

Teaching The Holocaust To Health Care Providers: A Creative Approach Interactive Workshop Outline

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Learning Environment: Adult Learning Model

This workshop is interactive, and throughout the presentation, participants will be encouraged to share their own experiences.

Introduction:

In October 1939, Hitler initialed an order to kill those Germans who were “unworthy of life,” thereby sentencing thousands of institutionalized people with mental and physical disabilities to be killed in “euthanasia” centers. The role of health care professionals in carrying out Hitler’s order is well-documented.

This history may be familiar to Holocaust educators, but today’s health care workers may be unaware of this horrific historical event. While standards are set for “culturally competent healthcare” (see e.g., [JCAHO, 2005](#)), there remains a critical need for an increasingly diverse group of health care workers to become more knowledgeable about the Holocaust. ([Carstairs, 2004](#)) Given limitations in resources and time, how might we teach health care professionals and students about the association of “health care,” “euthanasia,” and genocide in Nazi Germany? How might we facilitate cultural competence and sensitize diverse groups of health care professionals to the histories and needs of aging Holocaust Survivors?

For many years, as an occupational therapist, who worked with elderly Holocaust Survivors in Florida, I collaborated with health care professionals and community educators to identify, treat, and care for the aging survivors in our facility. Currently, as a researcher, I am studying the use of research-based theater as a means of providing Holocaust education and sensitivity training. In this workshop, I will share my story and discuss the need for competent health care workers in the United States, and provide an overview of the challenges in educating them. I will propose that research-based drama is a possible solution. Participants will be invited to read parts of an authentic dramatic script, [The False Witness](#), and analyze the value of this teaching method.

Part One: Identification of Needs and Issues

Review: The Need for Cultural Competence

Clearly, health care workers must be educated to care for aging Holocaust Survivors, as well as their family caregivers. Health care providers, in institutions and the community, must be *culturally competent*. This means that providers must not only be sensitive to *agism*, but to anti-Semitism and specific “triggers” that may cause psychological reactions during institutionalization in hospitals, adult congregate living facilities, and nursing homes.

The Issues: Difficulties Providing Holocaust Education in the Health Care Arena

What are the challenges in health care provider education? First, in the United States, we have a diverse workforce-- in institutions and in the community. Nurses, physicians, administrators, therapists, and assistants come to work with different educational levels, personal histories, and skills. Second, in the health care “industry,” we must meet productivity standards and cut costs-- in the face of national budget cuts and managed care. Third, although continuing education is generally mandated by state law, education is expensive, course requirements vary, and, facility education may be crammed into one’s work schedule. Although healthcare providers may have every intention to learn about the population they serve, they may have difficulty learning in the current environment.

Part Two: A Creative Approach to Holocaust Education

Clearly, traditional classroom methods will not work in this environment. How can we sensitize health care providers in the current learning environment?

An exciting new field, *research-based drama*, may provide an answer. Gray et al. (2000) note the particular advantages of researched-based theater: Connecting data to a theatrical performance seems preferable to finding the unread manuscripts of researchers on dusty library shelves, or in the occasional comments of academics. Research-based drama is also more realistic than the purely textual script, as a live theatrical performance can capture the lived experience--the real-life physical, emotional and sensory experience of the original data-gathering situation. Essentially, it is an effective way of producing images which reflect the meaning of the human experience. It is conducive to adult learning.

In recent years, teaching diverse audiences about the Holocaust, through drama has proven successful. Robert Krakow’s stage play, [*The False Witness*](#), the fictitious trial of Adolf Hitler, has been used to engage diverse audiences in meaningful dialogue about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism in today’s world. During the workshop, participants will read excerpts from the play, and analyze the experience.

Participants will also be asked to reflect on the creative utilization of an art form (i.e., a theatrical performance) to teach the Holocaust, and discuss the controversial linkage of art (e.g., drama, literature, and film) and the Holocaust. There will be time for questions, answers, and discussion.

List of Reference and [*The False Witness*](#) script available at the workshop

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