

Analysis of Vignette #2

Written by, Stefani Oakes

ETEC 532-65A- University of British Columbia

Master of Educational Technology Program

Some of the most powerful experiences when learning about the past, are those moments when we are able to put ourselves in the shoes of others to gain an understanding of world events and the unique experiences of individuals in a given time. Virtual museum tours have the potential to do just that. In this analysis, I will share my own museum tour experience, and use that experience combined with the article and websites from the vignette to discuss the advantages and drawbacks of such tours and the affordances they have for students and teachers.

In the summer of 2007, I had the opportunity to visit the Royal B.C. Museum in Victoria while they were hosting Titanic: the Artifact Exhibition. Upon entry, my husband and I received a White Star Line boarding pass that gave us our identities for the tour. We traveled through spellbinding and immersive exhibits that were beautifully crafted and incredibly powerful. We truly lost ourselves as we journeyed through the replicas of the ship as it once was, and the remnants of all that now remains. At the end of our journey, we looked up our identities and discovered our fate. I, being a second class female passenger, survived. My husband however was a male crew member and he did not survive the sinking. It was an emotional and unforgettable experience.

While reading Anna Reading's article, I was continually reminded of my Titanic experience. Within the exhibit, there was technology present that enhanced our visit. Optional videos and voice recordings could be played while viewing replicas or artifacts recovered from the wreckage. Reading's article focuses on how technology-enhanced exhibits in museums may limit or negatively influence the learning experiences of visitors because the experience is happening in a public space (Reading, 2003, p. 68). My own experience supports the argument that even within public spaces in museums, technological enhancements of real life tours and the learning journeys that they afford are valuable.

Virtual museum tours and interactive websites have a great deal to offer educators and students as Reading notes that museums are 'memory institutions' and 'central repositories of national and community memories' (Reading, 2003, p. 69-70). It is obviously not feasible for the majority of teachers to take students on location to learn about the Holocaust. An online experience can be an incredibly powerful and enriching alternative. Both of the web resources listed within this vignette could be utilized by educators to teach the events of the Holocaust in ways that personalize the event on a much deeper level than textbooks or historical videos can. That is one of the greatest advantages of online resources such as this. Students are able to gain a historical understanding of the events that led up to and unfolded during this historical period, while also learning real stories of victims and survivors. This can make the learning more engaging and meaningful. The stories allow for a different kind of learning to take place beyond the memorization of dates and facts. These websites and others like them, allow for the exploration into themes such as 'moral courage' and 'moral responsibility' through stories,

testimonials and artifacts (Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, retrieved from <http://www.vhec.org/schoolprograms.html>).

An additional advantage of online resources such as the Open Hearts Closed Doors: The War Orphans Project site is that they allow students to dig more deeply into topics of personal interest. Working through the general content areas of the site and then following the journey of one of the orphans can paint a more complete picture of what things were like for Jewish people at this point in history. The Canadian perspective within this particular online resource is also advantageous, as it allows teachers to situate the students' learning in a Canadian context. There are a wealth of interdisciplinary opportunities for educators to have students conduct further research or create media presentations of their own to demonstrate their understanding of the Holocaust. A possible drawback that I can foresee is that the content itself may be emotionally taxing on individuals, especially when used with younger students. Overall however, virtual museum tours and interactive online resources are excellent tools that educators can take advantage of in their teaching.

References:

Reading, A. (2003). Digital interactivity in public memory institutions: The uses of new technologies in holocaust museums. *Media, Culture and Society*, 25(10) 67-85.

Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. <http://www.vhec.org/schoolprograms.html>

Vancouver Holocaust Educational Centre, 2002. Open Hearts Closed Doors: The War Orphans Project. <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/orphelins-orphans/english/>

Additional Resources Used:

<http://www.canada.com/story.html?id=8f11b192-a263-4d25-9ee9-bc8010810165>

<http://www.premierexhibitions.com/exhibitions/3/3/titanic-artifact-exhibition>

<http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/assets/2008-03-05-Titanic-Economic-Impact-Fast-Facts.pdf>