REMEMBRANCE POLICY AS EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

EVALUATING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION: HITTING THE TARGET?

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Abstract

According to recent studies of the Claims Conference, millennials in various countries believe that the Holocaust is an important subject that should be taught in schools. This topic is often included in national or state curricula, but educators do not necessarily receive accredited professional development opportunities about how to approach teaching this subject matter in their respective classrooms. Moreover, many Holocaust-related institutions around the world offer workshops and seminars geared for teachers, however, their programming is not always externally evaluated.

This article will explore the results of a number of external studies of Yad Vashem's teacher-training efforts on an international scale, reflecting on aims and outcomes. Based on this data, there appears to be an added value to professional development training. However, additional research should be undertaken as these findings could support decisions made by policy makers.

Key words: *Holocaust, Yad Vashem, Evaluations, Education.*

INTRODUCTION

According to recent studies from the Claims Conference (Schoen Consulting, 2018), millennials in various countries believe that the Holocaust is an important subject that should be taught in schools. This topic is often included in national or state curricula, but educators do not necessarily receive accredited professional development opportunities concerning how to approach teaching these topics in their respective classrooms. Moreover, many Holocaust-related institutions around the world offer workshops and seminars geared towards teachers, however, their programming is not always externally evaluated.

The root of the noun "evaluation" is value, discerning worth. An evaluation may be considered an examination to determine the worth of someone and or something. Evaluations, whether internal or external may be conducted as an open call for proposals or by a specific academic research team. Some evaluations can be a collection of anecdotal evidence, responses recorded and reviewed but not necessarily tabulated or compared. Responses in comparison can be published in a peer-reviewed professional journal as part of an emerging or established research field.

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Institutions may also seek to measure whether there has been an effective return on investments. A positive evaluation may therefore be considered a success - projected and reported not only internally to those responsible for undertaking the project but also - and perhaps more importantly - externally to supporters, policy makers and other stake holders. A less favorable evaluation may indicate that changes in the workplan are needed.

An evaluation ideally measures impact when goals have been clearly defined. Yet, in some cases it may be rather difficult to determine whether aims and progress markers were realistically attainable and "hit the target."

Yad Vashem is the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. In 1993, forty years after the Yad Vashem law was passed in the Israeli parliament, Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies was founded. The School established a faculty of experts in history and pedagogy, developing a didactic approach and age-appropriate resources which would serve as the basis for its global outreach activities as well as its domestic programming. Over the last three decades, the International School's administration has collected feedback about its programming as well as conducted several external evaluations. Various Holocaust-related institutions, such as Facing History and Ourselves (2019)[3], have also undertaken similar evaluations.

A growing corpus of anecdotal evidence has been culled about the teachers' satisfaction vis-à-vis Yad Vashem's educational approach. The University of Duisburg-Essen (Friederike Lorenz et al, 2021) and other research institutes have also surveyed educators who have participated in Yad Vashem's professional development seminars and published their findings. However, a long-term study concerning the impact of Yad Vashem's trainings on pupils of its seminar alumni has yet been to be undertaken. Clearly, more research about the impact of Yad Vashem's training programs is needed in particular as well as in the field of Holocaust education in general.

Yad Vashem's goal is to ensure that the Holocaust is taught in schools, preferably by educators who have attended a training program on how to teach this complex subject matter in their classrooms. This training, which may range from a few hours to a few weeks, may be done in-person or online – whether synchronous or asynchronous.

Bolstering Holocaust education in recent years has become more crucial in light of surveys about the level of knowledge on this topic. For example, surveys in the US and other countries have measured the general population's level of knowledge about the Holocaust and attitudes toward teaching and studying about it. These surveys have received media attention worldwide, often highlighting people's lack of basic knowledge. As a result of Holocaust denial and distortion, the need to learn about the facts of the Holocaust has never been more relevant. Therefore, ignorance is not bliss but rather a serious problem that policy makers around the world need to address.

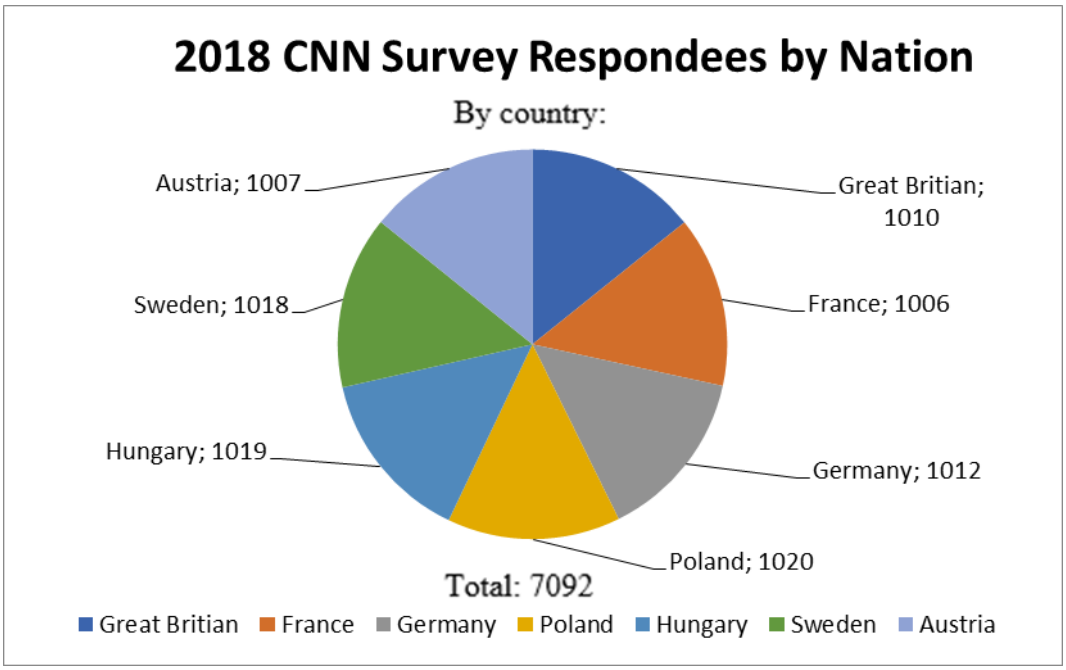
[3] Facing History and Ourselves have conducted numerous self-assessments, ranging in topics, through the years from 2008 until the present. https://www.facinghistory.org/our-impact/evaluation-studies-and-research

This article will highlight the results of many of the above-mentioned evaluations, noting the significance of data due to the aforementioned dearth of Holocaust knowledge, and shed light on the state of the field as well as raise additional research questions.

SURVEYING GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

This article primarily focuses on the evaluations of teacher-training programs delivered by Yad Vashem staff, both in Israel and abroad. Teachers impart knowledge to their students, whether in classrooms or in the framework of informal educational settings. Their efforts and best intentions are not always mirrored in the survey results, however. For instance, in November 2018 CNN[4] released that they commissioned ComRes to interview adults from a variety of European countries (see: Figure 1). Data was weighted to be representative of each country based on age, gender and region. According to this poll, approximately one-in-twenty Europeans from the seven countries surveyed by CNN had never heard of the Holocaust. In France, one out of five people surveyed between the ages of 18 and 34 in September 2018 stated that they had never heard of the Holocaust (ComRes, 2018).

Figure 1. CNN Survey, 2018, Total: 7092



Source: ComRes, 2018

Over the past few years, Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Studies have been commissioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany[5] (Claims Conference) in several countries. Data was collected and analyzed by Schoen Consulting with representative samples of adults via landline, cell-phone, and online interviews. Yad Vashem staff were involved in the

[4] https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/11/europe/antisemitism-poll-2018-intl/
[5] https://www.claimscon.org/

design of these surveys. Respondents were selected at random and constituted a demographically representative sample of the adult population in various countries, such as the United States of America, Austria, Canada, and France. Overall, these surveys aimed to determine people's level of knowledge about the Holocaust as part of a random sample of millennials. Although there are some differences between the various surveys (Schoen Consulting, 2018; 2019), overall certain patterns appear to emerge, namely:

- Modern cohorts do not support those who deny the Holocaust, however, they lack basic knowledge about Holocaust
- Moreover, a significant number of people have not visited Holocaust museums or Holocaust-related sites
- A significant number of people believe that something like the Holocaust could happen again

Overall, there are clear indications that teaching this subject is important in the eyes of most people surveyed. For instance, in the US, more than nine out of ten respondents (93 percent) believe that all students should learn about the Holocaust in school (*Schoen Consulting*, 2018). These surveys denote that despite their gaps in basic knowledge about the Holocaust, most people unequivocally state that this topic should be included in school curricula.

It is rather unlikely that a universal baseline of core knowledge about the Holocaust will be adopted across regions, let alone countries. Nevertheless, the results of these aforementioned national surveys indicate that pedagogical recommendations on teaching and learning about the Holocaust are needed across borders.

EVALUATING YAD VASHEM'S EFFORTS IN TRAINING ISRAELI EDUCATORS

In 2014, former Israeli education minister, Rabbi Shai Piron, implemented a systemic structure on learning about the Holocaust from kindergarten until 12th grade. The Israeli Education Ministry and Yad Vashem worked in partnership to create an educational and didactic curriculum that includes Holocaust education for all sectors and different age groups, emphasizing gradual and age-appropriate learning in a sensitive manner.

This spiral approach, considering the cognitive and emotional development of the pupils in each grade, provides Israeli teachers pedagogical guidelines and resources that seek to create a connection and a sense of belonging to this history while referring to national, Jewish and humanistic values.

In 2019, five years after the decision to revise the teaching of the Holocaust in the Israeli school system was taken by Piron, the Israeli Ministry of Education conducted a study (Tal Raz et al., 2019), including polls of educators and principals, and interviews with principals, educators and school officials.

The principle findings of this research (Tal Raz et al., 2019) highlighted the following results:

- There is a broad consensus among Israeli educators about the need to study this important topic
- Most Israeli educators teach about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, whereas a growing number also focus on the placing the Holocaust in historical context and its contemporary meanings. A number of teachers expressed their interest to find a balance between presenting the topic as a distinct and incomparable event and searching for connections to contemporary events, striving for relevance in the present
- Most teachers tend to prepare their classes about this subject around Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel
- There appears to be a consensus that the topic needs to be introduced to students in a careful manner. Teachers overall agree to avoid traumatizing their students and to tailor their lessons in an age-appropriate manner, keeping in mind their students' developmental, cognitive and emotional levels. Israeli teachers also agreed about the importance in giving their pupils the possibility to ask questions and express themselves as a way to digest the information
- The majority of Israeli educators who were trained on how use this national curriculum on the Holocaust noted their high level of satisfaction with the material (over 75%), widespread approval with its pedagogical approach (about 85%), and a positive assessment regarding their students' response to the material. The level of satisfaction is particularly high in intermediate grades of primary schools—third and fourth grade
- Teachers who participated in training courses or seminars experience significantly increases in both familiarity with the material and classroom implementation. Although more than half of those who did not attend professional development programs used the online material, their level of satisfaction with the curriculum was considerably lower than that of those who did (89% of teachers who participated in the training, compared with 62% of those who did not)
- Nearly half of the Israeli teachers surveyed attested to changing their viewpoints about how they teach following the trainings. They underscored the importance of the age-appropriate guidelines as well as exposure to more interactive methodologies that encourage dialogue and significant learning
- Despite professional development training, only a minority of teachers reported making changes in the annual school Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony (approximately 35%)

In light of the findings, it was recommended to Yad Vashem and the Israeli Ministry of Education to:

- Expand the variety of online material—the study material is a main lever of influence within classrooms and elsewhere

- Institute a policy for training refreshers—turnover and growing distance over time that require thinking about a model for refreshers that presumes a consensus on the basis of the "age-appropriate" principle and move forward to clarify other topics that are more complicated to implement
- Clarify potential "red lines"—along with the forming of a consensus about the principles of teaching gradually and in an age-appropriate way, as it is necessary to provide guidelines on these matters
- Develop more tools for process-based learning—the emphasis on annual commemoration ceremonies and their timing does not properly address process-based learning and create meaningful connections to the topic
- Examine the needs of different pupils, such as special education students, those of various socio-economic and ethnic or religious backgrounds and others, along with maintaining a uniform and apolitical message

EVALUATING YAD VASHEM'S EFFORTS IN TRAINING GERMAN EDUCATORS

In 2021 the University of Duisburg-Essen (Friederike Lorenz et al.) published their findings concerning responses from German educators who had attended seminars at Yad Vashem's campus in order to gauge the effects of the training. While its chief findings are listed below, the researchers were careful to note how German educators varied across different strata, further indicating that a monolithic approach to Holocaust education is unlikely to emerge, as even within subsets of educators there emerge variances related to socio-cultural and historical events, such as the bifurcation of Germany historically, post-World War II (Friederike Lorenz et al., 2021, pp.35-36).

The principle findings of this research (Friederike Lorenz et al., 2021) highlighted the following results:

- German educators contend that claims of "Holocaust fatigue", an aversion to studying the Holocaust due to the passage of time or due to being overwhelmed, among contemporary German students is a "myth" (Friederike Lorenz et al., 2021, p.29)
- Over the course of the seminars, teachers expressed frustration regarding the lack of time allotted to the Holocaust in their curricula, the inadequate supply of teaching materials, and the generational gap between students and teachers within the German education system
- Many teachers noted that they were specifically motivated to attend Yad Vashem seminars due to expectations that they would return to Germany better equipped to respond to local antisemitism
- Teachers expressed the challenges of reaching students, particularly those of different religious and social backgrounds, including those students with special needs and vocational students

REFLECTIONS OF US COLLEGE STUDENTS

In 2005, the ADL, USC Shoah Foundation and Yad Vashem launched Echoes and Reflections[6], a ten-unit interdisciplinary Holocaust curriculum designed for pupils in the United States. This educational material incorporates clips of witness testimony from the USC Shoah Foundation's archives.

In September 2020, Echoes and Reflections released the results of a study of 1,500 post-secondary students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities across the United States. Lucid Collaborative designed the survey and worked with the national polling company YouGov to recruit a nationally representative sample of US college students aged 18-24. This survey examined the differences between two distinct groups – those who received Holocaust education in high school and those who did not (*Echoes and Reflections*, 2020).

The survey measured student attributes related to: Holocaust knowledge and understanding; critical thinking skills; tolerance, empathy and respect for different viewpoints and experiences; and willingness and motivation to be an upstander. It was found that most college students (80%) have received at least some Holocaust education during high school, with the majority reporting they received one month or less of Holocaust education. The overwhelming majority (90%) of these students reported learning about the Holocaust in social studies or history classes, followed by English or language arts classes. The most common activities associated with Holocaust education were reading textbooks, watching documentaries, and reading novels and short stories. Over 55% reported watching videos of survivor testimonies. Students who had heard survivor testimony scored significantly higher than those who had not (Echoes and Reflections, 2020), suggesting that Holocaust education with survivor testimony could be more beneficial for critical thinking.

EVALUATING THE TRAINING HUB FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS

Yad Vashem's Overseas Education Department has trained some 20,000 educators on site, not including those who have been trained abroad and or via online study opportunities. In 2019, the Szold Institute conducted a study to assess seminar participants' educational process or the impact of their professional development experience at Yad Vashem, one to four years after completing their respective courses. Quantitative data were gathered via online questionnaires that were sent to the seminar graduates. The questionnaires included, inter alia, personal and professional data, general positions about the Holocaust, and aspects of satisfaction with the seminar. The graduates were asked about their interest in the Holocaust and how the seminar influenced their teaching of this subject matter. A total of 915 foreign educators answered the questionnaires. Additional qualitative data were gathered via partially structured phone interviews with 12 seminar graduates.

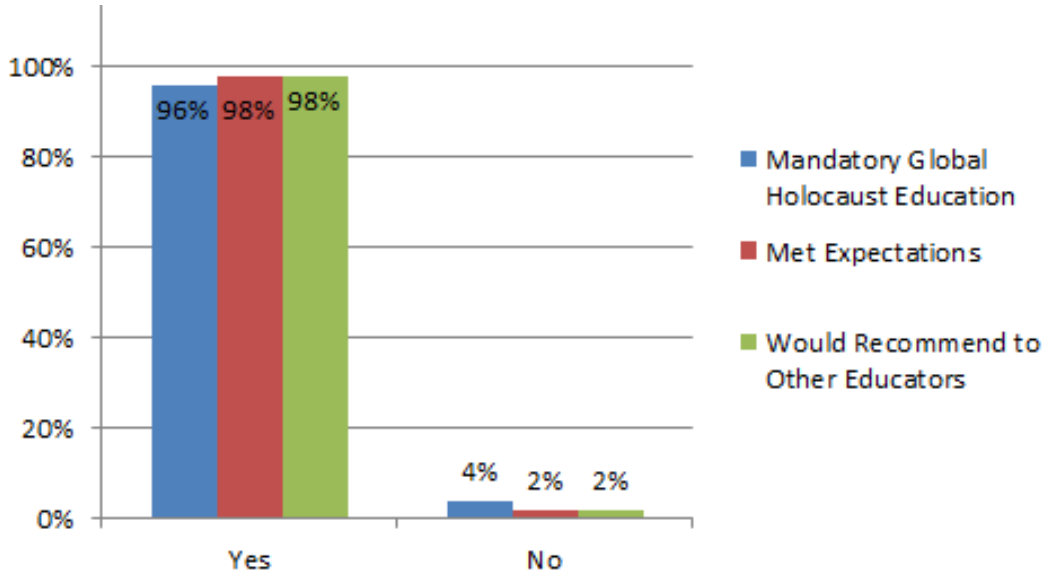
The main findings of this study (Szold Institute, 2019) revealed that:

- Over 70% of the educators surveyed continue to teach about the Holocaust. Most of them do so in a formal school framework

[6] https://echoesandreflections.org/

- When teaching the Holocaust, most of them teach about discrimination, racism and antisemitism, and the resources that they use are mostly movies and primary historical sources
- Those surveyed seemingly have adopted Yad Vashem's pedagogical approach to teaching about the Holocaust, sharing this methodology with additional educators. Moreover, about half reported that they get support from local centers for Holocaust studies and local Jewish communities
- The short amount of time dedicated to teaching about the Holocaust in schools poses a challenge. Most educators would like more time to teach a Holocaust curriculum in schools
- A high percentage of the participants said that they believed that the Holocaust must be taught everywhere in the world (See Figure 2)
- Over 80% agreed that the Holocaust is a unique phenomenon that cannot be compared to other events in history, as well as that it is important to understand the Holocaust as a chapter in the course of Jewish history and not as an isolated event
- A high percentage of participants reported that their expectations were met during the seminar. Additionally, a large majority said that they would recommend the seminar to their colleagues (See Figure 2)
- The graduates thought that the seminars' strong points were the richness and diversity of the content, the caliber of the lecturers, the experiential learning, meeting Holocaust survivors, and the group experience.
- The participants and the graduates mostly suggested improving the methods and means of guidance during the seminars, and allocating sufficient time to process the information. Furthermore, they mentioned the need to tailor the content as much as possible to the various populations, and they wanted to become more familiar with Israeli society
- In general, there was great satisfaction with the seminars, particularly the quality of the guidance by the coordinators and lecturers. Along with that, the participants also reported a relatively low level of satisfaction with the free time and the time available to process the information and their experiences

Figure 2. Study, 2019



Source: Szold Institute, 2019

According to this 2019 Szold study, the training seminars appear to have met the key objectives Yad Vashem set for itself: teaching educators from overseas about its educational approach and didactic principles for Holocaust education. The seminars noticeably contributed to the participants both academically and pedagogically, and many of them have been making frequent and varied use of the knowledge that they gained, including Yad Vashem's print and online educational resources. Satisfaction with the seminars was high in most respects. A high percentage of the participants and the graduates said that the seminars met their expectations and that they would recommend that their colleagues apply to participate in them. Finally, the graduates seem to feel that the seminars have had a resounding impact over the years, and were increasingly interested in this subject.

However, the findings shed light on various areas for improvement as well. For instance, the importance of buttressing experiential learning; allocating more time to process the information and the experience, tailoring the content to the different populations and more.

EVALUATION AND POLICY PLANNING IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

The abovementioned data, from various studies, have shed light on several aspects of Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust (TLH) in general, and for Yad Vashem in particular. On the one hand, many of the findings of these studies are positive indicators; for example: the majority of Israeli educators who were trained to use the spiral national curriculum on the Holocaust noted their high level of satisfaction with the pedagogical rationale as well as lesson plans.

On the other hand, some results raise concerns; for instance: only a minority of Israeli teachers who participated in this training redesigned the way in which they conducted their annual school Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony. Since most Israeli teachers prepare classes about this subject around Holocaust Remembrance Day, is the educational approach of their lessons consistent with the content of their remembrance ceremonies? Are the elements of the ceremony age-

appropriate and in line with the educational approach of the spiral curriculum? If not, then what possible conflicting educational messages could their students be receiving? More research appears to be needed in order to address additional questions and issues that arise from the original study.

Students in the US appear to positively recall survivor testimony. Meeting a Holocaust survivor, apparently, has made an impression. The voice of someone who was there, who is part of the human chronicle of the Holocaust, resonated with the students. This finding also indicates that the efforts to collect, preserve and make testimonies accessible appears not to have been in vain. As survivors pass on their memories to the next generation, educational institutions will continue to grapple with how to impart survivors' messages when survivors will no longer be able to bear witness in-person. Crucially, further empirical studies will need to be conducted regarding the educational impact of recorded testimonies on students after witnesses will no longer be alive.

In 2017, IHRA published *Research in Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust: A Dialogue Beyond Borders*. In the concluding section of this book the authors note that processes of TLH in schools "have a great potential interest not only for specialists, but also for educational reformers and researchers." (IHRA, 2017, p. 299) In 2019, in follow up to this volume, IHRA released comprehensive recommendations on learning and teaching about the Holocaust in English (IHRA, 2019). These recommendations have been translated into some twenty languages to date. Clearly, no ideal methodology may be deemed appropriate for all educators and learners for any subject. Contexts of when, why, what and how educators teach are not fixed but dependent on a multitude of factors. Measuring impact cannot be done in a vacuum and therefore the ever-changing context of educational environments must be considered, such as policy makers' directives, teacher burn-out, the influence of social media and more.

In the case of teaching about the Holocaust in particular, there are additional factors that should be considered, such as, but not limited to: contemporary antisemitism; Holocaust denial and or distortion. Although educational contexts differ, can an expected consensus on what constitutes a universal baseline of core knowledge about the Holocaust emerge? In this context, it should be underscored that the Holocaust cannot be considered a "point of view." Moreover, it is difficult to fathom how the Holocaust that "challenged the foundations of civilization" (IHRA, 2000, p.26) can be considered as "an issue from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective" (Prose 2021). This discourse, which has been widely reported in the media, infers the importance of institutionalizing professional development programming on Holocaust education and researching its impact – not only on the teachers but also on their students in the long-term. Training teachers and educational policy makers has never been more relevant, especially if the Holocaust could be perceived as an opinion or an "individual's truth" rather than an undisputable fact that should be taught.

In addition, research questions often yield unexpected results as well as denote the need to conduct further inquiry and or revise hypotheses. For instance, the "Zoom era" that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted all educational frameworks, both formal and in-formal. It appears that online programming can successfully provide support for teachers and

therefore professional development programming does not necessarily need to be localized, but rather can also be done on the international plane in partnership with other institutions. These technological innovations in teacher training are certainly relevant to both policy makers and researchers.

Evaluation is connected to public policy. Since training is often a three-way investment of teachers, educational authorities and the training institution itself, all three levels should ensure that evaluation is conducted on a regular basis and that the results are disseminated and publicized. Policy makers should provide the support for teachers to improve their skill sets, including Holocaust education. Teachers' professional development programming should be continuously evaluated and policy makers should be updated about the results of these assessments. Holocaust institutions should continuously evaluate their work, both on the national and international level, preferably with external experts such as university researchers. Research findings will always remain key in determining policy – not only in the field of science in general but also in the field of education in particular.

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