

**Research  Evaluation**

---

A Group of Researchers and Consultants under the direction of Erik H. Cohen, PhD  
38 Bethlehem Rd Jerusalem 93504 ISRAEL Tel: 972.2.6722881 Fax: 972.2.6723817  
msaharon@mscc.huji.ac.il

***Echoes and Reflections*—A Multimedia Curriculum on  
the Holocaust**

**Student Evaluation 2008–2009**

**Executive Summary**

**Submitted by Erik H. Cohen, Ph.D.**

**Jerusalem, January 5, 2010**

## Introduction

During the 2008–2009 school year, an evaluation of *Echoes and Reflections* was conducted by the Erik Cohen Research and Evaluation team. This was a continuation of the evaluation begun by Goodman Research Group, Inc. in 2006–2007.<sup>7</sup> The Cohen evaluation was conducted among students in public, private, and parochial schools in twelve states across the United States (Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas).

Students were surveyed at the beginning and the end of the school year. The pre-program survey was completed by 1,116 students. The second questionnaire, distributed at the end of the school year, was completed by 642 students: 80% of the students were in high school; 20% were in middle or junior high. The ethnic diversity of the student population reflects that of the United States, including significant representation of Hispanics (19%), African-Americans (7%), and Asians (7%).

Additionally, sixteen teachers from eight states (Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Tennessee) participated in the study. Twelve teachers used *Echoes and Reflections* when teaching history classes; five used it in language arts/English classes; three used it in courses specifically on Holocaust studies, and three used it in religious education classes (some teachers used the curriculum in more than one type of class).

## Key Findings

### Prior knowledge

- 99% of the students surveyed had at least heard of the Holocaust at the outset of the program.
- 36% said they knew "many details" and 54% said they knew "some details."
- 81% had studied the Holocaust before, mainly at school (79%).
- A large majority had learned about the Holocaust from mass media, especially books (72%) and movies (68%).
- Smaller but still significant numbers of students had heard of the Holocaust from parents (29%), grandparents (18%), and friends (19%).

### Interest in and attitudes regarding the Holocaust

- Virtually all of the students expressed at least some interest in learning about the Holocaust: 17% said they were "extremely interested" and 36% "very interested."
- A large majority of students agreed (*strongly* or *moderately*) that it is important to study the Holocaust (74%) and that it is an important part of history (85%).
- Over half said the effects of the Holocaust are still being felt today (54%); only 22% said the Holocaust is not relevant to their lives.
- The majority of students said that it is important to challenge racism (60%) and to speak out against stereotyping (56%).

### Students' evaluation of *Echoes and Reflections*

- Overall, the students found the classroom activities helpful. Students found the group discussions to be the most helpful instructional technique (85% found them *extremely* or *very helpful*), followed by research activities (75%).
- Journal writing received the weakest evaluation (46% found them *extremely* or *very helpful*). The Goodman Research Group study also found that students rated journal writing as less effective than the other methods.
- Overall the ratings of the materials used were positive. Students particularly liked the primary sources (photographs, interviews, video testimonies, biographic profiles),

---

<sup>7</sup>The results of the current survey were compared, whenever possible, with the results of the Goodman Research Group study. The Goodman Research Group focused to a greater extent on teachers, while the Cohen Research and Evaluation study focused primarily on the students—their knowledge of the subject, and their evaluation of the curriculum.

which were rated as *excellent* by 80% or more of the students. Similarly, in the Goodman Research Group study, the photographs and visual testimonies received the highest ratings. Biographic Profiles were not available at the time of the Goodman Research Group study.

### Comparison of pre- and post-program surveys

- Students learned about the Holocaust. The percentage of students who say they know “a fair amount” or “a lot” about each of the various subjects increased by at least 20%; in most cases the increase was by 30% or more.
- There is a consistent strengthening of the perceived importance and relevance of the Holocaust and the need to and act against stereotyping and racism. The percentage of students that *strongly agrees* it is important to learn about the Holocaust in school rose by 14%; the percentage who *strongly agrees* that the effects of the Holocaust are still being felt rose by 11%; the percentage who thinks that one person can make a difference in opposing stereotypes rose by 9%. This finding reinforces the trend noted in the Goodman Research Group study, which also found that by the end of the year students attached greater importance to learning about the Holocaust and challenging racism.
- Over two-thirds of the students said that they think what they learned by studying the *Echoes and Reflections* lessons will influence how they treat people with backgrounds different from their own.

### Impact of grade level

- High school students had more prior knowledge about the Holocaust than younger students: 83% of high school students had previously studied the Holocaust in school, compared to 64% of middle and junior high students; 93% of high school students said at the beginning of the year that they knew “some” or “many” details about the Holocaust, compared to 80% of middle and junior high students.
- Some of the materials and activities were less effective among the middle and junior high school students, particularly the glossary, informational handouts, literary pieces, and video testimonies.
- The rate of increase in knowledge about various Holocaust-related subjects was similar among the younger and older students, although generally there was a somewhat greater rate of increase among high school students. Middle and junior high students reported a greater increase in general knowledge about the Holocaust.
- Junior high students reported a greater overall change in opinion following the program. Among the high school students the greatest positive change was to be found in their perceived importance of studying the Holocaust in school; among the middle and junior high school students the greatest attitude change was seen in relation to the continued effects of the Holocaust.

### Impact of gender

- Female students gave significantly higher evaluations to every one of the program components and materials than did male students.
- Females reported a greater change in their knowledge of many of the issues covered.
- Females expressed greater interest in the subject at the beginning of the year, and their interest increased slightly by the end of the year; whereas the already lower level of interest expressed by male students remained unchanged.

### Impact of interest in the subject

- Students who said they were *very* or *extremely interested* in studying the Holocaust had greater prior knowledge of the subject.
- Students who expressed greater interest at the outset of the program reported greater knowledge of all aspects of the subject at the end of the year.
- More interested students had far more positive attitudes regarding the study of the

Holocaust at the end of the year; for example, 99% of “very interested” students said the Holocaust is an important part of history, compared to 54% of “somewhat interested” students; 79% of “very interested” students *strongly agree* it is important to challenge racism, compared to 35% of “somewhat interested” students.

- Students who expressed greater interest at the outset of the program gave far more positive evaluations to every one of the materials and methods used in the curriculum.

### **Impact of ethnicity**

- In general, ethnicity had little effect on knowledge or attitudes concerning the Holocaust. There were a few exceptions: students who identified themselves as “white” were more likely to have prior knowledge of the subject and to perceive it as an important part of history.

### **Teachers**

- The majority of participating teachers attended at least one full-day *Echoes and Reflections* training.
- Teachers spent between 2 to 5 hours using the program and dedicated 1 to 2 weeks to it per class.
- The most popular lessons among the teachers were: Lesson 2: Antisemitism (81%), Lesson 3: Nazi Germany (69%), and Lesson 8: Survivors and Liberators (69%). During the year of the Goodman Research Group study, only Lesson 2: Antisemitism and Lesson 4: The Ghettos were used in all the surveyed states.
- Visual materials and diary entries were the most widely used materials; students rated both of these highly, suggesting an understanding by the teachers for what works in the classroom.

### **Recommendations**

- As *Echoes and Reflections* was originally designed for use in high schools and is now also being used in middle and junior high schools, it may be necessary to adapt some of the materials (particularly the glossary, informational handouts, literary pieces, and video testimonies) for use with younger students.
- Given the significant difference in evaluations by male and female students, which was also found in the Goodman Research Group study, it may be beneficial to explore ways to make the material more relevant or interesting for male students.
- A number of students indicated they still had questions about the Holocaust at the end of the program (listed in the Appendix of the full report). These questions may indicate directions for classroom discussions or expansion of the scope of the subjects addressed.