OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: DEVELOPING THE QUEBEC TOUCH IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Montreal became home to over 9,000 Holocaust survivors after the Second World War, the third largest survivor refugee community after Israel and New York. Survivors arrived in a culture quite foreign to them and in particular in a city and province where the francophone majority perceived itself as a minority community in Canada and North America. This phenomenon has had repercussions on issues of acceptance and integration, on the educational system and on the potential and challenges for Holocaust education within this system and in Quebec society at large. This paper speaks to these issues, identifies some of the specificities relating to Holocaust education in Quebec and outlines some of the guidelines and means developed by the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre to address Quebec history and current context. It situates the role of the Centre as a central actor in supporting and influencing Holocaust education in the Quebec school system.

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Founded in Montreal in 1979 by survivors of the Holocaust and members of the Jewish community, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre has as its mission "to educate people of all ages and backgrounds about the Holocaust while sensitizing the public to the universal perils of antisemitism, racism, hate and indifference. Through its museum, commemorative programmes and educational initiatives, the MHMC is committed to promoting respect for diversity and the sanctity of all human life.[1]

The significance of the addition of over 9,000 survivors to the Montreal Jewish community cannot be underestimated. The Jewish community, in 1941, counted 63, 578 members.[2] Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe (excluding the former Soviet Union) Austria, Germany, Belgium and Holland peaked in the period from 1950-1959.[3] It is estimated that over 30,000 Holocaust survivors and their descendants lived in Montreal in the early 1980's, representing almost a third of the Jewish community.[4]

CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS

Much as Canada was arguably one of the least welcoming countries during the period immediately preceding and during the Holocaust (5,000 Jews were admitted from 1933 to 1945), Quebec posed particular problems.[5] Considerable lobbying to keep Jewish refugees from Quebec and Canada was launched by groups such as the St-Jean Baptiste Society[6] at the time. Challenges equally existed in the welcoming and integration of Montreal Holocaust survivors by both the Jewish[7] and broader communities. Though some Holocaust survivors learned French for work related purposes on their arrival, they found that the existing Jewish community had integrated largely into the English-speaking community for reasons related to economics and ease. In Quebec, most immigrants were integrated into the English speaking and Protestant school system, until the adoption in1976 of Bill 101, the law developed to promote and protect the French language. Immigrants, even those who were French-speaking, largely went to Protestant schools.[8] Schools and school boards, unlike those in other parts of Canada, were confessional in nature (according to religious affiliation), and had been organized along these lines since before the founding of Canada. This changed only with legislation providing for the advent of a linguistically based secular school system in 2000 in Quebec.

As social services and schools had been highly developed by the Catholic Church in Quebec until the modernization of the State in the 1960s, the Jewish community had developed a parallel system of social services and eventually schools. Jews and other minority religious groups did not have access to services offered to the majority community. A case in point is cited by the Jewish General Hospital in its history:

> "Unfortunately, when freedom seeking Jewish immigrants arrived in Montreal, they were shocked to discover that religious prejudice predominated in the city's leading healthcare institutions, and this prevented patients from receiving the prompt and reliable medical care that they desperately required. Jewish doctors encountered the same dilemma: It was exceptionally rare for a Jewish physician to obtain a staff membership or internship at Montreal's French-language hospitals. Even at the English language hospitals, restrictions were severe."[9]

Despite a large influx of Sephardi Jewish immigrants to Montreal from French-speaking North Africa from the late 1950's until 1973[10] the Montreal Jewish community remains largely English speaking. According to 2001 census data, 55.8% of Montreal Jews declared English as a mother tongue, as compared to 18.2% who declared it to be French.[11]

These contextual elements historically posed particular challenges both for the integration of the Montreal survivor community and the Jewish community in general. The Quebec context, given the concerns of French- speaking Quebecers about assimilation into the North American majority, preservation of language and culture and distinction and autonomy from the rest of Canada created a certain introspectiveness, and this was mirrored somewhat in the Jewish community.

Secularization of Quebec life, of school boards and health and social services, efforts to attract immigrants and integrate them into the francophone majority and the revamping of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) curricular requirements present opportunities for greater understanding between the Jewish and majority community, a greater respect for diversity and an openness to Holocaust education.

THE QUEBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre and its Museum has a particular role to play in defining Quebec Holocaust education. Since its inception, the Centre has outreached to Quebec schools and offered education and sensitization through survivor testimony, exhibits and eventually, a museum (recognized as a museum by both the provincial and federal governments since 2003) as well as programs and tools for educators. These are the means which continue to be used today; with the addition of recorded survivor testimony. Our educational work frames the central role of the organization.

Education in Canada is under provincial jurisdiction. In Quebec, as well as in other provinces of Canada, Holocaust education is not state-mandated or obligatory. Opportunities to introduce both the history of the Holocaust and to use documentation and discussion based on the Holocaust to reflect on values and current day situations are nonetheless plentiful and several new opportunities have emerged with an educational reform gradually introduced since 2001.

The Quebec Education Program, developed in a socio-constructivist perspective, emphasizes the development of competencies and encourages students to actively participate in their learning." ...Many aspects of the Québec Education Program, particularly those related to the development of competencies and the mastery of complex knowledges, call for practices that are based on the constructivist approach to learning. This approach sees learning as a process and the student as the principal agent in that process. The situations that are seen as most conducive to learning are those that present a real challenge to students by obliging them to reexamine their learnings and personal representations."[12]

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The Centre defines its pedagogical work in the framework of the MELS Quebec Education Program and assures that teachers are aware of the relevance of the Museum experience and our educational tools to this Program. Over the years, the Centre has built relationships with a wide variety of schools both in Montreal and throughout the province. This is reflected in the interest and good will of many educators who make a visit to the Museum as well as the use of educational tools part of their teaching on an annual basis. To assure the ongoing relevance of our programs, the Centre creates new tools and adapts visits and tools to both the pedagogical norms of the MELS and the social and cultural environments of students, anchoring them in Montreal today, with its increasing ethnocultural diversity. We assist teachers in meeting the challenges they face in justifying the relevance and appropriateness of Holocaust education and its pertinence to the Quebec Education Program.

As an example, the Contemporary World program (to be instituted in September 2009 for students in grades 9 and 10), has the following objectives:

- Help students grasp the complexity of the world today and be open to the diversity of the societies that make it up;
- Help students develop their critical faculties by studying problems and issues in the contemporary world;
- Prepare students to participate as responsible citizens in social debate.[13]

Competencies to be developed include interpretation of a contemporary world problem and secondly, taking a position on a contemporary world problem. Furthermore, educators are encouraged to develop *Learning and Evaluation Situations,* or structured pedagogical scenarios in which there are three phases: preparation, implementation and reinvestment and integration. The last phase is of particular interest to a Centre such as ours. Beyond the informational and education role the Centre and Museum play, it is essential that students reinvest their learning in their lives, in their environment, in society. Students are encouraged to be actors, to be engaged in being open to diversity and in assuring respect for human dignity and human rights.

Other opportunities for Holocaust and human rights education exist in the Geography, History and Citizenship Program for primary schools, which aim to develop an understanding of territory, society and more pointedly, the diversity of societies. In the same vein, and particularly relevant given the confessional school system which existed until very recently, is a program introduced in 2008: Ethics and Religious Culture. This program is compulsory throughout primary and secondary school. In particular, the stated goals of the Ethics portion of the program are perfectly in tune with our mission and our educational objectives. Students are expected to:

- recognize different ways of viewing life, relationships with others, and the place and role of human beings in the world;

- reflect on values (freedom, equity, equality, justice, respect, integrity, etc.) and social prescriptions (laws, rules, regulations, etc.);
- take a reflective position with respect to problem situations in which different values are at stake or choices have to be made;
- make choices based on the common good, get involved and act toward others autonomously and responsibly.[14]

Clearly, there is convergence between elements of the Quebec Education Program and the mission and mandate of the Centre.

The Quebec Education Program and the secularization of schools, though both contested by some Quebecers, facilitate the outreach done by the Centre and confirm the approach the organization has developed. The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre strives, through its educational work, to assure relevance to the particularities of Quebec and a diverse Montreal society, counts on the experiences, testimonies and artifacts of a large survivor community and builds on the interest and commitment of educators who understand the power of Holocaust education to teach history and its link with contemporary values and universal challenges to these values. The following are a few examples of how this work is done.

POINTS OF JUNCTURE

The Museum serves as a major repository in Canada of the Holocaust experience. The Museum's exhibition follows a chronological order, beginning with the diversity in Jewish cultural, religious and social life before the war. The Museum visit is organized around survivor testimony[15]. Over 400 artifacts, many of them personal belongings of survivors and of those murdered, are also displayed in the permanent exhibit. Memory is constructed about moments of discrimination, horror and humiliation, but also about hope and resistance. Visitors see and feel the human face and the human cost of the Holocaust. Well over 6,000 students visited the Museum through guided tours last year. The witnesses also recount their arrival and their integration in Montreal and Canada. Several displays in the Museum speak to antisemitism in Montreal, Quebec and Canada and the refusal to help Jews escape Europe. Visitors quickly understand, the relevance of the Holocaust to Montrealers, as aptly illustrated by a recent La Presse article titled "These Holocaust survivors, our neighbours."[16]

Teachers express two main objectives in bringing students to visit the Museum. They wish to teach history and make a link to issues studied in the classroom through the artifacts, photographs, testimony. They wish to confront their students with the reality of the Holocaust so "*that student's gain understanding of the full magnitude of the Holocaust. The atrocities, courage and the determination of people.*"[17] *Or "give the children a basic background in what the Holocaust was and the context in which it happened—then to relate it to present day genocide.*"[18]

Beyond the teaching of history, teachers choose to bring their students to the Museum to sensitize them to consequences of prejudice and discrimination. They wish to connect the lessons of the Museum to the students' daily lives and to current examples of discrimination and human rights violations and help them understand the scope of crimes caused by racism and antisemitism. Here, the goal is often to help students understand prejudice and influence their values and attitudes. "*Our students know little about diversity. (our objectives were) To teach them about tolerance and human kindness*"[19] Or again, "*To better enable the students to understand the subject of prejudice, intolerance, racism and their responsibility as citizens and human beings*[20]" These objectives are reached as students visit a Museum, often far from their community and listen to witnesses whose lives were forever transformed by anti-semitism and prejudice. In 2008, 48% of students visiting the Museum through a guided school tour attended school in English, 46% in French. Only 6% of these visitors attended a Jewish day school.

In response to these objectives, and in keeping with the Quebec Education Program, the Centre has created a new workshop in partnership with the Tolerance Foundation, aimed at highschool students. This workshop helps students link the past and the present, and develops understanding and a sense of individual responsibility in relation to issues of current-day discrimination and genocide. It begins with a Museum visit focusing on the escalation of prejudice, discriminatory policies and laws and hate crimes prior to the Holocaust. The workshop begins with a review of the Museum tour so that students may express feelings, reactions, and questions. The group then looks at examples from the Museum. What would students define as prejudice, discriminatory actions, hate crimes, genocide? Students place these definitions and events on a ladder, demonstrating the increasing levels of violence before and during the Holocaust. Students are then encouraged to speak of their knowledge of other examples of discrimination, human

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rights violations and of other genocides. How are these related to the Holocaust? Where would they place Canada on the ladder from prejudice to genocide? The students, then divided into two teams "play" a game of *Snakes and Ladders*, in which they must find ways to react and transform situations of prejudice and discrimination in school situations and in current events. They find ways to de-escalate prejudice and racism.

The workshop, in linking the Holocaust and experiences in the students' lives is a call to action and to responsibility. The example of the Righteous among the Nations, seen in the Museum, is presented to illustrate that each person can and must fight intolerance, bigotry and racism, in the past as in the present.

Most often immediately following a Museum visit, groups have the opportunity to meet a survivor and listen to his or her testimony. Over10,000 Montrealers and Quebecers heard live testimony through the Centre last year. Students understand the significance of these encounters. These witnesses to history personalize the numbers of those murdered and the losses sustained by those who survived. History becomes part of the present. The consequences of antisemitism are tangible and human. Situations described on the news in far away lands become closer as well.

According to French philosopher Jean Baudrillard "Forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history…"[21]. Living memory refutes denial and assures transmission of memory and the responsibility of remembrance to future generations. The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre takes this responsibility seriously. Listening to live testimony is a rapidly vanishing opportunity. However, since 1994, the Centre has collected recorded video life stories of Montreal survivors. Over 3,000 hours of testimony, almost 500 interviews have been collected to date through the "Witness-to-History" Program.

These testimonies are being digitized, with the assistance of a Community University Research Alliance project, *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and other Human Rights Violations* based at Concordia University. Educational projects are being developed with the Cambodian, Rwandan and Haitian communities with a focus on life stories. At the same time, our data base is being updated and thematic video clips of Holocaust survivor testimony are now available on both the Centre's website, and on a National Film Board's Citizen-Shift, a participatory Web platform exploring the lives of Canadians. Again, there is recognition of the inter-relationship between survivors and Quebec society. We have undertaken projects with the Faculties of Education of three Montreal universities, who are using recorded survivor testimony with students in their graduating year. These future teachers are developing pedagogical tools, in keeping with MELS guidelines, to teach about antisemitism, racism and respect for diversity.

All projects using survivor testimony clearly reflect our mission and respond particularly to the Ethics and Religious Culture Program objectives mentioned earlier. Issues of moral responsibility, human relationships, values and links with contemporary world issues are addressed by survivor testimony and will continue to educate generations to come.

The Hana's Suitcase Educational Project is based on the award-winning book, *Hana's Suitcase*, written by Karen Levine. It relates the story of young Hana Brady, who was murdered in Auschwitz, as it was discovered by the students and Director of the Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Centre. The Project, developed by the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, was created as a tool to promote student reflection on the Holocaust and the subjects of human rights and human dignity, develop their abilities to connect the past to the present and influence their understanding and attitudes about living with other cultures.

Teachers receive, on loan, a replica of Hana's suitcase, which includes a copy of the book (in English or French) for each student, a pedagogical guide with 10 lesson plans, a reference document on the history of the Holocaust, a CBC documentary film, a copy of Hana's family photo album and reproductions of Hana's drawings, maps and Museum artifacts. The proposed activities stimulate students to make the connection between Hana's story and their own experiences and to take position for the respect of diversity and understanding of other cultures. Introduced in 2007, the Project has reached over 5,000 students in Quebec and many others across Canada and in the United States. The Project is aimed at grade 6 students, and has had a dramatic effect on visits by this younger age group to the Museum.[22] In addition, following their visit, they often take the opportunity to hear testimony from a survivor speaker.

Quebec teachers see this easy to use kit as an excellent response to the Geography, History and Citizenship Education and Ethics and Religious Culture Programs. In addition, the kit is used in the study of English and French. The Teacher's Guide, slated for an update in 2009 as to be more closely aligned with these programs, presents why and how to teach about the Holocaust. Students immediately identify with Hana, a young girl whose rights were taken away one by one and they understand in an appropriate and real way the consequences of stereotypes and prejudice. The suitcase is an excellent means to visually and concretely bring teaching of the Holocaust into the classroom. Again, two Montreal universities have used the project through their Faculties of Education and through a Peace Studies program.

Other tools, some being tested as pilot projects and each addressing a different school level have recently been developed by the Centre. They can be found on the Centre's website: www.mhmc.ca.

TOWARDS A "QUEBEC TOUCH" IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

The Centre has a central role to play in Holocaust education as well as in support and guidance of the educational system in regard to Holocaust education in Quebec. We see our role as beginning with the sensitization of student teachers in faculties of education in universities. We are committed to informing and training educators and offering materials and tools so that they can invest in Holocaust education.

The following are some of the guidelines we have developed to help connect our programs, tools and activities to the Quebec and Montreal contexts:

- Tools are developed in keeping with the spirit of the Quebec Education Program.
- They are based on Museum artifacts and survivor testimony where possible, in an effort to promote understanding of the Holocaust as a human story connected to Montrealers and to assure more complete understanding of the Holocaust through the use of multiple tools and contact points.
- Our pedagogical tools address, where possible, Quebec and Canadian history in relation to antisemitism and the Holocaust. These are highlighted in the Museum.
- All tools are offered in both French and English.
- Programs are created from the perspective of helping students learn from their emotional responses. Students are encouraged to formulate opinions, take position and interpret according to their understanding. Values are not imposed, but are developed through a pedagogical process.
- Tools and programs should assist students in taking action in favour of respect for human dignity and human rights.
- Educational tools are developed, where possible, in partnership with universities and organizations committed to human rights.
- Activities should help students address the cultural and religious diversity of Montreal. They encourage harmonious social relationships in Quebec and Montreal today, and students as actors in the development of these relationships.
- Tools must be tested in cooperation with teachers and in integrating their feedback. Holocaust education is seen as a partnership between the Centre and educators.
- Activities, tools and programs must be adaptable and seen as a mutable, as social realities change.

CONCLUSION

As Holocaust Centres and museums focus on history and transmission of this history as well as memory and values, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre has found means to use both the city's and Quebec's past to shape programs which are relevant to the present and can impact on the future. The leitmotif of the Museum is *To learn, to feel, to remember*. Increasingly, our educational efforts aim to encourage students to go further and act, in their own environment and on issues of universal concern. As the Centre moves in this direction, it strives to walk the talk of the theme of its Holocaust Education Series 2008: *Looking back, reaching forward*, both in terms of the Holocaust and the approach which defines a Quebec touch.

NOTE

[1] Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, *Mission Statement*, 2007.

[2] Statistics Canada, *Census 2001*, Special Order. Figures extracted by Charles Shahar, Research Coordinator, Federation CJA, Montreal.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre Museum.

[5] Bialystok, F. *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community*, pp. 19-21, Montreal 2000.

[6] Several letters from these sources, dated from 1933 to 1939, are displayed in the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre Museum.

[7] Ibid, pp. 57-59.

[8] Milot, Micheline and Tremblay, Stéphanie. *Religion in the Quebec Public School System: A Change for Equality and Diversity*, p.1. Policy Research Initiative. 2004 www.policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=2009-0008_08.

[9] Etziony, Dr. M.B. *History of the Montreal Clinical Society*. Montreal Clinical Society, Montreal, 1963.

[10] Approximately 4,875 North African Jews settled in Montreal during that period. Kage, J. *A Brief Account on the Admission of Jewish Immigrants from North Africa*. Paper prepared for JIAS. Montreal.

[11] Shahar, C. and Magonet, H. *2001 Census Analysis Series: The Jewish Community of Montreal. Part V Immigration & Language*. Montreal. 2005 p.20.

[12] Gouvernement du Québec Ministère de l'Éducation, Quebec Education Program, p.10, Quebec, 2001.

[13] Gouvernement du Québec Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, Working Document, Quebec 2009.

[14] https:// www7.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DC/ECR/index_en.php.

[15] 12 videos offer both historical footage and testimonies based on different themes, highlighting more than one survivor story.

[16] Tison, Marc, La Presse, *Ces survivants de la Shoah, nos voisins*, November 15, 2008 Montreal.

[17] Excerpt from an evaluation completed by Stéphanie Guay, Polyvalente Marcel-Landry. Visit December 8, 2008.

[18] Excerpt of an evaluation completed by Richard Williams, North Hatley School. Visit April 22, 2008.

[19] Excerpt from an evaluation completed by Renée Lozoff, Ste Agathe Academy. Visit April 9, 2008.

[20] Excerpt from an evaluation completed by Hazel Kaupp, Hillcrest Academy. Visit April 24, 2008.

[21] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation—III. Holocaust*, p. 49. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, University of Michigan Press. 1994.

[22] This has also led to an adapted Museum guided tour for younger students.