

Sound in the Silence project

Teaching method

The twentieth-century history of Europe was marked by two world wars and two totalitarianisms, national socialism and communism. To pursue their objectives, these two systems - despite their ideological differences - were making use of similar means, i.e. violence and terror, incarnated as concentration and forced labour camps.

(...) Apart from being a unique kind of cemeteries, museums set up on the grounds of former death and concentration camps have also become monuments to the past, commemorating victims to regimes. It was there that a new area of educational activity, unknown before, was born in a natural way: memorial site pedagogy.

Luiza Kończyk, *Pedagogika (miejsc) pamięci*, 2012¹

1. Introduction

Sound in the Silence is an international interdisciplinary educational project delivered by the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS) in cooperation with the cultural centre MOTTE from Hamburg. Its main goal is to make adolescents attending upper secondary schools familiar with some difficult aspects of Europe's past in a way that matches their emotional sensitivity. Guided by artists and educators, the participants visit memorial sites where they explore selected events from the history of totalitarianisms in East-Central Europe. Then, referring to their own emotions and experience, they process the newly acquired knowledge during art workshops of several days. Their work finds its culmination in a public performance which combines various genres of art: dance, theatre, music and stage setting. Emotions and feelings related to visits at memorial sites – particularly those marked with violence and pain, giving rise to emotions sometimes hard to express in words – become thus externalised in an artistic message.

¹ Luiza Kończyk, *Pedagogika (miejsc) pamięci*, 2012, <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-1efca15a-a273-4533-aaa4-d482a723326b/c/11.pdf> (accessed on 5 May 2017)

2. Teaching method

The place where young learners come into contact with history for the first time, the school does not always offer conditions conducive to understanding the past. *Sound in the Silence* is intended to fill that gap, facilitating international, interdisciplinary cooperation between schools and external experts and artists representing various disciplines. Offering young people an opportunity to directly experience memorial sites and interact with others who have different experiences, the projects stimulates sensitivity, curiosity and tolerance. Learning in an international environment, coupled with integration and dialogue of youth from different countries and marked by twentieth-century history in different ways, will help them better understand the past and broaden their horizons.

The educational process proposed by the project includes two parts: one based on learning and history and one based on arts. During the first part, the young participants are guided around a selected memorial site, a concentration or forced labour camp. They learn about its history as well individual fates of its inmates, which facilitates stepping in their shoes and thus a more in-depth understanding of the past.² Then the participants attend an interactive lecture and discussion staged by scientific coordinators. The lecture aims at presenting a broader historical context as well as systematising and consolidating their existing knowledge (accounting for school syllabus differences in individual countries); the discussion, in turn, provides a space for asking questions, exploration and comprehension.

The other part is art workshops of around a week, during which the final performance is prepared as a team effort. They are delivered by means of an exposing teaching method intended to activate the student's whole personality, both intellect and emotions. The method consists in simulating situations and role-play using words, gestures, movement and sometimes props³. The point is not theatre, however, as the final performance is not based on a ready-made text but is an open structure where new content, actions and interpretations can be inserted. Consequently, playing a specific role requires personal engagement on the part of the student. The method allows for the emotional experience of specific problems, looking for one's own solutions as well as making choices. It also accelerates the students' emotional, intellectual and social growing up. It additionally teaches them understanding themselves and others at the level of feelings and emotions.

² Grzegorz Żuk, *Edukacja w miejscach pamięci – od reliktu do refleksji*, [in:] *Pamięć jako kategoria rzeczywistości kulturowej*, red. Jan Adamowski i Marta Wójcicka, Lublin 2012, p. 237–244

³ Wincenty Okoń, *Wprowadzenie do dydaktyki ogólnej*, Warsaw, 1998

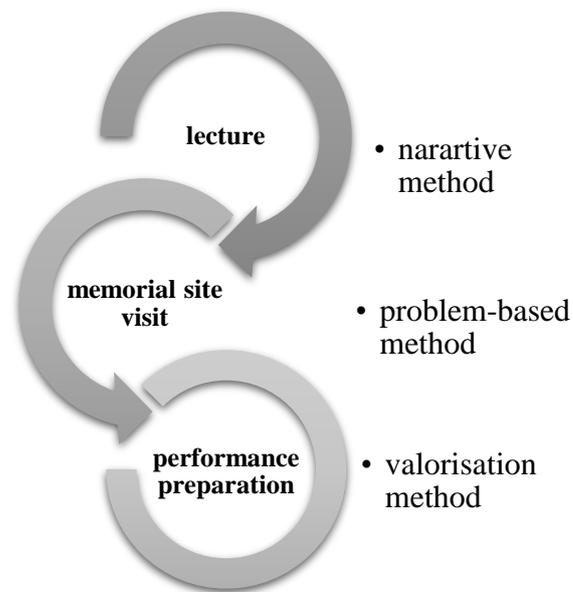


Image 1. Teaching methods used on the project

3. Project measures

Project work begins long before going to the memorial site and comprises the following stages:

- 3.1. Project site selection: project coordinators select a site as the axis of a given edition of the project. They also select and describe a leitmotif, closely linked to the history of the site, which helps define activities to be performed more precisely. Then materials for the students and teachers are prepared, with the subjects contained therein to be explored more in-depth and supplemented with new aspects during the historical workshop. The coordinators remain in close cooperation with the institution or museum in charge of a given memorial site.
- 3.2. Recruitment: it targets teachers and schools, lasts two months and is executed by means of online applications. Each year, students and teachers participating in the project are recruited by a selection team comprising ENRS and MOTTE staff. Four upper secondary schools from EU member states may select seven students and a teacher to spend eight days at a selected memorial site. The following aspects are subject to evaluation during the recruitment process: motivation (the selection team will assess the convergence between the project objectives and the teacher's interests, expectations and personal development plans); project recruitment modalities (the way in which the teacher/school selects seven young project participants as well as the teacher's approach to the project's interdisciplinary nature); experience in the delivery of interdisciplinary projects (outside the school syllabus) and

the knowledge of English (with the teachers and students obliged to declare it to be at least at the B2 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* standard of the Council of Europe).

The project assumes that the teacher and the students he/she selects take part in all activities planned by the organisers, with the teachers not involved in work during individual workshops and playing mainly the roles of guardians and aides.

- 3.3. A trip to the memorial site: the formula – that of a momentary break from daily duties and routines – facilitates the creation of a safe space for discussion, becoming familiar with different point of views and consciously working out new perspectives. As a result, visits at memorial sites serve not just to help improve one's knowledge of history but also as a starting point for juxtaposing various opinions in a way accessible to adolescents.
- 3.4. Visiting the memorial site and an educational workshop: the basic objective of the substantive workshop is to make the participants familiar as to the location where the project is delivered as well as discuss selected topics from the history of totalitarianisms in East-Central Europe. The knowledge acquired in the early days of the visit will also help the participants better prepare their final performance.
- 3.5. Groupwork with artists: one of the project objectives is to develop new outside-the-box ways to deal with history, based, on the one hand, on the participants' individual involvement and dialogue, and openness on the other. Hence the idea for combining visits at memorial sites with art workshops as well inviting youth, artists, experts in memory and educators from different countries and with different experience and knowledge of history to work together. The work is executed in several workshop groups, each led by a different artist. During the first workshop day, after each leader has presented their approach, the students select the genre of art that suits them best.

3.6. Final performance: the last day and a half of the project serves to combine the ideas of all groups into a coherent whole and rehearse the final performance which is then presented to the public. Emotions and feelings related to visits at memorial sites – particularly those marked with violence and pain, giving rise to emotions sometimes hard to express in words – become externalised in an artistic message.

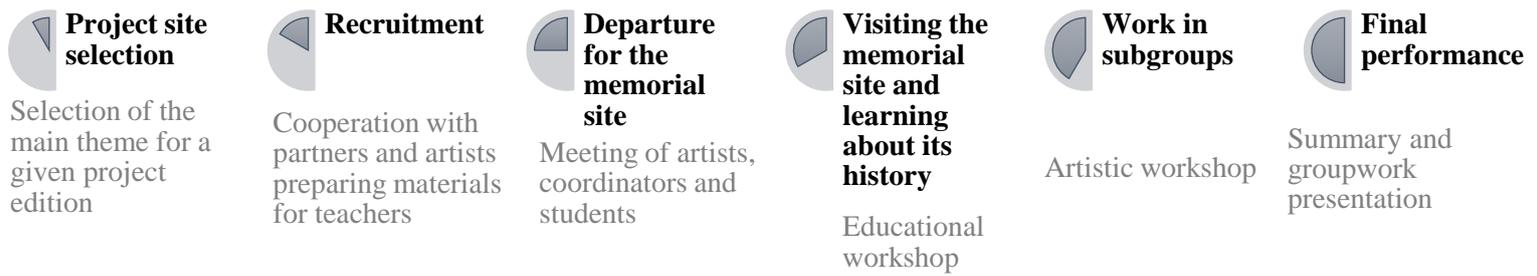


Image 2. Project implementation process

4. Learning through arts

The combination of two apparently contradictory domains as learning and arts may be seen, encourages young people to come into contact with history and points a way towards expressing one's views personally and critically. Using one's intellect, emotions, imagination and senses for learning purposes facilitates looking at the past from various angles and perspectives of many parties to the very same conflict. The formula of *Sound in the Silence* offers both students and teachers alike the possibility to move away from traditional history teaching routines giving a voice to witnesses to past events. The project has been conceived of as basic ground preparation work, aimed at counteracting exclusion, preventing nationalist attitudes, sensitising the participants to challenges faced by the modern world as well as promoting such terms as empathy, tolerance or dialogue.

The project focuses on individualised and multidimensional experience of the past. During the workshops, the students are encouraged to critically analyse the history presented. Dates and facts are contextualised with the experiences and feelings of those who lived past events coming to the fore. This is the point of visiting memorial sites, reading witnesses' accounts or watching feature films and documentaries. Additionally, each student is given an opportunity to select a workshop related to the type of art most suited to their sensitivity. The artists are

mentors, showing various ways to interpret historical events by means of arts. They are also there to help the participants work through and understand the most difficult topics, for which there is often no time available at school. Such an interdisciplinary and multidimensional approach to complex history facilitates reflection made more in-depth by one's own emotions and understanding of both the past and presence. Use of forms and means to which contemporary youth can relate helps them find the importance of historical events for the modern-day world. As a participant of the previous edition put it: "I have never felt so connected to history before and would never have by just looking at a picture"⁴.

Facing the history of the project site in emotional terms requires ensuring a common, safe space for dialogue for participants of various ages, characters and maturity levels. Thanks to re-defining certain educational methods, *Sound in the Silence* is a good solution for students who find it difficult to understand the timeless universality of historical messages. The artistic techniques applied as well as direct contact with memorial sites make the process of knowledge acquisition and analysis more accessible. They also facilitate personal engagement on the part of the participants and showing links between the past and their present-day lives.

One of the key challenges as regards the delivery of *Sound in the Silence* is transmission of expert historical knowledge to persons of various nationalities in a language other than their native one. The coordinators communicate with the adolescent participants in English, which may hamper the understanding of specialist historical terms. Should comprehension problems appear, the participants should contact the project coordinators or their guardians.

An additional difficulty as regards working with adolescents from various countries is varied levels of knowledge of the history of the site and region visited as well as differences in their knowledge of twentieth-century European history. That is why cooperation begins long before the project implementation stage. The coordinators meet representatives of the schools or hold consultations with them over Skype. They offer them materials prepared for the young participants serving to minimise such discrepancies. From the very start, the project is consulted with school teachers, head teachers as well as artistic and substantive coordinators. The point is to define the goals and objectives of the project precisely and communicate them to all the interested parties so that misunderstandings and tensions could be avoided.

Each edition of the project is assessed by all the persons involved in it: artists, teachers and students and then subject to detailed evaluation by a team from the European Network

⁴ Mereike Fischer

Remembrance and Solidarity. The conclusions are used while planning is being done for successive editions of the project.

5. Summary

The idea behind *Sound in the Silence* is multi-track historical education delivered both at memorial sites and art workshops as well as integration and exchange of experiences between peers from various countries. *Sound in the Silence* makes us aware that new forms of historical education make it possible to combine individual engagement with exploring the past together. One's own experience and sensitivity as well as understanding of views characteristic of individual countries allow for changing one's own personal perspective and mutual contact regardless of where the participants hail from. Learning history through arts and expressing it through emotions makes it easier for adolescents to understand history and the world around them.

6. Organisers

6.1. European Network Remembrance and Solidarity

The European Network Remembrance and Solidarity is an international initiative established pursuant to the Declaration of 2 February 2005 by ministers of culture (or their equivalents) from four countries: Poland, Germany, Slovakia and Hungary. Back then, they acknowledged the need to hold a dialogue about twentieth-century history as well as engage in joint research, documentation and dissemination of most recent European history marked by wars and totalitarian dictatorships. In 2009, the intention to establish the ENRS expressed in the Declaration was repeated in letters of intent signed by the ministers of culture of Germany, Poland and Hungary. In May 2014, an annex was added to the Declaration as another country, Romania, joined the Network. The ENRS was set up as an entity active in the area of remembrance policy, an ambitious attempt at shaping international discourse about the history and memory of Europeans. An important factor that defines the nature of the initiative is the fact that there are constantly differences to be faced present at several levels of cooperation:

- level of the substance the Network deals with: various historical narratives specific to each member country;
- level of structure: various organisational or institutional solutions specific to the remembrance policy systems in the member countries;
- level of culture: different ways and experiences related to commemoration, different means of communication or interpretation of specific phenomena.

The current members of the Network are Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, while representatives of also Austria, the Czech Republic and Latvia serve on its advisory assemblies. Since the establishment of the ENRS Secretariat, i.e. 2005, the Network has delivered around 100 initiatives varied in terms of nature, theme and scope. Some of them have become flagship ENRS projects and are delivered in successive editions now.

6.2. Cultural Centre MOTTE

Established in 1976, MOTTE is a municipal centre of culture in Altona, a formerly working class district of Hamburg. From the very beginning, its main objective has been supporting its local, ethnically diverse, community through cultural education, promotion of media knowledge as well as development of vocational and social competences. The dynamics of the centre's operation is based on cooperation with diverse institutions, i.e. schools, cultural centres, libraries as well as culture animators, journalists or artists.

Projects delivered by MOTTE target almost all age and social groups. Apart from a crèche and community centre for youngest children, the organisation offers many free programmes for adolescents aged 12 and above. Its activities cover such fields as remedial classes and advice in vocational development planning, games and cuisine workshops, or workshops for girls or persons with disabilities. Initiatives are also offered supporting schoolchildren in improving their vocational competencies in cooperation with local schools. Children aged 6-12 can benefit from a project at the intersection of black light theatre, musical play and film, where the participants learn to create their own radio broadcasts and develop their creativity. MOTTE is also planning to soon expand its operations and offer projects focusing on senior citizens.

Text has been written based on relevant literature on the subject:

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2. Michael Gray, *Teaching the Holocaust: Practical Approaches for Ages 11–18*, Routledge, New York, 2015
3. Grunewald, D., A., (2003). *The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place*, Educational Researcher 4 (32), s. 3-12.
4. Grzegorz Żuk, *Edukacja w miejscach pamięci – od reliktu do refleksji*, [in:] *Pamięć jako kategoria rzeczywistości kulturowej*, red. Jan Adamowski i Marta Wójcicka, Lublin 2012
5. James Woodcock, *History, music and law: commemorative cross-curricularity*, <https://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Teaching-History-2013.pdf>, (accessed on 5 May 2017)

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7. Luiza Kończyk, *Pedagogika (miejsc) pamięci*, 2012, <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-1efca15a-a273-4533-aaa4-d482a723326b/c/11.pdf> (accessed on 5 May 2017)
8. N.H. Weber, H.-F. Rathenow, *Pedagogika miejsc pamięci – próba bilansu*, „Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” 1996, nr 2, s. 3–36; I. Scheurich, NS-Gedenkstätten als Orte kritischer historisch-politischer Bildung, w: B. Thimm, G. Kößler, S. Ulrich (Hrsg.), *Verunsichernde Orte. Selbstverständnis und Weiterbildung in der Gedenkstättenpädagogik*, Frankfurt a. M. 2010, s. 38–44.
9. Victoria Nesfield, *Keeping Holocaust education relevant in a changing landscape: seventy years on*, University of Leeds, UK, 2015.
10. Theodor W. Adorno, *Education After Auschwitz*, <http://paep.ca/doc/CIYL%20-%20Theodor%20Adorno%20-%20Education%20after%20Auschwitz.pdf>, (accessed on 5 May 2017)
11. Wincenty Okoń, *Wprowadzenie do dydaktyki ogólnej*, Warsaw, 1998
12. *Wizyty edukacyjne w Państwowym Muzeum na Majdanku Poradnik dla nauczycieli*, edited by: Tomasz Kranz, Lublin, 2012

