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Teaching Difficult Knowledge of Holocaust Education in Poland: A Look at The Impact of Narrative, Empathy, And Previous Knowledge on Memory.

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Abstract

The Holocaust is regarded as the worst crime against humanity and violation of human rights in modern history. The need to pedagogically present and engage with the heritage of the Holocaust is a complex and emotionally charged challenge that many teachers have to face. It is often referred to as difficult knowledge. This study looks at how the narrative of film can be used in teaching about the Holocaust and the impact of narrative perspective on short- and long-term memory of the subject matter. Participants were shown two Holocaust testimonies: one in first-person narrative, the other in third-person narrative. Our aim was to provide novel insights on the effect of narrative on memory in teaching difficult knowledge. We believe that insights from this study may shed light on the astute use of film in the teaching of difficult knowledge.

Keywords: difficult knowledge, empathy, memory, first-person narrative, third-person narrative

1. Introduction

Classroom curricula requires engagement with difficult knowledge, the most prominent example being the Holocaust. One of the missions of an educator is to seek out ways to transmit this knowledge to new generations effectively with the hope that this may influence future conflict-management and peacemaking efforts outside of the classroom (Shulman, 1987), or at the very least, not forgotten. This particular study was aimed at exploring how film can be used astutely for this goal. The study looks at the impact of narrative perspective in film on memory, in addition to the contribution of empathy and previous knowledge.

2. Theoretical Background

Educational and psychoanalytic theorists, Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt (2003) coined the term difficult knowledge. According to Britzman, newly introduced information that unsettles the learner's identity and preconceived understanding of the world around them is defined as difficult knowledge (Perreault, 2017). Difficult knowledge is a theoretical construct suggesting that when an individual encounters representation of social and historical trauma, a host of emotional and pedagogical complications arise during the learning process (Garrett, 2010).

Katz (2018) stated that Holocaust education must be implemented into the curriculum allowing for an understanding of humankind and the awareness of the fragility in social values and the complexity of moral choices. There is a moral responsibility to engaging with difficult knowledge in the classroom by enabling empathy and perspective-taking with the experience of another.

2.1. Holocaust Education in Poland

Poland, not by its own will, was chosen by the Third Reich as the place where the Holocaust was to be perpetrated. This role in history was part of the reasoning that led the Minister of Education in 1999 to include Holocaust education in the curriculum as a mandatory subject of secondary school education. This reflects

Poland's general commitment to education, remembrance and promotion of Holocaust research. Since then the Holocaust has been taught in various forms on different levels of education, mainly in history classes but also during Polish literature, civic education, and extracurricular lessons. One of the main educational programs recommended for use by teachers is "The Holocaust. A Curriculum for the Humanities in Secondary School Education for Teaching on the Destruction of Jews". Further teaching handbooks have been published to enhance Holocaust education. Additionally, there are several in-service teacher training programs for teachers willing to learn more about both the history of the Holocaust and the methods of teaching it. A continued public debate on the Holocaust drives teachers to enhance their knowledge

Film and video footage are popular tools that have been used increasingly for teaching empathy, perspective-taking, and other skills relevant to social and emotional learning (Muller & Kane, 2017). While research has shown that first-person narrative in film can invoke a higher level of identification, empathy, and memory in the viewer, there is much less research about the effect of narrative perspective in film as it relates specifically to teaching difficult knowledge.

2.2. Emotional and Cognitive Empathy

Empathy is divided into two recognized forms: (1) emotional or affective empathy, where there is an alignment with the emotional state of with another; (2) cognitive empathy or perspective taking (PT), with a mental representation of another's feelings, thoughts, and intentions. As humans, empathy is an essential psychological skill that we need to navigate our life as social beings (Davis, 1983; Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Wagner et al., 2015).

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) is a tool to measure empathy. It assumes that there are four related, but individually distinct in concept, aspects of empathy that can be measured: (1) perspective-taking (PT): the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others; (2) fantasy: measures respondents' tendencies to transpose themselves imaginatively into the feelings and actions of fictitious characters in books, movies, and plays; (3) empathic concern (EC): assesses "other-oriented" feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others; (4) personal distress (PD): measures "self-oriented" feelings of personal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings. These four subscales can be further categorized into two groups to distinguish between the cognitive aspects of empathy (PT and

fantasy) and affective aspects of empathy (EC and PD) (Wagner et al., 2015). The Interpersonal Reactivity Index allows for a focused observation of individual characteristics of empathy, and in addition, a multidimensional view of empathy in general (Davis, 1983).

2.3. The Connection Between Cinema and Empathy

Moreto (2022) describes cinema as the audiovisual version of the narrative, framed in emotions and images. Teaching with cinema is particularly well-suited to the learning of difficult knowledge because it represents a reality very close to the language of the student who is inserted in a particular emotional subject (Moreto et al., 2022). However, and more importantly, the intention behind using film is not to provide “sentimental, emotional education” only, but to provoke reflection that leads to incorporating attitudes. Reflection is, without a doubt, the bridge that allows the transition from emotions to attitudes (Blasco et al., 2010).

Cinema is a multisensory experience that evolves over time, 'grabbing' viewers' attention and activating a wide range of affective responses, triggering a sequence of perceptual, cognitive, and emotional processes (Hasson, et al., 2008). What is important to our study is that film has the potential to increase empathy in viewers; in particular, using first person as opposed to third person film can further increase empathy of the participants. Additionally, Stadler (2017) states that can affect their short- and long-term memory contributing to learning. Furthermore, studies of cinematic empathy and perspective-taking show that film plays an important role in developing and testing models of engagement and intersubjective understanding (Stadler, 2017).

2.4. First- and Third-Person Narrative

According to Kaufman (2009), narrative perspective is perhaps the most fundamental feature of a narrative and the research shows that specific narrative strategies effect a reader's engagement with the subject matter. Whether first-person narrative is more or less conducive to empathy and trust in comparison to third-person narrative is a question that is the subject of discussion.

Kaufman and Libby (2012) have shown that a more immediate sense of closeness and familiarity to the main character is created by using first-person narratives and they are therefore more conducive to experience-taking [i.e., empathy] than third-

person narratives, which explicitly position the main character of the story as separate entities.

Research found that participants identified with a character more when the narrative was told from that character's perspective and resulted in a higher identification with the character, leading to a greater persuasiveness of the narrative (De Graaf et al., 2012; Nan et al., 2015). Hakemulder (2000) states that while narrative perspective has an effect on readers' responses, the exact nature of these effects depends on the narrative's subject matter. When the content is difficult and complex, such as with the difficult knowledge of the Holocaust, it is worth considering using third-person narrative in order to avoid strong emotional involvement that may lead to rejection and disconnection and negatively affect learning and memory (Shalom & Gross, 2022). Our study looked at whether these findings remain truthful when teaching about the Holocaust in Poland.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. What are the connections between first-person and third-person narrative to the level of short-term and long-term memory while watching a documentary film with "difficult knowledge"?
2. What is the connection between the level of previous knowledge of the subject and memory level in the short and long term?
3. What is the connection between the level of empathy and memory level in the short and long term?

In this study, we hypothesized that a third-person narrative film would bring about the least emotional involvement leading to a higher level of memory. Additionally, a high level of previous knowledge would also increase performance in memory. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the higher the level of empathy on each issue, the higher the level of memory of the participants.

4. Method

4.1. Study Aims

We evaluated the level of empathy, previous knowledge, and the level of short-term memory (STM) and long-term memory (LTM) as it related to specific information

about the films' content. We expected that despite the differences, the first-person narrative would increase the level of empathy and consequently, the level of memory among the participants. The main aim of the current study was to examine whether significant differences would be found between the narrative perspective of the two films in the performance on the STM and LTM tests.

4.2. Participants

The sample size was determined a priori by using G*power software. For ANOVA with repeated measures (within-between interaction) analyses and for the test parameters: low- effect size = 0.23, $\eta^2 = .05$, α error = 0.05, power = 0.90, the total sample size required was 72 participants. In order to increase power and sensitivity, the present study comprised of 112 Polish students (2 males and 55 females). The students' ages ranged from 18 to 32 ($M = 22.52$, $SD = 2.16$).

4.3. Procedure

The study was conducted in two steps:

Step One: The participants were shown two films about the Holocaust in two different narratives. In the first-person narrative film, a Holocaust survivor shares their own experience and in the other film, in third-person narrative, the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor relates her grandmother's experience. The order of the films was presented differently to the participants in order to increase the reliability of the findings. After watching the films, the participants filled out a demographic questionnaire, an empathy questionnaire, a previous knowledge questionnaire and a memory test. The memory test was given at the end of watching the films, in order to measure the level of short-term memory following the viewing.

Step Two: Participants answered the same memory test one week after watching the documentary films in order to measure the level of long-term memory following the viewing.

The participants were divided into two groups. One group (Order 1) comprised of 56 students (1 male and 55 females) and they watched the personal testimony film in first-person narrative first. The other group (Order 2) comprised 56 students (1 male and 55 females) and they watched the personal testimony film in third-person narrative first. This deviation into two groups aimed to counterbalance the films in order to prevent alternative explanation for the differences in the performance on the

STM and LTM tests, such as fatigue after watching the first film, etc. The two groups were perfectly matched by gender.

As background measures, all the students were requested to answer four questions regarding the Holocaust and to fill out the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) regarding their reactions to observing others' experiences. To examine whether the two groups differed in their previous knowledge of the Holocaust, two independent sample t-test were conducted. The IRI measure has four subscales, each made up of seven different items. One-way MANOVA was conducted to examine whether the two groups differed in the scores on the four subscales of the IRI.. Table 1 presents the mean, SD and F-values of the background variables by group.

Table 1: Mean, SD and F-values of the background variables by group

Background variables	Order 1 (n = 56)		Order 2 (n = 56)		F	p	ηp2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Knowledge of the Holocaust ¹	2.96	0.87	2.75	1.03	1.41	.238	.01
Interpersonal Reactivity Index -IRI							
Perspective Taking (PT)	3.70	0.49	3.79	0.66	.00	.976	.00
Fantasy (FS)	3.71	0.61	3.71	0.58	.00	.964	.00
Empathic Concern (EC)	4.08	0.52	4.07	0.54	.59	.443	.01
Personal Distress (PD)	3.56	0.55	3.53	0.49	.11	.736	.00

¹Independent samples t-test was conducted; Order 1: Watched the documentary film in first-person narrative first; Order 2: Watched the documentary film in third-person narrative first.

As can be seen in Table 1, no significant differences between the two groups were found in the knowledge of the Holocaust and in each of the four subscales of the IRI. These results indicated that the group who watched the documentary film in first-person narrative first and the second group who watched the documentary film in third-person narrative first, did not differ in their previous knowledge of the Holocaust and their self-report in the IRI.

4.4. Materials

Ethics: A written explanation of the research topic and a consent form according to the ethics procedures of the Mofet Institute.

Film clips: Two films presenting personal testimony of the Holocaust from two narrative perspectives, first-person and third-person, each film lasting 15 minutes

Preliminary questionnaire: Demographic information and an assessment of the participants' previous familiarity with the films.

Empathy questionnaire: Self-report Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) as a measurement tool for the multi-dimensional assessment of empathy (Davis et al, 1983).

Previous knowledge of the Holocaust questionnaire (Golub & Cohen, 1993)

Memory tests: Two tests with 15 multiple-choice questions were given to assess the participants' memory of the films; one test was given at the end of watching the film to test short-term memory (STM) and the second given after two weeks to test long-term memory (LTM). The questions addressed details specifically related to each film, to avoid answers that may draw on previous knowledge of the content, for example, questions that related to the character's age, the place of the event, the time of occurrence and the names of the characters and their role in the story.

4.5. Ethics and Confidentiality

The study was reviewed and approved by Mofet's Institutional Review Committee. Participants were explained the nature of the experiment and its overall purpose. Participants also signed a consent form, which states that the information collected in the study will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

5. Results

Before applying the research questions and hypotheses, Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted in order to examine whether the various research variables (previous knowledge of the Holocaust, scores on the IRI and the performance on the memory tests) were normally distributed. The results indicated that the various research variables deviated significantly from normal distribution ($p < .05$). Therefore, the research questions were examined by both parametric and non-parametric analyses that do not hypothesize on the normal distribution of the variables examined in the current study. Wilcoxon analyses were conducted for each group (Order 1, Order 2) to examine the differences between the two different narrative perspective films in the performance on the memory tests. Since the findings of the non-parametric

analyses indicated the same significance level as the parametric analyses, the findings of the parametric analyses are presented in this section.

A three-way (2x2x2) mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine the first research question of whether significant differences would be found between the two films in the performance on STM and LTM tests. The independent variables were the group (as between subject factor), narrative perspective and memory type (as within subject factor). The dependent variable was the performance on the memory test. Additionally, the memory type was entered into the ANOVA analysis as a within subject factor to examine whether the effect of the narrative perspective that was presented in the films differed with regard to the memory type. Table 2 presents the mean and SD of the performance on the memory tests by group, narrative perspective and memory type.

Table 2: Mean and SD of the performance on the memory tests by group, narrative perspective and memory type (STM, LTM)

Dependent variables	Group	Narrative perspective			
		First-person narrative		Third-person narrative	
		M	SD	M	SD
Scores on the memory test (STM)	Order 1 (n = 56)	10.70	2.90	10.91	3.51
	Order 2 (n = 56)	10.48	3.07	10.95	2.57
Scores on the memory test (LTM)	Order 1 (n = 56)	9.36	3.08	8.82	2.91
	Order2 (n = 56)	8.46	2.72	8.62	3.02

Order 1: Watched the film in first-person narrative first; Order 2: Watched the film in third-person narrative first.

The main effect of memory type was significant, $F(1,110) = 34.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$, indicating a higher performance on the memory test (STM) immediately after watching the films compared to performance on the memory test (LTM) one week after watching the films. The main effects of group and narrative perspective were not significant [$F(1,110) = .74$, $p = .391$, $\eta^2 = .00$ and $F(1,110) = .17$, $p = .680$, $\eta^2 = .00$, respectively].

The two-way interactions of narrative perspective and memory type, narrative perspective and group, and memory type and group were not significant [$F(1,110) = 1.71$, $p = .194$, $\eta^2 = .02$, $F(1,110) = 1.67$, $p = .199$, $\eta^2 = .02$ and $F(1,110) = .48$, $p = .490$, $\eta^2 = .00$, respectively]. Finally, the three-way interaction of narrative

perspective, memory type and group was also not significant, $F(1,110) = .31$, $p = .581$, $\eta^2 = .00$. These results indicated that the effect of the narrative perspective which was presented in the films did not differ significantly with regard to group and memory type (see Figure 1).

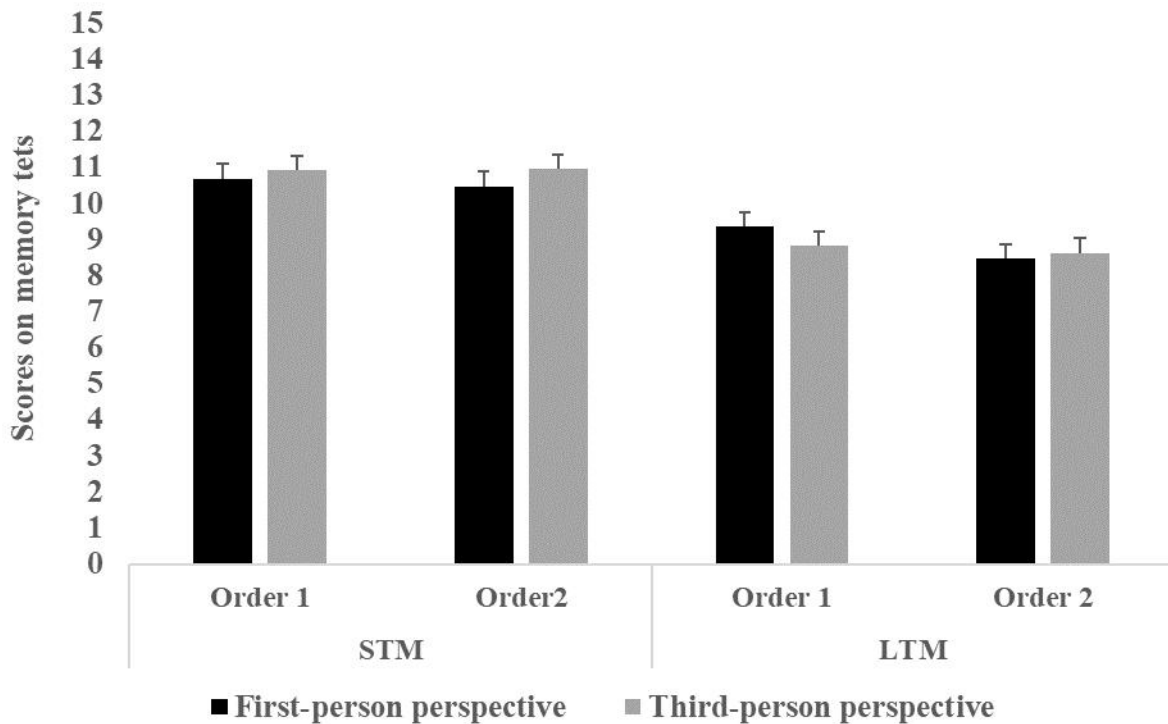


Figure 1: Mean (and SE) of the performance on the memory tests by group, narrative perspective and memory type

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the second research question of whether significant positive correlations would be found between the students' previous knowledge of the Holocaust and their performance on the STM and LTM tests (see Table 3).

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficients between students' previous knowledge of the Holocaust and their performance on the STM and LTM tests

STM and LTM tests	Knowledge about the Holocaust
First-person narrative (STM)	.31***
Third-person narrative (STM)	.35***
First-person narrative (LTM)	.03
Third-person narrative (LTM)	.01

*** $p < .001$

In accordance with our hypothesis, significant positive correlations were found between the students' previous knowledge of the Holocaust and their performance on the STM tests in both perspectives. On the contrary, no significant correlations were found between the students' previous knowledge of the Holocaust and their performance on the LTM tests.

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the third research question of whether significant correlations would be found between the students' scores on the four IRI subscales and their performance on the STM and LTM tests (see Table 4).

Table 4: Pearson correlation coefficients between the students' scores on the four IRI subscales and their performance on the STM and LTM tests

	First-person narrative		Third-person narrative	
	STM	LTM	STM	LTM
Perspective Taking (PT)	.14	-.02	.09	-.01
Fantasy (FS)	.24**	.06	.14	.18
Empathic Concern (EC)	.16	-.02	.10	.01
Personal Distress (PD)	-.06	.08	-.04	.09

**p < .01

Significant positive correlation was found between the students' scores on the FS subscale and their performance on the STM test regarding the film's content when told in the first-person narrative, but not in the third-person narrative [$r(110) = .24, p = .01$ and $r(110) = .14, p = .155$]. No significant correlations were found between the students' scores on the other three IRI subscales and their performance on the STM and LTM tests.

Finally, in order to examine the contribution of the students' background characteristics (gender, age, group), their previous knowledge of the Holocaust and their scores on the four IRI subscales for the explained variance (EPV) to the performance on the memory tests, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. The students' background characteristics were entered into the regression model in the first step. The students' score on the knowledge test of the Holocaust and their scores on the four IRI subscales were entered in the second step. These measures were entered into the regression model in the second step in order to examine their

unique contribution to the EPV of the performance on the memory tests beyond the students' background characteristics. In both steps, the variables were entered into the regression model in a stepwise manner so that only variables that have a significant contribution to the EPV of the performance on the memory tests were entered into the regression model in each step. The variables were entered by order of significance. Only variables that have a significant unique contribution to the EPV of the performance on the memory tests beyond the students' background characteristics were entered into the regression model in the second step. In this manner, the probability of multicollinearity is likely to be decreased. Table 5 presents the results of hierarchical regressions for the performance on the memory tests by the student's gender, age, group, their previous knowledge of the Holocaust and their scores on the four IRI subscales.

Table 5: Results of hierarchical regressions for the performance on the memory tests by the students' gender, age, group, their knowledge of the Holocaust and their scores on the four IRI subscales

Dependent variables	Steps	Independent variables	B	SE.B	B	R2	ΔR2
First-person narrative (STM)	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
	2	Knowledge of the holocaust	.90	.28	.29**	.095***	.095***
		Fantasy (FS)	1.10	.45	.22*	.142***	.047*
Third-person narrative (STM)	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
	2	Knowledge of the holocaust	1.12	.28	.35***	.123***	.123***
First-person narrative (LTM)	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
	2	---	---	---	---	---	---
Third-person narrative (LTM)	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
	2	---	---	---	---	---	---

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As Table 5 shows, the background characteristics did not contribute significantly to the EPV of the performance on the memory tests in all four analyses.

Regarding the performance on the STM tests on the content of the first and third-person perspective films, the level of previous knowledge about the Holocaust contributed significantly 9.5% and 12.3% to the EPV of the STM performance. The positive β coefficient indicated that as the students' knowledge of the Holocaust increased, the performance on the STM tests increased, respectively. In addition, the scores on the FS subscale contributed significantly 4.7% beyond the level of previous knowledge of the Holocaust to the EPV of the STM test of the first-person perspective film. The positive β coefficient indicated that the more the students tended to transpose themselves imaginatively into the feelings and actions of the film's character, their performance on the STM test of the first-person perspective film increased, respectively.

Regarding the performance on the LTM tests of the first and third-person perspective film, no significant contribution was found to the EPV of the students' performance.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The Holocaust is regarded as the worst crime against humanity and violation of human rights in modern history. The need to pedagogically present and engage with the heritage of the Holocaust is a complex and emotionally charged challenge that many teachers have to face. It could be assumed that teachers in Poland may have a harder challenge given the extraordinary complexity of the history of the Holocaust that transpired in Poland.

This study aims to provide educators with information on the intelligent use of film in teaching difficult knowledge, in particular the Holocaust. The goal was to explore the impact of narrative perspective on short and long-term memory of the subject matter.

The findings of the study do not make a significant contribution with respect to the gender and age of the students. Most of the participants were female-identifying and the age range was mostly similar, students aged 20-30, hence it is not possible to indicate any variance in the sample. However, insights were found regarding the relationship between the type of narrative, empathy and previous knowledge.

6.1. The Connection Between Narrative and Memory

The study findings show that the types of memory examined in the study (short-term and long-term memory) naturally indicate that short-term memory is better than long-term memory, moreover it was found that the two narrative films (first- and third- person) do not elicit differences with regard to short-term memory levels, which is supported by the research literature on the subject (Mızrak, & Oberauer, 2021). In contrast, content presented in first-person narrative was found to be better remembered than in third-person narrative in the long term. This finding is consistent with the research literature to date showing that first-person narrative creates a deeper sense of closeness, involvement, and connection with the main character (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) and correlates with an increase in memory level (Stadler, 2017).

6.2. Previous Knowledge and Its Impact on Memory

An examination of the participants' level of previous knowledge found it contributed to the short-term memory level in both narratives, meaning that the more previous knowledge the participants demonstrated, the more they remembered in the short-term. This finding is consistent with the literature indicating a positive relationship between previous knowledge level and short-term memory level (Mızrak, & Oberauer, 2021; Ricker et al., 2020). It can be explained that the content of the films did not 'move' to long-term memory in light of the fact that apart from the one-time exposure of the two videos no further learning of any kind was conducted that could strengthen and expand the content, context and knowledge that can strengthen memory (Chia, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

6.2. The Connection Between Empathy and Memory of Difficult Knowledge

Empathy metrics indicated a correlation between short-term memory level in a film that presented first-person narrative evidence of FC-type empathy. This empathy is linked to the world of imagination and refers to the emotions and actions of fictional characters in books, movies and plays (Maibom, 2017). This finding may indicate the effectiveness of films that invite the viewer to a fantasy look at the reality of difficult knowledge and forgetfulness from a state of distress that may lead to repression and (Shalom & Gross, 2022). Presumably, the use of this empathy contributed to the distancing and emotional detachment from reality, prevented repression and as a result contributed to the short-term level of memory in the first-person narrative. The fact that the memory did not "pass" in the long run can be explained by the fact that the exposure to the information was isolated and short - watching two testimonial

films. It is likely that a combination of additional teaching-learning methods would have stabilized and consolidated the memory on the subject.

In light of the findings, three possible conclusions can be drawn regarding the intelligent integration of films with difficult knowledge in teaching-learning processes: 1) use of films that present a narrative in the first person 2) a combination of additional teaching-learning methods on the subject of difficult knowledge, such as rehearsal'. 3) Using films of a fictional or fantasy nature that evoke FC empathy and contribute to short-term memory.

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