Second annual professional development seminar for teachers in European Jewish schools

Building skills – creating networks

This seminar was made possible by

Date: Frankfurt, 9-10 March, 2014
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Executive summary

On March 9-10, 2014, Centropa held our second professional development seminar for teachers working European Jewish schools. Twenty-seven teachers and school directors from 15 schools in 13 countries attended. The seminar was held in Frankfurt at a conference hotel and in the city’s Jewish community center.

Over the past three years, launched, tested and expanded the Centropa Jewish Network of European Jewish schools. Our goals are to help teachers create cross-competency and project-based learning projects through the use of social media, digital story telling and new technologies; bring them together to share best practices with each other; and connect their students with each other. Since the establishment of CJN, we have:

- conducted half-day workshops in ten schools in nine countries;
- held two winter seminars – including this one in Frankfurt – for 56 teachers working in 22 European Jewish schools;
- brought 16 teachers from 13 schools to two of our eight-day summer academies;
- and created a network with 13 very active schools and nine moderately active ones, with a potential to expand into another dozen schools in eight countries.

These seminars give our teachers and school directors the opportunity to work alongside those who face many of the same challenges unique to European Jewish schools. Issues are raised and addressed; problems are aired and discussed. Before CJN, these teachers had never sat with their European counterparts to create joint lesson plans, cross-competency projects and (closed) Facebook groups. Now they are doing it as if it were second nature. During our Frankfurt seminar:
--each participant made a presentation on his or her school, telling us when it was founded, how many students attend and in which grades, etc;
--veteran teachers presented projects they and their students have been carrying out;
--we watched four new Centropa films based on Centropa interviews;
--we worked in small groups to draft lesson plans and project ideas around these films;
--established working partnerships.

This report is based on the responses of 27 seminar participants, and among the most salient facts are:

- 92.3 % feel that Centropa’s approach of presenting 20th century Jewish history beyond the Holocaust has a positive impact on the way they teach history;
- 20 out of 27 named a specific project they plan to carry out with another school;
- During the seminar, teachers created 15 lesson plans/project ideas based on our films, our website, and connected educational materials;
- 92.3 % of the participating teachers signed up to create a video project.

This report explains how we conducted our seminar and what we accomplished. Thank you for reading this through and feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Marcell Kenesei
Director
CJN
Ten take-away quotes

„I’ve been to many international conferences before but none of them provided so many usable materials as Centropa did. It is also much more practical and hands-on than many of the conferences I attended before. At the same time Centropa is an archive and a research network. By tapping into these we gain a wealth of information and resources.” – Csilla Hajnal-Smith, Lauder Javne School, Budapest

„Centropa makes it possible to communicate with other Jewish schools and of course has the most useful teaching materials in the field of Holocaust” – Maciej Przybyliński, Lauder Morasha School, Warsaw

„You bring teachers all over Europe and not only together giving them a fruitful share experience. They have the chance to get in touch with different schools in the same community. Centropa puts very interesting materials at the disposal of the teachers involved in teaching Jewish history, language and traditions.” – Tova Ben-Herbis, Lauder-Reut Educational Complex, Bucharest

„It’s not just different, it’s unique. There is no other forum for European Jewish schools’s teachers to share ideas and perspectives about European Jewish history and in that sense also the future aspects of living as a Jew in Europe.” – Sheila Weintraub, Jewish School of Helsinki

„I really enjoyed the feeling of cooperation that resonated throughout the conference. I learned a great deal from the movies and from my interaction with the other participants.” – Eleonora Ziser, Ulus Jewish School, Istanbul

„The seminar was a great experience. The most important thing is that I found many new ideas and met great colleagues from other European countries.” – Stella Dinkova, Lauder School, Sofia

„A different, important outlook on MEMORY and SHOA / new tools and ideas and not less important: the encounter with a lot of very special and motivated people - talking to them about what is different in our schools and what is similar or even the same, enlarging the TWIN SCHOOL project our school started a year ago with Prague, Budapest and Istanbul to other countries as well. I am sure a lot of other useful things will emerge from this network in the long run.” – Rina Lund, ORT School, Rome

„Different teaching methods that include using visual materials like pictures, personal stories and movies. As natural as it sounds to a lot of people, how Centropa does it is unique.” – Tomislav Simic, Lauder Hugo Kon School, Croatia

„What makes Centropa different? The beautiful website, the abundant material, the many ideas given, the inspiring leaders.” – Fransje Rijxman, Maimonides School, Amsterdam

„It’s this extremely motivated and motivating approach of doing projects and moving thoughts and ideas!” – Daniela Brandes, Isaac Emil Lichtigfeld School, Frankfurt
Our teachers; their schools

We have twenty-two schools in eighteen European countries currently in our network, and by next year, we hope to add more. Twenty-seven teachers from fifteen schools in thirteen countries attended the Frankfurt seminar.

A substantial majority of the participants this year teach in middle school (57 % of the respondents) and/or in high school (57 % of the respondents), but we also had 11 teachers who work in elementary school as well.

The subjects they teach are varied – 20 % of the participants teach history, English, Hebrew, and Jewish studies/history. But we also had three social studies, two geography teachers, and nonetheless four headmasters present.

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Survey results

Survey question: We asked you to make short presentations on your schools. Do you think this was useful—and did you learn anything about other schools from this exercise?

1.) Absolutely – 65.4 %
2.) Somewhat – 30.8 %
3.) It wasn't useful for me – 0 %
4.) I wasn't there – 3.8

We added this component to our 2014 seminar because several teachers attending last year's seminar asked us to. Since there is so little communication between European Jewish schools, we gave each teacher five minutes to tell everyone about their schools, then distributed handouts. We can see it from the results that this proved to be an excellent ice breaker and helped pave the way for partnerships.
Survey question: Centropa feels that while studying the Holocaust is important, it is just as important for our students to know much more about the history, personal lives and culture of European Jews throughout the century. Do you feel our seminar got this message across to you?

1.) Of course – 92.3 %
2.) To a certain extent – 3.8 %
3.) Not really – 3.8 %

In most Jewish schools in Europe, teachers had very little content on 20th century Jewish history other than Holocaust and Zionist related material. Centropa's goal was to fill that gap, upload that material on our website, and then show our teachers where they could access this content. We asked our participants if they felt we did an adequate job of presenting it to them.
Survey question: We had Centropa veteran teachers share their lesson plans and ideas about what they are doing in their classrooms. Did you find this useful?

1.) Yes, I found this useful and I picked up some ideas for my work – 61.5%
2.) I found this moderately interesting – 38.5%
3.) It was a waste of time – 0%
4.) I didn't see any presentations – 0%

Since 100% of our respondents found the presentations by other teachers very or moderately interesting or useful, they affirm what we have been saying since our founding: ‘no one teaches a teacher better than another teacher.’ Listening to a teacher present an actual lesson plan, reviewing things like: time and equipment needed, questions to be asked, outcomes reached, all proved valuable to our teachers. It also means they took those lesson plans home to adapt them to their classrooms.
Survey question: After watching some of the films, we divided you into smaller groups to work on lesson plans. Each group presented its lesson plans and ideas, and the other groups responded with feedback. Did you find this useful?

1.) Absolutely – 61.5 %
2.) To some extent – 34.6 %
3.) Not at all – 0%
4.) I was not there – 3.8 %

These survey results show us, once again, when teachers work with each other, results are invariably positive. In this question, we asked that by having them work together after watching a film, and then present their ideas to the larger group, if they felt this was effective. The only ones who did not think so were the ones who did not attend these sessions.
Survey question: You also worked in smaller groups to brainstorm on ideas how your school can work on projects with other schools. Did you find this useful?

1.) Yes, it was very useful – 61.5 %
2.) To some extent – 38.5 %
3.) It wasn’t useful – 0 %
4.) I wasn’t there – 0 %

These results show that our teachers clearly want their students to carry out projects together, and we will monitor their activities over the coming year to see how, and if, they follow through.
Survey question: Among the films we showed which one or ones will you use in class?

In 2012, when we first produced *Survival in Sarajevo*, we felt there would be limited interest in a film about how Bosnian Jews helped save their city during the siege of the city in 1992-1995. Much to our surprise, it is by far our most popular film, as it has universal appeal: to always stand with your neighbors, regardless of their ethnicity.

With some 40 films now available online, we have already learned that Hungarian teachers and students will be attracted to our Hungarian films, just as our Czechs will care most about our Czech films. In general, however, interest flags when we try and cross borders.
Our second most popular film, however, is set in Krakow, and we have learned that all European Jewish schools are attracted to films set in Poland, since most of these schools attend March of the Living programs.

Lessons learned

We asked our seminar participants what we needed to do to make our seminars better. All 27 participants responded. Of those, 22 asked us to extend the seminar by a day, so that the program would be less crowded, and there could be more time for reflection as well as time to take a city or Jewish tour. Here are other comments we will adopt.

„Perhaps it would be a good idea to spend time discussing the films and the messages, this could be done as a first step, in a group before proceeding to develop lesson plans. It seems like watching these films evokes many emotions and memories in many of us, and these feelings were kept "inside" which in a way left us all full of emotions and reactions which we did not have a chance to fully process internally. “
Elenora Bahar, Istanbul

„First, we need more time to work with each other. We also need more working groups so that maybe by the end, everybody will have had the opportunity to have worked with (and gotten to know) everyone. In other words, bringing teachers and school directors is invaluable to all of us and I would like to see us get even more out of these seminars.”
Rina Lund, Rome

„Give us more time. And maybe it’s a silly idea, but as I myself learned a lot about different teaching-related softwares (Prezi, Dipity, Wordle), and I saw that others were also interested, it may be a good idea to focus on teaching their use (in the summer, I mean). Would it be very difficult to learn how to create a flash-animation based Centrope-like film?”
Marta Zsolt, Budapest

„Some more time for informal contact between teachers. For example create a walk through the city, for example along interesting Jewish sites. While walking teachers can talk with eachother and get to learn eachother. The first day is too much as a rush and hurry. Honestly,
the first couple of hours of information of your side takes relatively loads of time (but also interesting to listen to!)."
Leo Tjoelker Amsterdam

„Could we have the seminars one by one situated within different European Jewish Schools? I think it would be more attractive for all of us, knowing that each year we would visit another school and another city. Of course, we all know these seminars need to add an extra day, as the program is just so intense we need that extra time. For example if the seminar could be held in Helsinki there could be a tour of our city and our school, you could stay in hotel next to our school, and it could be very concrete and practical to see how a Jewish school is really functioning."
Daniel Weintraub, Helsinki
Seminar program

8 March, Saturday, motzi shabbas

19:00 – Registration for early arrivals.

9 March, Sunday

8:30 – 9:00 – Introduction - who we are and where we came from, by Edward Serotta and Marcell Kenesei. What I get out of Centropa as a teacher, Zsolt Martha, Jewish studies, Scheiber School, Budapest.

9:00 – 9:30 – Introduction to centropa.org, our interactive website for Jewish family stories from Europe by Marcell Kenesei.

9:30 – 10:15 – Participants introduce their schools, part 1. Seven schools will be represented, 5 minutes per presentation, followed by questions.

10:15 – 10:30 – Coffee break.

10:30 – 11:15 – Participants introduce their schools, part 2. Eight schools will be presented, 5 minutes per presentation.

11:15 – 11:45 Lecture by Dr. Esther Graf on contemporary Jewish life in Germany.

Cross-border projects

11:45 - 12:00 – Svetlana Kutuzova (ORT School in St. Petersburg) and Tamás Domonkos (Scheiber School in Budapest) presenting their joint project: virtual cookbook.

12:15 – 12:30 – Csilla Hajnal-Smith (Lauder school in Budapest) present their virtual walking tour project.

12:30 – 12:45 - Zsolt Mártha (Scheiber School in Budapest) presents his school tableau project,in which his students are using old class portraits to tell the stories of those who attended the school before the Holocaust.

12:45 – 13:00 – Marcell Kenesei presents „The story of my family” video competition. We will show great videos made by teenagers in Stockholm and Seattle.

13:00 – 14:00 – Lunch

14:00 – 15:00 – How to connect your students with each other? Our goal: for you to create a project that really does bring your students together.

During this session teachers will break into 6 smaller groups and discuss what kind of cross-border projects they are going to make happen between their students (the ideas can be based on the presented projects, or they can also be completely new projects).
15:00 – 15:45 – All the smaller groups present their cross border project ideas, and the larger group gives feedback and makes suggestions.

15:45 – 16:00 – Coffee break

**Poland, Jewish history, and Holocaust education for 21st century teenagers in Jewish schools**

16:00 – 16:45 – Screening the Centropa film "So that memory doesn't die", on Teofilia Silberring, and short discussion about this remarkable woman, who never left Krakow, except for the years she lived in hell. Google street view walking tour of Teofila's Krakow. We will hand out her stories and read from her biography.

16:45 – 17:30 – Break into smaller groups and creating lesson plan based on the film.

17:30 – 18:00. Short presentations by each group to larger group.

18:00 – 18:45 – Screening of the Centropa film "From Tel Aviv to Frankfurt", the story of Erna Goldman, who was born and lived in Frankfurt, then Tel Aviv. Introductory remarks by Manfred Levy, a historian in Frankfurt.

19:00 – Leave the hotel lobby together for walk to JCC.

19:30 – Dinner at the Frankfurt Jewish Community – welcome by Ms. Jennifer Märsteller, director of the Frankfurt Jewish Community.

Dr. Doron Kiesel will speak on how education in Germany today—and over the coming decades—will have to evolve to embrace Europe's ethnic mix of today, and tomorrow.

**10 March, Monday**

**Be sure to check out of your hotel and have breakfast. Remember, you pay any extras in your room, like mini bar charges.**

**Our Sephardic heritage**

8:00 – 9:00 - Screening two Centropa films followed by short discussion.

- Centropa's most popular film is “Survival in Sarajevo”, how Jews worked together with Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, and Bosnian Muslims for the survival of their multiethnic city. We'll discuss the moral and ethical messages of this story.
- "A Bookstore in Six Chapters" tells the story of a bookstore in Salonika, a city that once had 93,000 Sephardic Jews. The best story in the bookshop was not on the shelves, but belonged to its owners, Renee and Solon Molho, and how they survived the Holocaust.

9:00 – 10:00 – Break into smaller groups to create lesson plans based on these two films.
10:00 – 10:45. Present and discuss your lesson plans created by teachers (Survival in Sarajevo, Bookstore)—everyone gives feedback.

10:45 – 11:00. Coffee break.

11:00 – 11:30. --Video story telling in Jewish schools. Presenting projects created by Centropa students.
--We will show two poetry videos: how Israeli students made a video on a poem by Wislawa Szyborska, and how Polish students created a video on Yehuda Amichai.
--a walking tour video by students in the Berlin Jewish school.
--a biographical film, made by a teenager in Baltimore, about a Jewish neighbor who fought at D-Day

11:30. – Leave hotel lobby together for walk to JCC. If you have an early departure, bring your luggage with you.

12:00 – 13:00 – Lunch at Frankfurt Jewish Community. Discussion over lunch: which of the student films we watched before lunch meant the most to you.

13:00 – 15:30– We remain in the restaurant and we hold our final evaluation, final discussion.
What have we learned?
Who are you going to cooperate with?
Which projects will you try to implement?