



Dealing with Online Anti-Semitism

Teaching Aid

9

1. Increasing Knowledge about Jews and Judaism
2. Overcoming Unconscious Biases
3. Addressing Anti-Semitic Stereotypes and Prejudice
4. Challenging Conspiracy Theories
5. Teaching about Anti-Semitism through Holocaust Education
6. Addressing Holocaust Denial, Distortion and Trivialization
7. Anti-Semitism and National Memory Discourse
8. Dealing with Anti-Semitic Incidents
- 9. Dealing with Online Anti-Semitism**
10. Anti-Semitism and the Situation in the Middle East

Dealing with Online Anti-Semitism

The Internet has opened up a whole new world by providing easy access to a vast amount of information. It also presents a new and essential challenge: learning the skill set needed to accurately identify what is true and what is false. By providing the means to share media and connect with others online, it has given people a new language with which to communicate.

As with all new forms of communication, it is necessary to study the positive and negative effects of online communication. And as in the physical world, Internet users require an inclusive space where they feel safe and respected. Unfortunately, the ability to interact anonymously online makes it difficult to hold people accountable for their remarks. Hateful language can be amplified and exponentially reproduced through the sharing of content on social media. The spread of anonymous intolerant discourse or “hate speech” can have extremely harmful effects

on individuals and groups by perpetuating the use of negative stereotypes.¹

Thus, while offering incredible advances, the Internet, and social media in particular, has simultaneously facilitated the spread of hate to a mass audience. Recent reporting on digital hate has shown anti-Semitism flourishing on the Internet.² To counter this trend, teachers need to be aware of how hate speech can enter the classroom:

- Students may come across anti-Semitic, Holocaust denial or hate propaganda websites during research activities or while surfing the Internet;
- Students may be exposed to and absorb anti-Semitism on social media; and/or
- Students can be vulnerable to, perpetrate or be witnesses to cyber-bullying, which may also have an anti-Semitic dimension.

Hate speech often goes hand in hand with cyber-bullying, and the harm it causes should not be underestimated. It is a type of abuse that may at first seek to isolate the victim by making them feel different, unwelcome and unworthy, but which can escalate to physical harm.

Hateful discourse and harmful stereotypes may be viewed as jokes by perpetrators, who often exploit simple and easily recognizable categories representing “us” and “them.” The motives for such anonymous attacks can vary. It may be that the perpetrator is venting their inner frustrations and helping themselves feel better by putting others down, providing a false sense of control and power.

This teaching aid provides strategies for dealing with online hatred when it enters the classroom, with the aim of reducing its impact.

¹ While OSCE participating States have committed themselves to combat hate speech (OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism, Document of the Tenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, Porto, 7 December 2002, <<https://www.osce.org/mc/42536?download=true>>), beyond speech that threatens and incites to violence, there is no consensus in the OSCE as to what forms of hate speech should be criminalized.

² See, for example: “Digital Terrorism and Hate”, Shimon Wiesenthal Center, 2019, <<http://www.digitalhate.net/index.php>>.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like mobile phones, computers and tablets. Cyber-bullying can occur through text messaging and apps, or online in social media, forums or games that allow Internet users to view, participate in or share content. Cyber-bullying includes sending, posting or sharing negative, harmful, false or malicious content about someone. It can include sharing personal or private information to cause embarrassment or humiliation. Cyber-bullying sometimes escalates into unlawful or criminal behaviour.

The most common places where cyber-bullying occurs are:

- Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter;
- Text messages (SMS) sent through mobile devices;
- Instant messaging via , email provider services, apps and social media messaging features; and
- Email.

SOURCE: StopBullying.gov, <www.StopBullying.gov>.

Background

Anti-Semitic hate speech is an age-old phenomenon that now thrives on social media platforms and instant messaging apps, which can become breeding grounds of hatred. In this way, hate speech and cyber-bullying encountered online can be transferred to the classroom. Monitoring work conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has found that expressions of anti-Semitism in online forums are on the rise in the European Union.³

In 2017, the annual “Digital Terrorism and Hate” report, published by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, identified 24 anti-Semitic games accessible on the Internet, as well as anti-Semitism and hate speech across social networking platforms, blogs, messaging apps, discussion forums, video channels and other online media.⁴ Anti-Semitism can sometimes be expressed through symbols on social media posts, Twitter handles, blogs and threads. As

anti-Semitic posts often target high-profile individuals and celebrities, students are likely to encounter anti-Semitism and hate speech online.

A 2018 survey by the European Union’s Agency for Fundamental Rights asked European Jews in various Member States about their experiences and perceptions of anti-Semitism. Eighty-five per cent of respondents consider anti-Semitism to be a serious problem. Of

³ Antisemitism: Overview of data available in the European Union 2005-2015”, European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights (FRA), November 2016, p. 18, <<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/antisemitism-overview-data-available-european-union-2005-2015>>.

⁴ “Digital Terrorism and Hate”, Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2017, <digitalhate.net/>.

the environments where they encountered anti-Semitism, 89 per cent of respondents consider online anti-Semitism the most problematic. Eighty per cent of respondents who had come across anti-Semitic statements in the past year had experienced this online.⁵ This was much more common among younger respondents. For example, 88 per cent of 16-to-29 year olds and 89 per cent of the 30-to-44 year olds surveyed had seen or heard negative statements about Jews on the Internet. Younger respondents were also more likely to have heard negative statements about Jews in non-online social situations or public places.⁶

A 2016 Anti-Defamation League factsheet collecting various research data notes that, in the United States, 22 per cent of students below 18 years old reported being bullied at school, while

28 per cent reported experiencing cyber-bullying during their lifetime.⁷

Online bullying and spreading intolerant discourse is increasingly becoming an issue within schools, as students are continuously connected through their smartphones, including in class chatrooms. The anonymity of online profiles allows users to express their opinions without experiencing any consequences or meeting the recipient face-to-face. In the case of cyber-bullying and online hatred, people with similar attitudes and mind-sets can come together to form an online mob that targets an individual. The consequences can severely impact the victim in real life and, when students are involved, affect the class atmosphere and culture.

It is essential to understand the potential harm that hate speech

Hate speech:

Forms of expression that are motivated by, demonstrate or encourage hostility towards a group — or a person because of their membership of that group — are commonly referred to as “hate speech”.

SOURCE: Preventing and Responding to Hate Crimes: A resource guide for NGOs in the OSCE region (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2009), p. 17, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/39821>>.

can cause, while also reflecting on its subjective nature: not everyone finds the same statement offensive; every student is different, including in terms of their sensitivity and sense of humour, and students may respond differently to the same incident. However, this harm should never be underestimated. Even if it is difficult to identify exactly what is offensive about a statement made online or offline, if it is having a negative effect then it should not be ignored.

⁵ “Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism: second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU”, European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2018, p. 11, <<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/2nd-survey-discrimination-hate-crime-against-jews>>. The general conclusions are based on responses from 16,395 self-identified Jewish people living in 12 EU member states. These states are home to over 96% of EU’s estimated Jewish population.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷ ADL’s A World of Difference Institute, “Statistics on bullying”, 2016, <<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/bullying-cyberbullying-statistics-overview-one-sheet.pdf>>.

Strategies to Address Online Hate Speech in the Classroom

How can I report hateful content online?

If you come across intolerant discourse so damaging that you feel that it needs to be removed from the Internet, report it immediately to the website administrators or host. Social media companies such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter follow a code of conduct committing themselves to constant monitoring of reports and prompt removal of hateful content. For example, see Twitter's reporting guidance, here: <<https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-report-violation>>.

Read more about the European Commission's work with IT companies to enforce these practices, here: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/countering-illegal-hate-speech-online-2019-feb-04_en>.

To help create a safe and inclusive classroom environment, and to better understand any bullying or intolerance that may be affecting your students, it is important to encourage and equip them to report instances

if they encounter them, and to establish safe channels for doing so. Confidential reporting mechanisms for bullying incidents, as well as clear procedures to investigate and respond to such incidents, should be in

place at your school. Students should be equipped to identify intolerant discourse and to understand the safety procedures in place, such as telling a trusted adult.

It is also important to “reinforce the difference between ‘tattling’ and responsible reporting, and impress upon youth the destructive consequences of keeping silent about bullying and bias.”⁸

It may also be helpful for your students to learn about civil society organisations in your region or country that monitor or campaign against hate speech. Students can also research those who actively promote tolerance and non-discrimination, for example, through projects that bring together different communities and spread positive messages.

⁸ Lee Hirsch and Cynthia Lowen, *Bully: An Action Plan for Teachers, Parents, and Communities to Combat the Bullying Crisis* (United Kingdom: Hachette, 2012).

No Hate Speech Youth Campaign

The No Hate Speech Movement is a youth campaign led by the Council of Europe seeking to mobilize young people to combat hate speech and promote human rights online. It has national campaigns in 45 countries.

Read more about resources developed to prevent, counter and produce alternative narratives to hate speech and the national campaigns, here: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign/national-campaigns1>>.

Anti-Semitism on the Internet and social media can be addressed in educational settings by developing media and information competencies in combination with, for example, intercultural competencies, by:

- Raising awareness of the presence, threat and dangers of online anti-Semitism and how this is transferred offline;
- Guiding students to understand that they have agency in the information, media and technological landscape, and that they can influence change;
- Guiding students on how they can use the Internet for positive social actions, including joining groups that advocate for tolerance and respect for Jewish and other people or cultures;
- Examining a selection of cultural representations in different media and information sources, such as representations of history, and analyzing the words and images that are used or omitted, and the sociocultural context of media content;
- Explaining possible responses to incidents of anti-Semitism online, available options for taking action, and how to judge the most appropriate course of action, including disengagement;

- Discussing how information consumers can be manipulated by the emotional-moral content of social media messaging;
- Guiding students to develop the skill sets needed to weigh evidence and discern which information can be trusted on the basis of verifiable research or objective logic;
- Empowering learners with the skills to become reflective creators and producers of information and media messages themselves, providing an opportunity for them to more actively reject anti-Semitism and other forms of hate;
- Assessing and evaluating students' safe usage of the Internet to understand and target skill and knowledge deficits; and
- Translating legal frameworks into simple language that students can understand and discussing these, as well as redress and social media reporting mechanisms with students.

SOURCE: *Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2018), p.50, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089>>

What to remember when dealing with anti-Semitic hate speech and cyber-bullying:

- Do not underestimate the harm it causes; and
- If something feels wrong, it probably is wrong.

What to do if ...?

...a student is experiencing anti-Semitic harassment on social media?

If you notice or have reason to suspect that one of your students is the target of anti-Semitic harassment online, ensure that they feel heard and understood. Reach out to them to find out how they are coping and offer comfort. Supporting the victims of such harassment should be the number one priority.

If your school has a policy regarding cyber-bullying, be sure to follow the appropriate guidelines on referring the incident. Schools can deal with cyber-bullying in the same way as they would a case of offline bullying. If the harassment continues or escalates, you may consider contacting the parents or guardians of the harasser or victim.

Regardless of whether or not you know the perpetrator, you can report the offensive post(s) to the hosting social media company or online platform. Reporting is anonymous and if the post or comment is removed, the person will be notified that they circulated offensive content.

...a student comes across anti-Semitic material during online research?

This issue should be addressed openly with the class. It is first necessary to create a safe space in which to discuss this difficult issue. Any particular sensitivities should be taken into account, such as if there are Jewish students in the class. Consider setting up some “rules of engagement” to initiate the classroom discussion. For guidance on how to set up such rules you may refer to ODIHR’s teaching aid no. 5, “Teaching about Anti-Semitism through Holocaust Education.”

Discussing an offensive post or comment found online can be educational, as it provides an opportunity to evaluate the sources – a crucial skill for digital literacy. Ask students to identify the anti-Semitic part of the post. Can they identify it? Does it invalidate the rest of the material? This can open a discussion the necessity of thinking critically about the information we consume, especially online, where fact-checking is less institutionalized and false stories can easily be fabricated and spread. It can also be helpful to refer to the ODIHR teaching aid no. 4, “Challenging Conspiracy Theories”, when discussing information found online.

...you are made aware of an anti-Semitic post on social media made by a student or colleague?

Social media incidents can leak into the classroom and upset

Source verification checklist

As a potential research assignment, ask the class to investigate the sources of information for an online post or story, and other opposing (factual) sources, using the source verification checklist.

- **CHECK THE SOURCE:** Where is the news posted? What kind of website/Facebook page/Twitter/YouTube/Instagram account/etc. is it? Can you see who is posting it?
- **CHECK THE AUTHOR:** Any serious source must reveal its author.
- **READ BEYOND THE HEADLINE:** Headlines are sometimes used as a “hook” to steer readers towards a certain opinion or to “sell” the article or the piece of information they are trying to spread.

- **CHECK OTHER SUPPORTING SOURCES:** Check out the links indicated as sources and try to verify their legitimacy as well.
- **ASK AN EXPERT:** Advice from a more knowledgeable person – such as a teacher, librarian or museum representative – can help to clarify the information.
- **USE FACT-CHECKING WEBSITES:** Encyclopaedias; Factcheck.org; the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).

Digital literacy is the ability to find and evaluate information online and distinguish what is true and what is false. It combines critical thinking skills, such as source verification, with new knowledge about how the digital world works, such as using search engines. Using the source verification checklist, students can analyse verifiable sources of information on the Holocaust, for example.

the learning environment. In this situation, it is important to follow school policy and alert school management, if applicable.

If the post comes from a student, this may be an opportunity to engage in a classroom discussion. This can be done without directly referencing the post in question. For example, you can initiate a discussion in class about becoming aware of our own biases. The student responsible for the post might not be aware that what they posted is anti-Semitic, and discussing biases is a first step to raising

their awareness. You might also discuss why perpetuating stereotypes is harmful to ensuring a diverse, inclusive environment where everyone feels safe. As a credible role model, a teacher is well-positioned to discuss the negative impact of an example of anti-Semitism that has entered the classroom or is found online.

If a fellow teacher shares an anti-Semitic post that can be seen by your students (i.e., through a public account), you can also alert the school authorities and/or follow the appropriate policy.

...you learn that anti-Semitic content is being shared around the school?

Work with the school leadership, which is responsible for investigating incidents of this nature, bearing in mind that it may be a spoofing attack (where fraudulent or malicious communication is sent from an unknown source disguised as a source known to the receiver). If it calls for violence, it is likely to be a criminal act and should be reported to the police.

Emails, for example, may be circulated to raise awareness

The triple filter test

In ancient Greece, philosophers were reputed to hold knowledge in high esteem. One day an acquaintance met a great philosopher and said, “Do you know what I just heard about your friend?”

“Hold on a minute,” the philosopher replied. “Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be good idea to take a moment and filter what you’re going to say. That’s why I call it the triple filter test. The first filter is Truth. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?”

“Well, no,” the man said, “actually I just heard about it and...”

“All right,” said the philosopher. “So you don’t really know if it’s true or not. Now, let’s try the second fil-

ter, the filter of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?”

“Umm, no, on the contrary...”

“So,” the philosopher continued, “you want to tell me something bad about my friend, but you’re not certain it’s true. You may still pass the test though, because there’s one filter left—the filter of Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?”

“No, not really.”

“Well,” concluded the philosopher, “if what you want to tell me is neither true, nor good, nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?”

about political or human rights issues, but can sometimes also exploit anti-Semitic stereotypes which generate hostility towards Jews. If students are concerned about a particular human rights issue, or have been exposed to such an email, it may be worthwhile to explore

the situation in class so that the students are better informed and less vulnerable to biased information or propaganda.

Discuss the problem of the spread of viral content with the class and review some basic criteria for deciding when to

forward or share such content. The “triple filter test” is a great and accessible way to decipher the value of sharing a piece of information.

Resources and Materials for Further Reading

To learn more about the nature of cyber-bullying and how it can be countered, visit:
www.StopBullying.gov.

For more information on how to identify and report online hate speech, visit:
www.facingfacts.eu.

Read the Council of Europe’s manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education here:
<https://rm.coe.int/168065dac7>.

A brief history of anti-Semitism is provided on the Anti-Defamation League’s website, here:
<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Brief-History-on-Anti-Semitism-A.pdf>; and
<https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>.

Resources and information on tackling hate speech include:

- Hate Speech Overheard:
www.tolerance.org/magazine/hate-speech-overheard;
- NPR: Fighting Hate in Schools (focuses on schools in the United States)
www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/04/05/522718288/fighting-hate-in-schools; and
- UNESCO’s publication on “Countering online hate speech”
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002332/233231e.pdf>.

For activities in the European Union aimed at making the Internet a safer place for young people, see:
www.betterinternetforkids.eu/web/portal/saferinternet4eu.

UNESCO have created a *Teacher’s Guide on the Prevention of Online Extremism* (2016), which contains useful advice on countering hate speech and cultivating a safe environment in the classroom, see:
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244676>.

UNESCO’s guide *Countering Online Hate Speech* (2015) suggests that educators build students’ media and information literacy to respond to hate speech by informing them and guiding them on how to analyse and positively respond to hate speech, see:
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002332/233231e.pdf>.

For a discussion of dealing with hate speech on the Internet, and ethics and digital journalism, see:
The Online Media Self-Regulation Guidebook, OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, (Vienna: 2013), p. 50-73,
www.osce.org/fom/99560?download=true

