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## Experiential Holocaust Education — What Are the Options?

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**EXPERIENTIAL HOLOCAUST EDUCATION —  
WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?**

**Abstract**

Experiential learning of the Holocaust was initiated in Israel through youth trips to Poland in the late 1980s. The young age of participants harbors both advantages and disadvantages. In this article we attempt to analyze the benefits and effectiveness of this method of experiential Holocaust education.

**Keywords**

Experiential learning, firsthand learning, Holocaust, behavioral effect

## INTRODUCTION

In the process of experiential learning, students acquire skills and values as a consequence of a direct experience. Experiential learning draws on senses, emotions, and cognition to appeal to learners' entire being<sup>1</sup>. Such learning, by nature, enables development of a variety of capabilities, such as planning, teamwork, coping with stressful situations, responsibility, and leadership<sup>2</sup>. Experiential learning has many varied definitions; we have chosen here to refer to experiential learning as a "sequence of events that include one or more specific study objects requiring active involvement of learners in various stages of the process"<sup>3</sup>. This definition sees the process of experiential learning as an active practice in which learners leave the conventional state of learning through mediators in favor of firsthand learning, where learning is manifested in doing. The promoters of experiential learning contend that learning is enhanced through active involvement in meaningful experiences accompanied by processing for meaning and future use<sup>4</sup>. Experiential learning is mostly based on the behavioral-cognitive approach, which contends that change on the cognitive level might occur amidst an experience and project onto behavioral and emotional aspects as well<sup>5</sup>. In this article, we shall seek to present major programs offering experiential learning about the Holocaust and to explore their cognitive and behavioral effect on learners.

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<sup>1</sup>P. Jarvis, *Towards a comprehensive theory of human learning*, London and New York 2006; M. Lev, *Impact of youngsters' journey to Poland on their cognitive and emotional attitudes toward the Holocaust*, Ramat Gan 1998 [Hebrew].

<sup>2</sup>J. T. Neill, *Reviewing and benchmarking adventure therapy outcomes: applications of meta-analysis*, *Journal of Experiential Education* 25, 2003, p. 316–321; M. Rosol, *Wilderness therapy for youth-at-risk*, *Parks and Recreation* 35, 2000, p. 9–42; K. C. Russell, *Exploring how the wilderness therapy process relates to outcomes*, *Journal of Experiential Education* 23, 2000, p. 170–176.

<sup>3</sup>G. Walter and S. Marks, *Experiential learning and change: Theory design and practice*, New York 1981.

<sup>4</sup>J. L. Luckner and R. S. Nadler, *Processing the experience: Strategies to enhance and generalize learning*, Dubuque, IA, 1997.

<sup>5</sup>N. Davidovitch and I. Kandel, *Joint trips of Israelis and Germans — Beyond the experiential shock*, *Kivunim Hadashim* 14, 2006, p. 152–164 [Hebrew].

## ABOUT EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The experiential learning theory (ELT) provides a holistic model of the learning process as well as a multilinear model of adult development. The theory is referred to as “experiential learning” in order to emphasize the central role played by **experience** in the learning process<sup>6</sup>. Another reason for calling the theory “experiential” is its intellectual origins in the experiential works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget<sup>7</sup>. Carver<sup>8</sup> proposed a model of experiential learning with four features: active learning, assimilating the experience through cognitive and emotional work on materials, authenticity of the study matter (relevance for learners), and providing means of creating related experiences. The theory contends that integrating these features in the learning process might make it significantly more meaningful and help sustain the experience over time<sup>9</sup>. The theoretical model of experiential learning presents learning as a five-stage process: a learning-experiential occurrence, sharing, processing, generalization, and application. According to the model, learning as an active experience lets learners use knowledge in a practical applied manner and develops their life skills<sup>10</sup>.

Imparting knowledge and developing life skills are the equivalent of expanding and improving one’s cognitive dimensions. Cognitive models allege that one’s concept of self and of the world is organized in a complex manner, as a result of a unique cognitive alignment. The cognitive alignment and arrangement of information affect one’s worldviews, inclinations, responses, and

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<sup>6</sup>D.A. Kolb, R.E. Boyatzis, and Ch. Mainemelis, *Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions*, [in:] R.J. Sternberg and L.F. Zhang (eds.), *Perspectives on cognitive learning and thinking styles*, Mahwah, NJ, 2000, p. 228–247.

<sup>7</sup>D.A. Kolb, *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1984.

<sup>8</sup>R. Carver, *Theory for practice: A framework for thinking about experimental education*, *The Journal of Experiential Education* 19, 1996, p. 8–13.

<sup>9</sup>S.B. Bacon and R. Kimball, *The wilderness challenge model*, [in:] R.D. Lyman, S. Prentice-Dunn and S. Gabel, *Residential and inpatient treatment of children and adolescents*, New York 1989, p. 115–144.

<sup>10</sup>J.W. Pfeiffer and J.E. Jones, *Reference guide to handbooks and annuals*, New York 1983.

adaptation<sup>11</sup>. Adventure programs are the precursors of experiential learning<sup>12</sup>. These programs were initiated in the United States in the nineteenth century and were a unique way of enriching the curriculum. At first, these programs consisted of organized summer camps at which children spent several days off-campus, enjoying a variety of activities utilizing life skills<sup>13</sup>. Some claim that in modern life these programs might add value and meaning to the world of young people<sup>14</sup>. Another contention, as mentioned above, is that learning is enhanced through active involvement in personally meaningful experiences accompanied by processing for meaning and future use<sup>15</sup>. One such example is “work camps” (a type of adventure program) operated by Israeli youth movements in pre-state years, which formed an inseparable part of the process of imparting values of the revitalized Israeli society in the hearts of contemporary young people. Experiential learning can be divided in two: learning experienced personally in daily life and through one’s life events; and learning by means of programs devised by others<sup>16</sup>. For the latter there is need for advance preparation and working through the process at its conclusion<sup>17</sup>. School trips to Poland are one of the major experiential learning programs in Holocaust instruction. This is a meaningful study program that encompasses all principles of the “adventure program”.

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<sup>11</sup>G. Walter and S. Marks, *Experiential learning and change: Theory design and practice*, New York 1981.

<sup>12</sup>D. Hopkins and R. Putnam, *Personal growth through adventure*, Bristol, PA, 1993; J. Sibthorp and A.B. Skye, *Developing life effectiveness through adventure education: The roles of participant expectations, perceptions of empowerment, and learning relevance*, *Journal of Experiential Education*, 27, 1, 2004, p. 32–50.

<sup>13</sup>L. Zilberberg, *Knowledge, feelings, and views of youth at risk towards the Holocaust: Shifts following the trip to Poland*, Ramat Gan 2008 [Hebrew].

<sup>14</sup>S.B. Bacon and R. Kimball, *The wilderness challenge model*.

<sup>15</sup>J.L. Luckner and R.S. Nadler, *Processing the experience*.

<sup>16</sup>J.L. Cano, I. Lidon, R. Rebollar, P. Roman, and M. J. Saenz, *Student groups solving real-life projects. A case study of experiential learning*, *International Journal of Engineering Education* 22, 6, 2006, p. 1252–1260; N.A. Knobloch, *Is experiential learning authentic?* *Journal of Agricultural Education* 44, 4, 2003, p. 22–34; R. Turner, A. Keegan, and L. Crawford, *Delivering improved project management maturity through experiential learning*, *Project Management Journal*, 8,1, 2002, p. 72–81.

<sup>17</sup>L. Zilberberg, *Knowledge, feelings, and views*.

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING — SCHOOL TRIPS TO POLAND

Trips to Poland encompass all elements of experiential learning, as learners are present at the place of occurrence<sup>18</sup> and have the privilege of serving as “witnesses of witnesses”<sup>19</sup>. The trip to Poland resembles those early adventure programs that sought to use informal means to generate learning. The trip is a unique experiential course of study that lasts eight intensive days, in which students visit former Jewish centers, sites of mass extermination, and Polish tourist sites. In the process, participants are exposed to potent emotional experiences, the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis, and the rich culture of Eastern European Jewry<sup>20</sup>. Models of experiential learning largely assume that the trip to Poland, compatible as it is with the principles of experiential learning, might generate an array of changes among individual participants<sup>21</sup>. The trip program is composed of three parts: preparation for the trip, the trip itself, and post-trip work. All parts together constitute the entire trip program, and are almost equally important for realizing its goals. Circulars from the Director General (of the Ministry of Education) recognize the significance of trip-supporting contents and include them in their instructions. Academic **preparation** refers to formal learning of issues stemming from trip topics and sites visited. The **trip program**, as defined by the instructions of the Director General, must reflect overall goals designed by the Ministry of Education: familiarization with the history of the Jewish people and reinforcing one’s links to it, learning lessons about the need for Israeli sovereignty and reinforcing students’ commitment to the continued existence of Israel, as well as learning universal lessons about democracy, human dignity, and the value of life. A primary and explicit demand of the Ministry of Education is that the trip program should express and re-

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<sup>18</sup>M. Lev and S. Romi, Experiential learning of history through youth journeys to Poland: Israeli Jewish youth and the Holocaust, *Research in Education* 78, 2007, p. 88–102.

<sup>19</sup>J. Feldman, *Between the death camps and the flag: Youth voyages to Poland and the performance of the Israeli national identity*, New York 2008.

<sup>20</sup>S. Romi and M. Lev, Knowledge, emotions, and attitudes of Israeli youngsters to the Holocaust, *Megamot* 42, 2003, p. 219–239 [Hebrew]; The effect of youth trips to Poland on their views of the Holocaust in the cognitive and emotional dimension. Follow-up study, Tel-Aviv and Beit Berl 2003 [Hebrew].

<sup>21</sup>N. Davidovitch and I. Kandel, Joint trips of Israelis and Germans; M. Lev and S. Romi, Experiential learning of history; L. Zilberberg, Knowledge, feelings, and views.

flect **all** these goals. This is the only unequivocal demand of the program, with everything else being merely recommendations: “It is advisable to visit...”<sup>22</sup>. The recommendations suggest that various contents be included in the trip. In order to realize the goal of getting to know the Jewish community as it once was, visits to cities and towns are proposed, for example: Warsaw, Cracow, Lublin, Lodz, Tikochin, Góra Kalwaria, Kazimierz Dolny, Sandomierz, Lizensk, Landshut, Kielce, Tarnov, Chenstohova, Wieliczka, as well as visits to extermination camps (all camps are optional, aside from the visit to Auschwitz which is mandatory). Conducting ceremonies at selected sites is also compulsory: “Participation in ceremonies at extermination camps and recommended sites should be included in the trip program”<sup>23</sup>. In regard to educational-cultural contents, evening activities should be held, including group discussions aimed at working through emotional experiences and sharing on topics that surface at sites visited.

**Returning from the trip** — After returning from the trip the Director General Circular recommends holding several group encounters in which participants discuss feelings and thoughts that surfaced after returning home, with the aim of understanding “how and how much the trip to Poland affected their subsequent life on a personal, familial, social, and national level”. There are other recommendations, such as urging participants to share the story of the trip with those close to them, organizing a “Poland evening” at which participants present their impressions of the trip, preparing a trip book, integrating events experienced in the regular course of study, preparing ceremonies, adopting communities, adopting Holocaust survivors, and writing a final paper. Since schools are given a free rein to design the trip, diverse trip models exist.

### TRIP MODELS — USING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WITH DIVERSE METHODS

The various methods used for trips to Poland are under the auspices, guidance, and direction of the Ministry of Education. The ministry, as part of its responsibility, is in charge of the contents to which students are exposed before, during, and after the trip. Circulars from the Director General, beginning from

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<sup>22</sup>Director General Circular, 2005.

<sup>23</sup>Ibidem.

1988, explicitly defined experiential learning contents acquired on the trip to Poland. For example, the Ministry of Education gives a list of institutions dealing with research and study of the Holocaust and recognized by its Social and Youth Administration for the purpose of preparing youth delegations to Poland. Nonetheless, although the Ministry of Education controls and supervises delegations, the various trip contents and models are not uniform. Interviews with principals of the various schools, observations, correspondence, school websites, and conversations with staff show that the methods chosen change as a function of the school's values and tradition. In general, it is possible to categorize trip models by educational variants. Thus, trip designs range from the ethnocentric-nationalistic to the universal. The ethnocentric-nationalistic dimension includes various insights ranging from Jewish morals to Israeli morals. Over the years, these two dimensions have been given varied degrees of meaning within the identity of young people occupied with shaping their ethical and normative frame of reference. The varied designs of trip models have different educational emphases: **The first** emphasizes universalism: values of democracy, humanism, tolerance, and pluralism. **The second** emphasizes Zionist-national values: the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) and the State of Israel. **The third** emphasizes the shared Jewish destiny, the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, and stressing Jewish issues.

The different ethical emphases formed within experiential teaching of the Holocaust are often a result of the composition of participating groups. Youth trips to Poland are comprised of teenagers from all sectors of Israeli society. In contrast to the common perception, young people are diverse, and thus participating groups are varied as well. As stated, these groups have different agendas and different ethical emphases. This divergence leads to different trip models. The design of the trip model refers to the basic shape and contents of trips to Poland. Various settings may undertake such trips, each with its own educational and ethical goals and unique models of applied experiential learning.

**State schools** — State schools operate under the State Education Law, whereby the state is responsible for providing education according to the curriculum, unaffiliated with political, ethnic, or other unofficial organizations, and supervised by the minister or anyone authorized by the minister for this purpose<sup>24</sup>. The purposes of state education, as declared, include among other things instilling both Zionist and universal values. In the context of the trips to Poland, these schools

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<sup>24</sup>Ministry of Education and Culture, Special education law, Jerusalem 1953 [Hebrew].



are recognized as non-religious, and they encompass various trends. Each school emphasizes different values. **Democratic** schools stress application and instilling of basic values of democracy in all school operations rather than only in a representative part, as customary in regular state schools where decisions are made by the authority of the adult in charge. **Pluralist** schools espouse the principle of pluralism and admit students from all sectors of the population. Other schools in the state education group promote **leadership development**, while yet others seek to promote **tolerance** as a basic value. The school agenda is manifested in the emphases of the various study programs, including the Holocaust program.

**State religious schools** are institutions that operate in accordance with a religious life style. Their curricula, teachers, and supervisors educate students in the spirit of observant Judaism and religious Zionism, guided by Jewish Orthodox traditions.

The state religious educational system encompasses sub-trends with unique emphases of their own. The **Torah-oriented stream** teaches students to recognize the value of life and its meaning, with students learning that they have a special mission given them by the Creator. According to the Torah-oriented approach, the current world is a corridor — “Prepare yourself in the corridor that you may enter into the hall”<sup>25</sup>.

**Faith-oriented education** strives to connect students to values and form, while connecting with the Godly spark by maintaining contact with the Creator. Its basic concept is that students are part of a wider generation full of ambitions and dreams, and that as promised by Rabbi Kook: “The tree of life in all its good and glory will be revealed in them and by them”<sup>26</sup>.

**Hasidic education** follows the Hasidic worldview whereby the purpose of the creation is to turn the world into a dwelling, an apartment, for God. This purpose is realized by the People of Israel by conducting themselves according to Torah and performing its commandments. Hasidism emphasizes the direct link between the believer and the Creator, where the former must adhere to God with the assistance of the righteous. According to this conception, the acts of every Jew hasten the redemption. Emphases of Hasidic education include values of loving Jews, joy, helping all Jews.

**State schools with special needs students** — these groups integrate students from special education schools and state schools. Special education students are

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<sup>25</sup>Tractate Avot, 4, 21.

<sup>26</sup>Arfiley Tohar, 16.

students with disabilities who study at schools adapted to their unique needs. These schools were established by virtue of the Special Education Law<sup>27</sup>, which determines that all Israeli children aged 3–21 and diagnosed with a disability are eligible for special treatment funded by the government, and may study at a special education setting or be integrated in a regular classroom as determined by a placement committee. Joint trips integrate the two teenage groups from a perspective of mutual responsibility and confirm the saying: “All Israel are responsible for one another”<sup>28</sup>.

### TRIPS TO POLAND INITIATED BY OTHER SETTINGS

Schools are not the only settings to plan trips to Poland; many other organizations seek to impart experiential knowledge of the Holocaust to their members. Both quantitatively and qualitatively, models employed by these settings are very different than those used by schools, which operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Those not answerable to the educational system can in theory do as they wish with the topic of the Holocaust and trips to Poland. Trips initiated by the IDF — the “Witnesses in Uniform” program — last four to five days and their main purpose is to create a “basis for expanding soldiers’ command-oriented and ethical identity...[and enhancing] the feeling of being on a mission for the state and the army”<sup>29</sup>. Due to the army’s specific goals, the trip design emphasizes the national-Jewish aspect in addition to intensively integrating Jewish and Israeli symbols and many ceremonies<sup>30</sup>. There are trips on behalf of local municipalities, which select a group of youngsters to represent the city in Poland. Municipalities such as Tel Aviv and Bat Yam assemble teenagers from several local schools and the students themselves serve as emissaries of the city. There are trips on behalf of Magen David Adom (the Israeli parallel of the Red Cross) — which are socially oriented and can almost be said to constitute a type of team building for members of the delegation.

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<sup>27</sup>Ministry of Education and Culture, Special education law, criteria and guidelines for approving youth delegations, Jerusalem 1988 [Hebrew].

<sup>28</sup>Sifra Leviticus, 26.

<sup>29</sup>Witnesses in Uniform, accessed May 18, 2012, <http://www.aka.idf.il/edim/main>.

<sup>30</sup>N. Davidovitch, A. Haskel, and D. Soen, Witnesses in uniform — IDF delegations to Poland: Education or indoctrination?, [in:] N. Davidovitch and D. Soen, *The Holocaust ethos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Kraków 2012, p. 316–348.

Trips by youth movements are a “collective journey to history, Jewish roots, and culture, providing an opportunity for thorough introspection in which participants come to terms with their Jewish, national, and personal identity” (from an official document of the Scouts movement). For example, the Hano’ar Ha’oved Vehalomed movement calls its delegation “the journey to discover the roots of the Zionist revolution and the revolt of the youth movements” and emphasizes Zionist and social values embodied in the trip<sup>31</sup>. Other countries (quite a few of which have trips to Poland), particularly European countries, utilize a completely different model. The time span is usually short, one or two intensive days at a single site, often the city that has become a symbol of the horrors of the Holocaust of European Jewry — Auschwitz. For example, the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah in France intensively prepares trip participants, with the visit to the camps themselves forming the culmination of a lengthy study process. The delegation spends one day (24 hours) in Poland, at a single site, emphasizing the historical more than the moral aspect<sup>32</sup>. Group trips to Poland as part of studies about the Holocaust are organized by other settings in Israel as well: pre-school teacher committees, groups of employees, residents of moshav rural villages, and more. In each of the groups it is possible to identify specific goals: these goals shape the structure and contents of the trip.

#### AN ALTERNATIVE TRIP — TRIPS WITHIN ISRAEL AS AN EXPERIENTIAL WAY OF LEARNING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

“The alternative trip” is a trip in Israel that is the equivalent of the high school trip to Poland as part of Holocaust studies. The purpose of the trip is to teach the subject in an experiential manner: “Creating an educational process that ranges from the tangible to the abstract”<sup>33</sup>. This alternative is proposed by one Holocaust instruction institute, Beit Ha’edut (the Testimony House),

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<sup>31</sup>D. Soen, N. Davidovitch, and H. Hazan, Youth trips to Poland — A case study of the Israeli youth movement model, [in:] N. Davidovitch and D. Soen, *The Holocaust ethos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, p. 266–315.

<sup>32</sup>Interview with Jacques Frej, director of the Mémoire, 2009; N. Davidovitch and D. Soen, *The future of remembrance and of Holocaust commemoration enterprises — A case study*, *Education and Context* 34, 2012, p. 21–38 [Hebrew].

<sup>33</sup>Program of journey from Holocaust to revival, Beit Ha’edut, accessed May 18, 2012, <http://www.beit-haedut.org.il/>.

as a substitute, or supplement, to the trip to Poland, with the main purpose of enhancing the experience of learning about the subject, while emphasizing Jewish revival in the Land of Israel: From the terrors of the Holocaust, in which our people were tortured and murdered, survivors found the strength and the vitality to join the struggle for personal and national independence: to build a home and a family, to help establish the State of Israel, to contribute to the flourishing and existence of the Jewish People in its land. Jewish revival was manifested in establishment of the state, its sovereignty as an independent state, and our contribution, that of each and every one of us, to the existence, defense, and development of the state<sup>34</sup>. Schools that come to Beit Ha'edut are part of the sector that takes part in trips to Poland, and this program is employed either in addition or instead of the trip to Poland. At Ulpanat Kdumim this program is operated as part of the formal instruction, and students of the Ulpana participate each year in a journey that follows the Holocaust and Revival in Israel.

The program lasts about four days, in which students deal with issues connected to history, civics, and religion, as well as visiting institutions and institutes for commemoration and teaching of the Holocaust, open air sites, and participating in hikes: "We constructed a journey in Israel that includes visits to museums, plays, meeting witnesses, instructors with a good background and knowledge of the Holocaust and revival, and of course board and lodging as well. The program was constructed and the 'credo' of the Israeli journey was written, 50% of the journey is subsidized by Beit Ha'edut, we realized that the journey must be experiential or else it would not answer the needs of young students who want something that provides a special experience in addition to its educational value"<sup>35</sup>. A study conducted by Vered Refaeli<sup>36</sup> on the Israel trip organized by Beit Ha'edut shows that in this setting the institute manages to reach most of its goals by creating a meaningful learning experience, as indicated both by achievement of its declared aims and by student satisfaction with the experience. The trip costs NIS 650 (roughly US\$162), and many see it as a more appropriate alternative to the trip to Poland for bequeathing the memory of the Holocaust through experiential learning. The major claim is that the strength and significance of the Israel trip are the equivalent of those

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<sup>34</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup>A. Bariach, CEO of Beit Ha'edut, accessed May 18, 2012. <http://www.beit-haedut.org.il/>.

<sup>36</sup>V. Refaeli, Evaluation of the Holocaust to Revival trip program, Directors report: Intermediate summary, Beer-Sheva 2009 [Hebrew].

achieved by the trip to Poland. In interviews we conducted with instructors, delegation leaders, and witnesses, many chose to compare the trip to Poland to the Exodus — just as we do not travel to Egypt in order to enhance our memory, it is unnecessary to travel as far as Poland. In conclusion, the alternative Israel trip is a way of having a meaningful learning experience, and it is adopted by certain schools as a supplement or substitute to the trip to Poland.

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT HOLOCAUST INSTITUTES

During the six decades of the State of Israel, a wide range of museums have been established with the aim of shaping remembrance. The most conspicuous are: the Holocaust Basement, Yad Vashem, the Itzhak Katzenelson Museum at Kibbutz Lohamei Hageta'ot, Masuah, Beit Ha'edut, the Diaspora Museum, Moreshet, and others. The museums afford another type of experiential learning and offer educational, experiential, and cognitive challenges. Many museums serve as Holocaust instruction institutes, i.e., they do not make do with a passive display of remembrance; rather they take part in its shaping and in structuring knowledge. This approach is manifested in infusing meaning in topics presented while forming links between the historical perspective and the meaning of remembrance<sup>37</sup>. Traditionally, it is customary to perceive the trip to Poland as the main experiential method of learning about the Holocaust; however, visits to these institutes show that it is possible to learn about the Holocaust experientially and thoroughly without traveling as far as Poland. This concept is reflected in the numbers reported by the institutes — they are visited by a very small number of students, usually as part of general preparations for “the trip”. The institutes also report the relative proportion of students who go on the trip, attesting to a lack of proportion between the various schools. An overview of visitors to Holocaust instruction institutes shows that only a small percentage of visiting students come as part of school programs on the Holocaust. One exception is Yad Vashem, which forms an integral part of the high school curriculum. However aside from this institute, which has attained symbolic status within Israeli society as the most well-known Holocaust museum, very little experiential learning about the Holocaust is effected

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<sup>37</sup>A. Ben Naftali, History, memory, and identity, [in:] N. Keren (ed.), *Islands of memory*, Jerusalem 2008, p. 37–53 [Hebrew].

at Holocaust memorial institutes. The institutes themselves affirm that they tend to be sectorial by nature — aimed at a certain population. For example, Beit Ha'edut at Moshav Nir Galim, established by the Bnei Akiva Association of Central Europe, appeals mainly to religious Zionist groups<sup>38</sup>. The Mordechai Anilewicz house of testimony — Moreshet — operates according to the values of the youth movements (<http://www.moreshet.org>) and thus appeals mainly to the secular sector. A comparison both between the different populations that visit the institutes and between the declared goals of the institutes shows that Holocaust instruction institutes have a certain agenda, which they strive to promote through experiential learning. In contrast to the original goals of the institutes, set in the initial years of the state, they evolved independently and changed over time. Each grew in its own way and developed programs for shaping students' ethical, experiential, and cognitive world. Participation in the learning experience afforded by the various institutes shows that in practice each has its "own" Poland. The experiential aspect of Holocaust studies, aside from the trip to Poland, includes a large variety of options. Holocaust instruction institutes throughout Israel propose original study programs. The various institutes offer a large range of programs, each with its own agenda, major focus, and ethical emphases. For example, the Shem Olam Institute focuses on the topic of "Rabbinical leadership during the Holocaust". Study material, collected in several booklets, depicts prominent Hasidic sects during the Holocaust as well as leading rabbinical figures. The Masuah Institute, which serves as a central school for Holocaust instruction, sees its main purpose as "commemoration and contribution to the cultural discourse in Israel"<sup>39</sup>. The institute's program emphasizes youth movements and revolts during the Holocaust. In addition to academic content, the institute publishes study methods and activities for teaching the various materials. Yad Vashem offers modular study programs adapted for various age groups. The programs stress the history of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and attempt to commemorate the life story and memory of each of the six million victims and to impart the heritage of the Holocaust.

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<sup>38</sup>M. Aricha, Guidance coordinator — Yad La'ed, Michtav 22, 2004.

<sup>39</sup>Masuah bulletin, 2009, accessed May 18, 2012, [http://www.massuah.org.il/upload/Downloads/PdtFile\\_603.pdf](http://www.massuah.org.il/upload/Downloads/PdtFile_603.pdf).

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND ITS EFFECT — COGNITIVE, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL-BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS

Traveling to Poland is like entering a time tunnel that leads travelers into the past of Eastern European Jews. This past featured a rich culture, in addition to destruction and ruination. Teenagers participating in the trip take part in six months of a formal program of preparation that provides them with preliminary historical knowledge and explains the historical, social, and political circumstances that led to the outcome observed on the trip. Throughout the trip pedagogic and educational aspects are emphasized and attempts are made to work through contents both cognitively and emotionally. These endeavors are manifested in evening gatherings led by group instructors and by cognitive and emotional work on the events experienced during the day in conversations between students. Throughout all phases of the program attempts are made to deal with all aspects encountered by learners and to generate a transformation among them, by creating new insights. The program seeks to realize these goals by utilizing principles of experiential learning. The large majority of research on views and identity in the aftermath of the trip indicates that the experience embodied by the trip to Poland serves as a means of confirming and enhancing Jewish-Israeli identity, Zionist values, and national values<sup>40</sup>. The State of Israel, the IDF, and the Israeli flag — constitute sources of strength for young travelers<sup>41</sup>. Although also clarifying the significance of universal values of human-

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<sup>40</sup>N. Davidovitch and I. Kandel, Joint trips of Israelis and Germans; J. Feldman, In the wake of the Israeli shoah survivor: Israeli youth delegations to Poland and national identity, *Theory and Criticism* 19, 2001, p. 167–190 [Hebrew]; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland within the framework of the Ministry of Education on the working through of the Holocaust, Beer Sheva 2000 [Hebrew]; A. Lazar, J. Chaitin, T. Gross, and D. Bar-On, A journey to the Holocaust: Modes of understanding among Israeli adolescents who visited Poland, *Educational Review* 56, 2004, p. 13–31; Jewish Israeli teenagers, national identity, and the lessons of the Holocaust, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, 2004, p. 188–201; M. Lev, Impact of youngsters' journey; M. Lev and S. Romi, Experiential learning of history; Ministry of Education, Evaluation of youth trips to Poland in 2009: Cognitive, emotional and value wise impacts, Tel Aviv 2011 [Hebrew]; S. Romi and M. Lev, Knowledge, emotions, and attitudes; S. Romi and M. Lev, The effect of youth trips to Poland.

<sup>41</sup>J. Feldman, Marking the boundaries of the enclave: Defining the Israeli collective through the Poland Experience, *Israel Studies* 7, 2002, p. 84–114; Between the death camps and the flag; Pilgrimages to the death sites in Poland, *Bishvil Hazikaron* 7, 1995, p. 8–11 [Hebrew].



ism<sup>42</sup>, attitude towards minorities and others, and empathy towards them<sup>43</sup>, the experience enhances perceived risks for Jews in the Diaspora<sup>44</sup>, which would still exist were it not for the State of Israel. Therefore, as repeatedly stated above, there are some who object to the trip to Poland<sup>45</sup>. Opponents contend that these cognitive aspects are constructed as they are as a result of the trip's design — one that forms a dichotomous conception of the world: “they” versus “us”, Jews versus non-Jews, Israel versus the world<sup>46</sup>, preventing one from experiencing modern-day Poland, as security arrangements and schedules preclude random encounters with Poles<sup>47</sup>. Those opposed see the trips as an attempt to form an educational code whereby the essence of Israel in the 2000s is the Jew as a hero who survives, who is victorious<sup>48</sup>. Some dub this process, in which a young state attempts to urge its citizens to develop a new cultural system, the creation of a “civil religion”<sup>49</sup>. This “religion” interacts with the culture of origin, while selectively choosing the values it sees as important. In Israel a civil religion has emerged, embracing some Jewish values as well as new ceremonies and symbols of Israeli officialdom. The Holocaust occupies an important part in this religion, supplementing traditional-religious effects<sup>50</sup>. This civil religion with the Holocaust at its epicenter, is a new one, superseding the previous one, which reigned

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<sup>42</sup>D. Blatman, Post-Zionism and the blurring of memory, *Bishvil Hazikaron* 7, 1995, p. 15 [Hebrew].

<sup>43</sup>H. Schechter, The effect of youth trips to Poland on their empathy towards the suffering of Israeli Arabs, Haifa 2002 [Hebrew].

<sup>44</sup>A. Ram and M. Shani, The trip to Poland: Children of the future travel to the past (immigration absorption), *Aley Hinuch* 18, 1997, p. 30–31 [Hebrew].

<sup>45</sup>D. Soen and N. Davidovitch, Israeli youth pilgrimages to Poland: Rationale and polemics, [in:] N. Davidovitch and D. Soen, *The Holocaust ethos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, p. 234–265.

<sup>46</sup>D. Ofer, History, memory and identity: Perceptions of the holocaust in Israel, [in:] U. Rebhun and C.I. Waxman (eds.), *Jews in Israel*, Lebanon, NH, 2004, p. 394–419.

<sup>47</sup>J. Feldman, Review of K. Lichstein, H. Durrence, B. Riedel, D. Taylor, and A. Bush, *Epidemiology of Sleep: Age, Gender, and Ethnicity*, *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 48, 2005, p. 58–60; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland; A. Ophir, On inexpressible feelings and unquestionable lessons, *Bishvil Hazikaron* 7, 1995, p. 11–15 [Hebrew].

<sup>48</sup>H. Grossman, March of the living, *Keshet Ayin* 147, 2005, p. 12–14 [Hebrew].

<sup>49</sup>A. Don Yehiya and Y. Libman, The dilemma of culture in a modern state: Changes and developments in Israel's civil religion, *Megamot* 28, 1984, 461–85, accessed May 18, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1187453.html> [Hebrew].

<sup>50</sup>J. Feldman, Review of K. Lichstein; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland; A. Ophir, On inexpressible feelings.



in the pre-state days and up to the early 1960s<sup>51</sup>. Thus, it is possible to conclude that from the cognitive aspect there are many meaningful effects. The trip helps adolescents expand their knowledge of the Holocaust, enhances their views, and significantly transforms their self-identity. In contrast to formal learning experiences, which might mainly affect the knowledge component, the force of experiential learning seems conspicuous. Nonetheless, an inevitable question is whether Israeli youth have to travel all the way to Poland in order to discover their Jewish essence. Isn't there another way for students to sense their Israeli nature rather than through the horrors of the Holocaust? Through ritualization of the victims' death<sup>52</sup>? Are Israelis nearing national and ethical "bankruptcy"<sup>53</sup>, forcing them to delve into their past to search for the meaning of their existence? Although the current literature does not provide conclusive answers to these questions, it is certainly possible to realize that Holocaust events are not freely interpreted by learners; rather they undergo a process of appropriation to facilitate preservation and confirmation of the nation's constitutive myths<sup>54</sup>. Young students are given a limited interval in which to cope with complex events. They are compelled to examine various issues encountered and to reach their own answers to difficult questions: How could an entire nation be taken to its death while the world remained silent? Did those Jews indeed go "as sheep to the slaughter"? Why did no one put an end to the atrocities? How did the world let the Holocaust happen? What should be done to prevent something like this from happening again? The extensive information provided to students might be overburdening for adolescents who are in a period of change, engaged in forming their own identities and seeking answers to ethical and moral questions in their lives. In adolescence one's identity has not yet stabilized; adolescents find it difficult to decide who they are and where they fit in. Their

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<sup>51</sup>O. Almog, *The Sabra — a profile*, Tel Aviv 1997; *Farewell to Srulik — Change of values among the Israeli elite*, Haifa 2004; M. Lissak and D. Horowitz, *The ideological dimension in the political system of the Yishuv, State, Government and International Relations* 7, 1975, p. 28–61 [all in Hebrew].

<sup>52</sup>S.D. Ezrachi, *Revisiting the past: The changing legacy of the Holocaust in Hebrew literature*, *Salmagundi* 68/69, 1985/6, p. 245–276.

<sup>53</sup>M. Schechter and Y. Iram, *Fifty years of values education: From an evolving to a changing society*, [in:] Y. Iram, S. Scolnicov, J. Cohen, and E. Schachter (eds.), *Crossroads: Values and education in Israeli society*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 320–351 [Hebrew].

<sup>54</sup>E. Klinhouse, *To be there? Guiding Israeli youth delegations to Poland*, Tel Aviv 2006 [Hebrew].

outlook, approaches, and goals are unstable and might change with every shift of the wind. The sense of continuity, characteristic of childhood, is undermined in adolescence<sup>55</sup>. Adolescents are often occupied with the question of how they are perceived by their peers and wonder how to integrate all the functions and skills they acquire with role models in their environment<sup>56</sup>. This period seems to be the most sensitive in one's life, shaping one's future form. Thus the trip experience is even more meaningful, experienced as it is by students whose personality has not been fully formed. The large quantity of information and forceful emotions might have special added meaning when young people are involved. A qualitative study conducted by Klinhouse<sup>57</sup> examined contents conveyed to young people during the trip and found that the enormous amount of historical information imparted to students does not occupy a dominant place in impressions retained by students and does not dictate the nature of the trip. On the contrary, data and facts are not assimilated, and cognitive-rational goals linger far behind emotional goals. Thus, cognitive changes observed are based on a significant emotional component that helps infuse learning with unique traits, enhance it, and make it unforgettable. We shall now portray the place and impact of the emotional component of the trip.

The “**emotional component**” of the trip is appealed to through various activities that let one sense and work through the experience emotionally. These activities include walks and guided tours of the camps with their various sites (the roll-call plaza, the execution wall, the gas chambers, etc.), commemoration ceremonies, absorbing “Holocaust sights”, listening to witnesses relate their personal story, reading letters from survivors describing their experiences<sup>58</sup>, and frequent encounters with gruesome ordeals<sup>59</sup>. The many activities conjoin to shift the learning experience from the past to the present. To a certain degree, aside from the experience itself, which produces a not insignificant amount of emotions, messages and expectations conveyed to students throughout all

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<sup>55</sup>S. Fisherman and S. Kaniel, Changes in ego identity of adolescents following their visits in Poland, *Dapim* 37, 2004, p. 182–202 [Hebrew].

<sup>56</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup>E. Klinhouse, To be there?

<sup>58</sup>M. Lev, Youth trips to memory, [in:] S. Romi and M. Shmida (eds.), *Informal education in changing circumstances*, Jerusalem 2007 [Hebrew].

<sup>59</sup>E. Klinhouse, To be there?

stages of the program have a large impact<sup>60</sup>. Organizers, educators, and parents<sup>61</sup> voice messages about the significance of the trip and its prospective effect on their personality and identity. These emotions are supported by acts aimed at arousing national and particularly Zionist components. Thus, for example, reading the names of the victims and reciting the Kadish help give students the feeling that they are witnesses to an intergenerational Jewish heritage<sup>62</sup>. This is also true of posing questions on mutual commitment and on attempts to act in response to authoritarian domination with the aim of building fences to prevent evil systems from assuming control. Within the intensive program, students may absorb the messages, expectations, and demands, and these might have a “Pygmalion effect”, in the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is good cause for such assumptions, as evidently emotional reactions formed among individuals who experience the trip are to a great degree a function of culture<sup>63</sup>. For example, Israeli Jews feel differently than American Jews<sup>64</sup>, while the Germans themselves feel both shame and pride<sup>65</sup>. Thus, the emotional component, powerful as it may be, seems to be the product of certain practices whose aim is emotional. Feelings formed are responses by individuals to early cognitions outlined for them in the three-phase program. Some even claim that the meaning of the trip is created emotionally and not cognitively, rather by circumventing one’s cognition<sup>66</sup>. Feelings of participants upon their return correspond not insignificantly to social expectations instilled in them. From this respect the trip is an efficient tool of rapid socialization, teaching participants how they must feel and experience their existence in Israel, an existence stemming from

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<sup>60</sup>J. Feldman, Review of K. Lichstein; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland; A. Ophir, On inexpressible feelings.

<sup>61</sup>J. Feldman, Review of Lichstein; L. Zilberberg, Knowledge, feelings, and views.

<sup>62</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup>D. Bar-On, P. Hare, M. Brusten, and F. Beiner, Working through the Holocaust? Comparing the questionnaire results of German and Israeli students, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 7, 1993, 230–46.

<sup>64</sup>J. Chaitin, Facing the Holocaust in generations of families of survivors: The case of partial relevance and interpersonal values, *Contemporary Family Therapy* 22, 2000, 289–314.

<sup>65</sup>N. Davidovitch and I. Kandel, Establishing a bridge for communications: Joint Israeli-German delegations to Holocaust sites in Europe, *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 5, 2007, 87–97.

<sup>66</sup>J. Feldman, Marking the boundaries of the enclave: Defining the Israeli collective through the Poland Experience, *Israel Studies* 7, 2002, 84–114; Between the death camps and the flag: Pilgrimages to the death sites in Poland, *Bishvil Hazikaron* 7, 1995, 8–11 [Hebrew].

the fortitude of the Jewish people who withstood and still withstand those who wish to destroy them.

All the aforementioned clearly indicates that in these trips, initially, no dominant component was found to relate to the universal-humanist aspect. Recently, policy makers are expressing more awareness and orientation towards the universal component. The ethical-behavioral component of the program exists on three spheres: the technical-organizational, the ritual-ceremonial, and the tourist-oriented. During preparations for the trip a large part of the groups' attention is occupied by organizational, technical matters, and by preparation of the ceremonies. During the trip the organizational sphere receives very little attention, and most of the ethical-behavioral emphasis is on the tourist-oriented and ceremonial spheres<sup>67</sup>. Throughout the trip students are required to demonstrate various behavioral norms that include listening, being on time, helping with organizational activities, taking part in ceremonies, and active participation in creating the atmosphere of the delegation<sup>68</sup>. Many students manage to express in the informal context behaviors, abilities, and skills that are not expressed in formal settings, for example leadership, sense of humor, orientation, empathy, support, assistance, and sensitivity to others<sup>69</sup>.

Many studies state ceremonialism as the major ethical-behavioral component of the trip. Ceremonies are planned before the trip and executed by students at the extermination sites. They include reciting texts, playing quiet music, raising Israeli flags, and singing Hatikva, the Israeli national anthem. Some claim that this ethical-behavioral component is a national ritual that helps create an emotional effect, a feeling of belonging and unity, and constitutes a type of catharsis in response to the difficult sights<sup>70</sup>. Once students return to Israel they continue to look at the photographs, watch the videos, and edit the memorial ceremonies. These behaviors are a direct continuation of the trip and their purpose is to help them work through the experience<sup>71</sup>. Some claim that the tourist component of the trips has gradually become more meaningful. Re-

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<sup>67</sup>L. Kessen and A. Shachar, The trip that became a journey, *Panim* 17, 2001, 95–107 [Hebrew].

<sup>68</sup>M. Lev, Youth trips to memory, p. 433–449.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup>J. Feldman, Review of K. Lichstein; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland; A. Ophir, On inexpressible feelings.

<sup>71</sup>L. Kessen and A. Shachar, The trip that became a journey.

cently, trips to Holocaust sites have been increasingly commercialized, backed by travel agents and tourist offices that have realized their financial potential<sup>72</sup>. Trips to Poland have become a prominent unrivalled economic project in the educational field. Some claim that the various go-betweens take advantage of the spiritual aura of the trip, and that the spiritual experience surrounding the topic of the Holocaust serves as a means for commercializing the trip and increasing stakeholder profits: “It is important to emphasize the material-financial aspect of the Poland trips enterprise prior to discussing its spiritual aspects... Very important, because these trips are shrouded in a sentimental guise of elation approaching pure spirituality. The experience is offered for sale, mediated by the government... very similar to a concentrated religious experience culminating in a type of revelation... this experience of revelation is produced and marketed by travel agents together with ‘Poland certified’ guides, teachers, and escorts”<sup>73</sup>. While it is possible to delineate the behavioral component of the trip, measuring long-term behavioral ethical change among participants is problematic, as it is difficult to isolate the effect of the trip within one’s entire life course<sup>74</sup>. However while it is hard to attribute ethical-behavioral transformation to the trips themselves, cognitive and emotional changes measured in the short- and medium-term<sup>75</sup> may be assumed to find expression in one’s behavior, as in the long run one’s beliefs, values, opinions, views, and outlook are manifested in behavior. The learning process on its highest level manages to generate renewed shaping and assimilation of values. When discussing the term ‘value’ it is necessary to keep in mind that this is a multivariate term with many definitions referring to diverse aspects<sup>76</sup>. Its multiple definitions also make it difficult to measure values in a uniform manner in their operational sense.

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<sup>72</sup>J. Feldman, Review of K. Lichstein; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland; A. Ophir, On inexpressible feelings.

<sup>73</sup>Ibidem, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup>J. Feldman, Between the death camps and the flag: Youth voyages to Poland and the performance of the Israeli national identity, New York 2008.

<sup>75</sup>S. Fisherman and S. Kaniel, Changes in ego identity; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland; M. Lev, Impact of youngsters’ journey; A. Lazar et al., A journey to the Holocaust; Jewish Israeli teenagers; S. Romi and M. Lev, The effect of youth trips; H. Schechter, The effect of youth trips.

<sup>76</sup>S. Levy, Similarity and dissimilarity in the ethical system of two generations and in different educational settings from a religious perspective, [in:] N. Maslovati and Y. Iram (eds.), Moral education in diverse teaching contexts, Tel Aviv 2002 [Hebrew].

Nonetheless, in its general definition the term refers to that quality that makes things desirable<sup>77</sup>. Moral values, according to this definition, “are the standards that we use to evaluate”<sup>78</sup>. However more than serving as general standards, their role is to guide one throughout life, to help one distinguish good from bad, and to provide direction in times of conflict<sup>79</sup>. Thus, values can be seen as road signs that steer and instruct one throughout life, that structure one’s lifelong moral grounds<sup>80</sup>. The Israeli educational system seeks, among other things, to instill values in learners. Values are often taught by nurturing one’s sensitivities, providing tools that help one arrive at ethical decisions, and creating different academic experiences from which learners can learn about the sensitivities of others<sup>81</sup>. We perceive Holocaust studies and the trip to Poland in particular, as an attempt to use experiential learning as a way of imparting ethical goals: “The Israeli educational system grasps its responsibility to impart the full historical, moral, and educational meanings of Jewish destiny, both Jewish and humane, to our adolescent children, as well as those that will continue to shape their future... This trip is intended to enhance students’ sense of belonging to the Jewish people and their affiliation with its heritage and generations”<sup>82</sup>.

Examination of research conducted to date<sup>83</sup> shows that the trip mainly manages to enhance particular values, local values acquired within a certain community and according to a certain lifestyle, values manifested in specific institutions. In other words, one becomes and remains morally active only due to the special type of moral concept prevalent in one’s community<sup>84</sup>. The research literature indicates that universal values, values outside the context

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<sup>77</sup>Z. Lamm, What constitutes values and what does not, [in:] Y. Iram, S. Scolnicov, J. Cohen, and E. Schachter (eds.), *Crossroads*.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 651.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>80</sup>A. Ben-Zeev, Is an ethical person a reasoning person or a sensitive person?, [in:] Y. Iram, S. Scolnicov, J. Cohen, and E. Schachter (eds.), *Crossroads*, p. 156–189 [Hebrew].

<sup>81</sup>Z. Lamm, What constitutes values and what does not.

<sup>82</sup>Director General Circular, 2005.

<sup>83</sup>S. Fisherman and S. Kaniel, Changes in ego identity; T. Gross, Influence of the trip to Poland; M. Lev, Impact of youngsters’ journey; A. Lazar et al., A journey to the Holocaust; A. Lazar et al., Jewish Israeli teenagers; S. Romi and M. Lev, The effect of youth trips; H. Schechter, The effect of youth trips.

<sup>84</sup>S. Scolnicov and Y. Sorek, Values, [in:] Y. Iram, S. Scolnicov, J. Cohen, and E. Schachter (eds.), *Crossroads*.

of time or place, are marginalized, messages about the significance of human dignity are marginalized, while the fortitude of Jews as such receives prime place. Such people will develop strong values of nationalism and love of one's homeland, but general values of human life are marginalized. The trips help create concretization of the Holocaust, however selecting national over universal values leaves us with the question of how to generate commitment to remembrance of the Holocaust in the deepest ethical respect. How can we encourage individual commitment to preventing oppression of human beings as such, of nations as such?

In the postmodern culture, which focuses on a lack of commitment to anything but oneself, there seems to be a real difficulty with creating any ethical commitment<sup>85</sup>. "In the expanses of multicultural reality, capitalist globalization privatizes values as well as collective identities and their representations. This trend leaves no room for any efficient formal centralized moral education..."<sup>86</sup>. Experienced educators encounter practical difficulties with instilling values in the current self-serving culture, with its focus on gratification of personal needs and whims. This cultural-ethical environment attributes even more significance to the trips to Poland, which due to participants' exposure to tough sights and their removal from familiar surroundings, have the potential of becoming unique grounds for sowing ethical seeds that might and can be nurtured by working through the experience in real time and upon its physical conclusion. The off-campus learning experience arouses emotional responses, but reaches its full potential only with appropriate preparatory activities and meaningful concluding activities<sup>87</sup>. The Ministry of Education seeks to outline trip programs, but in reality it seems to be merely a mediator. The trip program suggested by the circular is not an organized curriculum; rather it is mostly a general suggestion of recommended contents for teaching and working with students<sup>88</sup>. The Ministry of Education indeed allocates 30 annual hours for pre-trip preparations; however a random review of schools shows that they do not

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<sup>85</sup>I. Gur-Ze'ev, Postmodernism, values and value education in Israel, [in:] Y. Iram, S. Scolnicov J. Cohen, and E. Schachter (eds.), *Crossroads*, p. 91–155.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 142.

<sup>87</sup>A. Levy and M. Meron, Effective taxonomy and its contribution to the promotion of moral education, [in:] N. Maslovati, and Y. Iram (eds.), *Moral education in diverse teaching contexts*, Tel Aviv 2001, p. 315–334 [Hebrew].

<sup>88</sup>T. Shpigler, *Developing curricula for preparing youth delegations for the trip to Poland*, Tel Aviv 2006 [Hebrew].



necessarily make use of all the time available to them. A study conducted by Klinhouse<sup>89</sup> as well as a study conducted on behalf of the National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education<sup>90</sup> found that trip guides have a significant impact on how students work through the experience. In many cases they direct students' feelings, select the material distributed, and centrally shape the trip experience. In the absence of unequivocal instructions, guides may infuse the trip with meaning as they see fit. Thus, despite the ethical and behavioral goals set by the Ministry of Education, it often has no control over how things occur in the field. In addition, the powerful emotional experience and its direction by the guide or by educators might lead to a limited moral transformation rather than realizing its full potential. The question is whether it is possible and feasible to detect a fundamental moral transformation in students? Is there some ethical difference between students who participate in the trip, see, and experience, and those who remain in Israel? Examination of the various components that form the trip experience shows that it appeals to students' entire being. Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components enable a range of operations that create a meaningful experience. This experience, of traveling to where it all happened, might also affect students' perception and experience of the meaning of the Holocaust. Many research findings indicate that the trip does not change one's perception of the Holocaust. It adds an experiential dimension, but with no transformation!<sup>91</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Experiential learning is an educational method with both pros and cons. As defined, the experience is mainly sensory. We might be swamped by emotion, shocked to our very core, aroused, depressed, strengthened, and have various feelings. In the postmodern world, where people are flooded with knowledge and stimuli and as a result become almost apathetic, the attempt to arouse feeling has become to a great degree an end that justifies the means. The attempt to produce emotions is manifested in the media. **Emotion** seems to be the

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<sup>89</sup>E. Klinhouse, To be there?

<sup>90</sup>Ministry of Education, Evaluation of youth trips.

<sup>91</sup>M. Lev, Youth trips to memory; S. Romi and M. Shmida, Informal education in changing circumstances, Jerusalem 2007 [Hebrew].



object of western society, with its confidence that arousing emotion is the way to people's heart, pocket, and mind, on the premise that emotion is at the basis of many human behaviors and decisions.

Experiential learning is a method based mainly on the belief that “what your mind doesn't grasp your feet will”, and this method has a lengthy history. However, we ask ourselves whether it is right to focus attention exclusively on this aspect of learning. Is it right to devote 50 million shekels to subsidize trips to Poland?<sup>92</sup> Should experiential, emotional learning indeed be our primary goal? Holocaust instruction via the trip does include cognitive learning, but only as a secondary goal. The emphasis in the trips is on being “witnesses of witnesses”<sup>93</sup>. The line separating emotional arousal and manipulation is very thin. This is particularly true when considering students' sensitive stage of development — adolescence, when one's views, attitudes, and goals have not been fully formed<sup>94</sup>. There is a danger that experiential learning will become a tool for emotional manipulation, losing its educational purpose and retaining only its emotional element, one whose effect is not necessarily positive: “Since this is an extremely powerful experience from an emotional perspective, a new mental reality is created in our subconscious, a format in which the horrors of the past are constantly reconstructed, renewed, and embodied in the next generations, a collective reemergence of the soul”<sup>95</sup>. Experiential learning risks becoming the major focus, with an emphasis on the destruction, that which was and is no more, ultimately leaving us with an experience of “nothing”, as we become bogged down in emotion and neglect the forward view, as aptly phrased by Avraham Burg: “Instead of breaching the pathological cycle, we perpetuate it. Instead of curing ourselves we make ourselves sick. Instead of letting forgetfulness heal, we scratch our scabs and bleed willingly. Isolationist Israeli nationalism finds the mounds of cinders, once smiling creative humanity, useful as fertile and productive matter for tortured fearful souls”<sup>96</sup>. Burg's words, despite their severity, are not so far-fetched. Based on our research of

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<sup>92</sup>Resolution of the Minister of Education, 2011 [Hebrew], accessed June 20, 2012, <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/22/1843834>.

<sup>93</sup>J. Feldman, *Between the death camps and the flag: Youth voyages to Poland and the performance of the Israeli national identity*, New York 2008.

<sup>94</sup>S. Fisherman and S. Kaniel, *Changes in ego identity of adolescents following their visits in Poland*, *Dapim* 37, 2004, p. 182–202 [Hebrew].

<sup>95</sup>A. Burg, *Defeating Hitler*, Tel Aviv 2007, p. 366 [Hebrew].

<sup>96</sup>*Ibidem*.

the trips over the past two decades we cannot disregard the fact that the trip to Poland, which once constituted only one part of the curriculum, has become its major and central component. An emotional experience, powerful as it may be, is not enough to generate long-term change, and in the case of Israel, is not enough to redeem us from ourselves. Contemporary trips may be a (desperate) attempt to instill national and Jewish values in future citizens of Israel, who are growing up in a Western society that sanctifies the individual and his values. This is an attempt to hold on to the last consensual refuge in Israel. We should ask ourselves whether we indeed wish to establish our national and Jewish identity on a foundation of destruction and ruination. Do we wish to justify Burg's claim that "Israel is the State of Auschwitz — trauma is its culture and its soul is terrorized"<sup>97</sup>? If we continue to teach our children to feel (only feel) instead of thinking, Burg's words might prove to be a wrathful prophecy.

**Nitza Davidovitch**

**O HOLOKAUSCIE PRZEZ DOŚWIADCZENIE —  
OPCJE METOD NAUCZANIA**

**Streszczenie**

Uczestnicy wycieczek z Izraela do Polski konfrontowani są z różnymi celami dydaktycznymi, wyznaczonymi zgodnie z modelem edukacyjnym przyjętym w danej szkole. Modele te zazwyczaj stanowią kombinację aspektów żydowsko-syjonistycznych i uniwersalnych, różniąc się naciskiem, jaki kładzie się na każdy z nich. Niektóre z nich skupiają się na przywódczej roli rabinów podczas Holokaustu, inne na buncie ruchów młodzieżowych. Podejmowane tematy obejmują również życie jednostki w getcie, życie współczesnych Żydów polskich, jak i wiele innych kwestii związanych z różnorodnymi zagadnieniami etycznymi. Zastosowanie zróżnicowanej metodyki nauczania sprawia, że wachlarz modeli jest bardzo szeroki. Jak wynika z literatury przedmiotu, wyróżnić można modele przyjęte przez szkoły państwowe, w ramach których uczestnicy stykają się z Polską i Polakami czy z żołnierzami. Niektóre z wycieczek łączą różne środowiska, np. religijne i świeckie czy uczniów ze szkół państwowych i szkół specjalnych; są grupy studiujące Torę i wyjazdy organizowane przez jednostki samorządowe, przy

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<sup>97</sup>Ibidem.

dużym zróżnicowaniu harmonogramów wycieczek. Niemniej każda z nich zasadza się na elemencie edukacyjnym. Dla niektórych punktem wyjścia jest obowiązujący program nauczania, a wycieczka służy poszerzaniu wiedzy z zakresu historii wymaganej na egzaminach; inne zaś opierają się na nieformalnych programach, które oferują alternatywną problematykę, jak i platformę dydaktyczną skupiającą się na jednym kluczowym zagadnieniu. Z danych ośrodków nauczania o Holokauście wynika, że liczba uczniów biorących udział w takich wycieczkach jest niska, ale należy podkreślić, że wiążą się one z wszechstronnym przygotowaniem uczestników, a także tych, którzy nie biorą udziału w wycieczce. Niektóre ze szkół zapewniają własne materiały dydaktyczne, które skupiają się na treściach uznanych przez szkołę za istotne. Z teoretycznych rozważań wynika, że wycieczki do Polski wiążą się z ogromnymi nadziejami Żydów w Izraelu. To, że w ogóle są organizowane, świadczy zarówno o potrzebie społeczeństwa izraelskiego, jak i oczekiwaniach względem tych wycieczek, choć związane są one z odmiennymi perspektywami i punktami widzenia. Okólnik Dyrektora Generalnego ds. Edukacji oraz rozmaite modele zdają się wyrażać nadzieję, że Polska ożywi naszą żydowskość, nasz syjonizm, nasz izraelski charakter oraz nasz humanizm, poczucie oddania bliźniemu etc. Izrael zdecydował się rozpocząć organizację wycieczek, stojąc na progu procesu degradacji, upadku humanizmu. Ministerstwo Edukacji zaprojektowało wycieczki motywowane świadomością etycznego kryzysu oraz z poczucia, że w kulturowym klimacie Izraela zaistniała potrzeba odkrycia swoich korzeni na nowo i znalezienia elementu integrującego. W tym właśnie społeczeństwo izraelskie dostrzega etyczną i społeczną przesłankę wycieczek, a potrzeba ich organizowania spotyka się z ogólną aprobatą. W naszym odczuciu jednak społeczeństwo izraelskie nie do końca właściwie inwestuje swoje fundusze i energię. Edukacja przez doświadczenie, choć niepozbawiona znaczenia, nie może i nie powinna stanowić alternatywy dla formalnego procesu nauczania, rozplanowanego w czasie i kładącego konieczne dydaktyczne podwaliny nauczania niezapśredniczonego.