

Reflecting on personal stories in Holocaust education: my experience at the training “Power or personal stories in confronting oblivion”

Author: Emma Abbate

In early September, I had the opportunity to attend the training "Power of Personal Stories in Confronting Oblivion" at the Max Mannheimer House in Dachau, Germany. The workshop, which took place from the 1st to the 4th of September and was organised by Documenta - Centre for dealing with the past (Zagreb-Croatia), focused on how personal narratives and biographies can be essential tools in countering Holocaust denial, genocide distortion, and other crimes of WWII. This training was part of the European Union's "Power of Personal Stories in Confronting Oblivion (PPSCO)" project, supported through the CERV European Remembrance program.

Over the course of these few days, I collaborated with other teachers and educators, engaging in discussions about new educational strategies, exchanging best practices, and expanding my network with colleagues and civic society representatives. The atmosphere of collaboration and shared purpose was enriched by the presence of professionals from both formal and non-formal educational settings, giving us a chance to merge diverse perspectives into our understanding of historical memory.

The program was both intense and deeply thought-provoking. It began with a visit to the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, an impactful experience that set the tone for the discussions to follow. We explored the significance of using personal stories in education, which helps humanize the enormity of historical events like the Holocaust. This approach not only engages students but also emphasizes the importance of memory in the face of ongoing denial and distortion.

Among the workshops, "Comic Memories" was particularly interesting. This session delved into the use of graphic novels and comics as a medium to depict personal stories, making difficult historical topics more accessible to younger audiences. The screening of the film *Woods That Sing (Šume Šume)* by Renata Poljak based on the testimonies of female partisans during the war, provided another emotional layer, showing how different forms of media can preserve personal memories of war and trauma.

The workshop "Conflict Textiles" added a hands-on element, where participants used textiles dolls to tell stories of conflict and resilience, showing how art can be a powerful medium for historical narration. Additionally, a session on "[Topografia per la storia](#)" (places associated with forced labor and deportation from Italy during the Second World War) and the presentation of the online [Arolsen Archives](#), offered practical ways to integrate these approaches into curricula, making historical sites and memories more relevant and present in educational contexts.

This experience has left me with a wealth of new methodologies and ideas, not only for enriching my own teaching of the Holocaust and other genocides but also for fostering a deeper understanding of the power of storytelling in shaping collective memory. I look forward to incorporating these insights into my work and continuing to build on the connections made during the training.