution has two aspects: the theoretical aspect and the practical aspect.

The results of the evaluation demonstrate that the programs for the teachers and educators undoubtedly achieved a breakthrough in the theoretical aspect. The principles of the pedagogic method are understood by the participants.

In the practical-applied aspect of the pedagogic contribution we cannot rely on anything but declarations at this stage: participants in the various programs intend to change their modes of work following the seminar. The findings of the long-term questionnaires will shed light on the extent to which the intentions are translated into practice as time goes by (such findings will be presented by July 2009, after online questionnaires will be completed by participants 6 months after returning from Israel). However, it was consistently found that participants in the various programs for educators want to deal more in didactics, in becoming familiar with unique materials, in preparing materials with the support of Yad Vashem, and especially in the need to actually experience all of these.

Recommendation: Since the goal of the seminars for educators from abroad is to create life-long learners and life-long pedagogues, it is important to offer the participants an opportunity to experience twice: once as students – a workshop

in which the participants are students, and once as teachers – a workshop in which they are given a task to prepare a learning unit, text, commemoration corner, exhibition or the like, while downloading material from the site and using the resource center under the guidance of Yad Vashem experts.

- **Prior preparation**

The issue of prior preparation pertains to different programs in different ways.

In the study days for students and soldiers it was found that for the students the study day is usually an activity within a program towards the matriculation exam or the trip to Poland. The students receive prior preparation, but it is apparently not focused. Among the soldiers it appears that the study day is not part of a comprehensive program, and its goals are apparently not defined clearly enough. The soldiers do not undergo preparation and for some of them the visit is a repetition of what they did in the past as students or even as soldiers. The study days for teachers and college students are also usually not part of a program, but rather a sporadic activity.

Recommendation: To construct the process of ordering a study day in such a way that it will be compatible with expectations, while defining goals and prior activities. It is desirable to prepare a proposal for beginners, advanced and specialists for all programs. Opening such possibilities may expand the potential market for the programs, may afford a more accurate answer to needs and may facilitate the problem of choosing between quantity and quality.

- **Planning**

Evaluation of the planning of the seminars for educators from abroad indicated great variability between the content of the programs in terms of the time and resources allocated for the components of academic knowledge, pedagogy as well as discussions, workshops and tours. It is apparent that there is a core program and topics that appear in all seminars.

Recommendation: To determine a required allocation of time according to the priorities of the school and the needs of the participants as shown by the preparatory activities and the findings of this research.

Since no significant differences were found between the contents that were learned in the long courses for Israeli teachers with the different titles, and no differences were found between the students and the soldiers as well as between the teachers and the college students in the study days, it appears that planning was not carried out by a rational process where aims and actions are derived from goals and criteria are set for evaluating products and outputs.

Recommendation: To instruct the planners of the various programs to present a detailed plan according to parameters which will be decided and which will require an orderly process beginning with a definition of goals and ending in the evaluation of the outputs. The schedule of the study day or seminar will be "transparent". It will be discussed in advance with those reserving the study day. It will be published in a printed sheet that will be handed to the participants, will require accountability and will also help reduce the above-mentioned vagueness.

- **The emotional aspect**

The participants of the seminar for educators from abroad, similarly to the participants of the other programs, undergo a significant emotional experience. However, it is necessary to differentiate between their experience and the attitude towards the experience of the Israelis. The participants from abroad are usually a non-organic group whose participants are strangers to each other, in addition to being strangers in Israel. If the participants are not Jewish, there is an added element to their feeling of being strangers. All the participants live in a kind of "bubble" during the course of the seminar, which is disengaged from daily life and is entirely focused on the tough subject of the Holocaust. During the seminar the participants are exposed to contents which sometimes require them to examine and even change previous attitudes and viewpoints, to ponder on the personal meaning of things for them as children of survivors or as members of a nation or families who were somehow involved in the war. Moreover, the participants are required to consider a behavioral change as educators when they come to actually implement the methods and content of the seminar. All of these participants, in varying extent, are in a delicate and fragile emotional state and need much support in order to preserve their mental wellbeing. In

such a situation, the coordinator who fulfills the "father" or "mother" role for the group is very important. This is expressed in the significant statistical relation between the satisfaction from the Yad Vashem team and the satisfaction from the seminar. Some of the participants reported a great emotional burden, but even those who did not feel a great burden expressed the need for processing the experiences in different modes.

- **The "together" experience**

Beyond what was written above on the seminars for educators from abroad, the significance of the group was prominent in the influence it had on the participants of the conference: educators from different countries of origin, nationalities and religions experienced an empowerment of the group – a "members' club" which becomes united around a subject of great value and carries an important mission on its shoulders. The actual unification around the dealing with the subject and the encounter with other people for whom the subject is important led to a sense of commitment among participants, contributed to their empowerment as messengers for the implementation of the importance of teaching the Holocaust and of the educational philosophy of Yad Vashem.

Recommendation: To preserve the long-term sense of commitment to the group by various means, such as: additional conferences and ongoing contact for updating, developing and cultivating the teaching of the Holocaust both by Yad Vashem and by means of creating a support group and studies in the country of origin.

- **Future plans**

The evaluation of the programs that were examined during 2008 indicates great success in achieving the set goals. These achievements should be preserved. **According to the requests and suggestions of the different participants, we recommend developing various continuation programs: advanced topic-oriented seminars, local in-service training in the countries of origin by Yad Vashem experts or local experts, and especially: development of a communication network between the educators and Yad Vashem and among themselves via the**

online network where they will be able to consult, exchange ideas and work materials, become updated and maintain their contact with the group of educators who were exposed to the educational principles of Yad Vashem, agreed with them and are interested in implementing them where they work. Some participants suggested expanding the interested public by more significant advertising which may draw more students to the seminars that take place at Yad Vashem.