Teaching 20th Century Jewish history and new technologies in the 21st Century

A professional development seminar for teachers in European Jewish schools. Building skills – creating networks

A seminar held in partnership with

The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Alvin and Fanny B. Thalheimer Foundation

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# Table of contents

Executive summary........................................................................................................page 3  
Participants..................................................................................................................page 4  
Seminar program........................................................................................................page 6  
Background info...........................................................................................................page 8  
Working in groups.......................................................................................................page 9  
Teacher presentations................................................................................................page 11  
Centropa films............................................................................................................page 14  
Outcomes and results..................................................................................................page 15  
Participants about the seminar....................................................................................page 16
Executive summary

A century ago, there were several networks of European Jewish schools. Tarbut schools operated in Poland, Lithuania and Romania. These were secular schools; their language of instruction was Hebrew. In Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Serbia and Romania, the Alliance Israelite Universelle administered dozens of secular minded French language schools. And in Germany, religious and secular Jewish schools had professional development networks.

We know what happened to those networks and we know what happened to who attended their schools. During the Cold War, few Jewish schools existed because the Jewish communities of the region had been decimated. We called their successors remnant communities. We said those living in them were last Jews. But the people we were calling last Jews in the 1980s have gotten married and have been having children. Jewish children who now attend the Jewish schools that began opening since the late 1980s.

Because these institutions have been concentrating on attracting children, developing curricula, and finding good teachers, there had been no network, no common platform on which their educators could share ideas and best practices. Until, that is, the 10th and 11th of February, 2013, when Centropa brought together 28 teachers from 17 Jewish schools in 14 countries.

Because 95% of the children in these schools (over the age of 12) are on Facebook, and have Facebook friends in other countries, it is high time Jewish education started bringing learning to where our children live—on the web, onto their smartphones. By doing so, we will open their hearts and minds, and we will connect them with other European Jewish students.

During our seminar, teacher shared ideas, developed lesson plans, gave each other feedback, and formed networks that are already linking up their students. This report will provide a view of how these teachers responded to our survey, and among the most salient statistics are:

- 92,9 % feel that Centropa’s approach to teach 20th century European Jewish history beyond the Holocaust will have a positive impact on their work
- 71,4 % feel that Centropa provides them with sufficient material to present 20th century Jewish history
- During these two intensive days the teachers created fifteen lesson plans/project ideas based on our films, our website, and connected educational materials
- 85,7 % of the participating teachers signed up to create a video project

This is all very new ground for Jewish education in Europe, and this report ably proves the necessity for founding an Association of European Jewish Schools. As far as we’re concerned, that Association was founded in February 2013. We thank those who made this program possible.

We hope you will help us grow this Association into something even more powerful, more meaningful, in the years to come. After all, by improving European Jewish schools we will make them more attractive. The more Jewish students enroll in them, the stronger our Jewish communities will be. But it all starts with the teachers—and making them feel appreciated and respected while connecting them up to other teachers in European Jewish schools is what we do best.

Thank you for reading this through and feel free to contact us should you have any questions.

Edward Serotta
Director

Marcell Kenesei
Director - European Jewish Schools Network
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country, City</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subject taught</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria, Sofia</td>
<td>Lauder School</td>
<td>Silviya Nikolaeva Savova</td>
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<td>Croatia, Zagreb</td>
<td>Jewish Elementary School Hugo Kon</td>
<td>Ana Sesar</td>
<td>Elementary school teacher</td>
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<td>Lauder School</td>
<td>Klara Synkova</td>
<td>History, Literature, English</td>
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<td>Katerina Weberova</td>
<td>Jewish studies</td>
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<td>Jewish Free School</td>
<td>Carolyn Raven</td>
<td>Art</td>
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<td>Sari Varesmaa</td>
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<td>Diana Gherasimiuc</td>
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<td>Cristina-Georgiana Popa</td>
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<td>School 550 World ORT</td>
<td>Irina Georgieva</td>
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<td>Ricky David</td>
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Seminar program

Sunday, 10 February

9:00. Introduction. What is Centropa and why do we believe in telling, and sharing stories.

9:30. Each participant has one minute to introduce themselves and their schools.

10:00. Centropa veteran teachers Ricky David and Tamara Pabyarzhyenye present their joint project and briefly explain how they use Centropa in their classrooms.

10:30. Teachers break into groups: history teachers; English teachers; other teachers; directors. Each will present his/her pre-seminar assignment: to go to the online Centropa database, find a story from their city or country, summarize that person’s life, and drag and drop three photos from that bio into a word doc. Then give out copies to everyone in their group and discuss.

11:00. Break.

11:15. Our Balkan heritage
Introductory remarks by a historian. Using the Sephardic stories that belong to all of us.

11:30. Screening of Three Promises: the Kalefs of Belgrade, a film about what happened to Jews in Belgrade in 1942. Praised in the press in New York as "a valentine to a lost Sephardic world, yet it does not shy away from the horrors that described that world." Followed by discussion.

12:00. We will now screen a film about what happened in former Yugoslavia 50 years later. Survival in Sarajevo: Friendship in a Time of War is our most popular film, now being used in a dozen countries. This story highlights La Benevolencija, the Jewish humanitarian aid agency that helped save a city of Muslims, Croats and Serbs. Followed by brief discussion.

12:30. Teachers work on lesson plan in smaller groups on how to use one or both of these films.

13:15. Lunch.

14:00. Every group gets 5 minutes to present their lesson plans. After every presentation the other groups get 3 minutes to fill out the evaluation sheet about the lesson plan. Discussions about the Sephardim follow.

15:00. Poland, Jews, and Memory: Introductory remarks by Jakub Nowakowski, Director of the Galicia Jewish Museum Krakow.

15:15. Screening of Teofila Silberring film, So That Memory Doesn’t Die, which is set in Krakow. We provide handouts of the Silberring walking tour in English, Hebrew, German and Polish.

15:45. Coffee break.

16:00. Presentation by Ursula Reinhart-Döring on how she used the film in her English class.

16:30 Teachers work in 4 smaller groups and write lesson plans on how to use the Silberring film and/or walking tour.
17:30. Every group gets 5 minutes to present their lesson plans. After every presentation the other groups get 3 minutes to fill out the evaluation sheet about the lesson plan. Discussions follow. Session ends at 18:30.

19:00. We leave for dinner at Filmbühne am Steinplatz.

21:00 You are free to explore Berlin bei Nacht.

Monday, 11 February

8:30. Breaking into groups and discussing possible school cooperation, joint projects. Moderated by Marcell Kenesei.

9:30. We watch Centropa’s Erna Goldmann film, When Ben Yehuda Strasse spoke German, which begins in Frankfurt and ends in Tel Aviv.

9:45 Teachers work on lesson plan in their groups.


10:45. Every group gets 5 minutes to present their lesson plans. After each presentation the other groups get 3 minutes to fill out the evaluation sheet about the lesson plan. Followed by discussion.

12:15 German stories, Jewish stories. Lecture on German Jewry by Dr. Chana Schütz, Centrum Judaicum. Followed by Q&A

13:00. Lunch.

14:00. Students, videos and grown ups. Nina Sasportas will present the video project she made with her students. We watch samples of films made by students. Session led by teachers who have used video in their classrooms. We review video template for making ten minute videos on “My Town’s Jewish History.”

15:00. Final discussions with invited guests. What should be our next steps together? Coffee and smalls snacks served.

16:00. Head for the airport / train station and home!
Background info

Since Centropa is offering unique and innovative methods in teaching 20th Jewish history, we were curious what the teachers in European Jewish schools think about what we have to offer.

Do you feel Centropa provides you with material to present 20th century Jewish history to your students?

“I think the story telling concept of the site is more than helpful to me as a teacher of several concepts. Students love it and are perfect for both individual research and group work.” -- Diana Gherasimiuc, Lauder-Reut Educational Complex, Bucharest

“If we do not teach this, we will never understand how much was destroyed during the Holocaust.” -- Katarina Weberova, Lauder School, Prague

“It is very important to teach students about the survivors - this is the best way to avoid a victimization mentality and too much focus on those who died, rather than those who lived” -- Cristina-Georgiana Popa, Lauder-Reut Educational Complex, Bucharest
At Centropa we listen to teachers. We ask them to give us feedback on our films, exhibitions and databases, and we ask them to create lesson plans around these resources and test them with their students.

The most important part of the Centropa seminars is always those sessions where we actually get real input from the participants. After organizing a number of seminars, Centropa has learned that it's always beneficial to let teachers work on the things they find useful, and also the best way to improve any educational material is to share it with another teacher and get new ideas.

During this seminar teachers worked in four different smaller groups where they developed 15 lesson plans based on four of our films, and five project ideas on school cooperation. These lesson plans were created and developed by teachers who are going to try them out in their classrooms.
During the seminar we divided you into five smaller groups to work on lessons based on our educational films—and then share your ideas with each other. Each group presented its lesson plans and ideas, and the other groups responded with feedback. Did you find this useful?

“...the group work provided a lot of input, enriching for sure...” -- Klara Synkova, Lauder School, Prague

“I enjoyed sharing and discussing ideas with colleagues” -- Kinga Mahr, Lauder Javne School, Budapest
Centropa believes that no one teaches a teacher better than another teacher. We asked four of our veteran teachers who use Centropa materials on a regular basis to present lesson plans and projects they carried out. They shared their experiences, spoke about the challenges they had to face and answered questions. This way we can show various ways how to use our materials, discuss possible obstacles one has to overcome, and nonetheless we can encourage our participants to engage in projects themselves.

The first presentation was done by Ricky David from Stockholm, and Tamara Pabyarzhyenye from Vilnius. They presented their joint project called „Fiddler on the roof” which they developed during our Summer Academy in 2012. In the frames of the project their students study Jewish life in the „Stetl”, learn about Jewish traditions, and the practice of those traditions in different places and in different times – before the war, and today.
The second presentation was done by Ursula Reinhart-Döring, one of our oldest partners. Ursula is an English teacher at the Moses Mendelssohn Jewish School in Berlin, and she presented how she uses our film on Teofilia Silberring in her English class.

On Sunday afternoon Ursula Reinhart-Döring from Berlin presented her lesson plan how she uses our Teofila Silberring film from Poland in her English classes. Did you find this useful?

The third presentation was done by one of our longtime partners, Nina Sasportas, who teaches Jewish studies at the Moses Mendelssohn School in Berlin. Nina presented how she carried out a video project with her students. With Nina’s help we introduced our video making competition to the teachers, encouraging them to do projects like this. As you can see from the survey results below, twenty-four out of twenty-eight participants said they would like to do a video project.
On Monday afternoon Nina Sasportas from Berlin presented her video project "The missing house and the stumblingblocks" that she conducted with her students. Did you find this useful?

- Absolutely: 17
- To some extent: 10
- Not at all: 1
- I was not there: 1

We would like your schools to create ten minute videos called Our Town’s Jewish History, which will need to be narrated in English. We would then share those films with other schools in the US and Israel so that we can build bridges and relationships between students and teachers in Jewish schools. Would you like to do this with your students?

- Yes, I will do my best to encourage my students to make a video: 24
- I will try but I’m not optimistic: 2
- This isn’t really for our school: 2


Centropa films

Centropa combines old stories with new technologies to create multimedia films. We screened several Centropa films during the seminar and asked them for their honest feedback. We were also curious how unique we are with our multimedia films that are presenting Jewish family stories from the 20th century. As it turns out, the teachers have never met films like these before. The only teachers who answered “Yes, I have seen other films like these...” was referring in their individual response to a Holocaust testimony, not mini-biographical films.

![Bar Chart](chart1.png)

**Among the four films we showed which one would you use in class most likely?**

- Survival in Sarajevo: Friendship in a time of war (1990s war)
- Three Promises: The Kalifet of Belgrade
- Testimony: Olbering, So that Memory Doesn’t Die (Klawow story)
- Ema Goldmann: From Frankfurt to Tel Aviv

![Pie Chart](chart2.png)

**Do you know of any other programs that take an entire family story and turn it into a mini-biographical film that you can use in the same way as these Centropa films?**

- Yes, I have seen other films like these.
- No, I don’t know of any other programs that offer similar content.
- I have seen some excellent short segments of video interviews with Holocaust survivors.
- I have seen other films like these.
Outcomes and results

With the seminar behind us we are ready to move on. Here are some of the outcomes of the seminar.

- All twenty-eight participants filled out an online survey form and rated the seminar as Very Good or Excellent
- The participants created fifteen lesson plans and project ideas based on four of our films
- Twenty-four teachers signed up to do a video project with their students
- The teachers also designed different ways to use our website, and shared those ideas with each other
- The participants elaborated on what are the challenges and threats one has to take into consideration when using the Centropa materials in their schools
- All of the participants offered to collaborate with us to conduct small workshops in their schools/towns
- Thanks to this seminar two school cooperation projects already started, and three more are in planning
- Sixty five percent of the teachers said they would or might be interested in attending our Summer Academy in July.
Participants about the seminar:

“Nowdays children are not interested in studying history as they find it a little old-fashioned and not useful. I was upset with that but at this seminar I saw interesting and new ways to make lessons more alive and close to children, to their generation and their needs.” -- Svetlana Kutuzzova, ORT School, St. Petersburg

“A once in a life time experience. After the seminar, I was asked to make a presentation about Centropa at my school and for sure I will motivate my colleagues to use Centropa’s educational materials in their classes as well.” -- Rita Sason, Jewish community school, Athens

“Educational seminars that make teachers work hard but also appreciate us as teachers.” -- Ricky David, Vasa Real School, Stockholm

“Centropa is not only a unique archive of personal memories, stories, photos and films of Jewish lives. It is also an amazing resource for a teacher and a Centropa seminar is a training event where one gets inspiration from other teachers how to use this resource.” -- Kinga Mahr, Lauder School, Budapest