

Behind the Curtain: Cornerstones of Experiential Education *Elective*

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| AUTHOR(S): | Erica Goldman |
| SUMMARY: | In this session we will: Learn the theories and some frameworks of experiential learning to inform how to build great programs |
| ABC GOALS: | <p>Affective: Participants will feel...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspired to learn more about experiential education Curious about how to apply what they've learned this summer <p>Behavior: Participants will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notice and name elements of experiential education Apply a learning-cycle approach to program planning <p>Cognitive: Participants will know...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three frameworks for defining experiential education There is a body of research and writing on Jewish experiential education |
| AUDIENCE: | Staff members |
| TIMING: | 60 minutes |
| APPENDICES: | Excellence in Experiential Jewish Education by Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow Two printed examples of quilled art (or a real one!) such as this and this |
| MATERIALS NEEDED: | A quilling kit (such as this one for example) |
| SET-UP DETAILS: | Any clean quiet space where participants can interact with the quilling materials, and discuss |

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:20 – Introduction and Quilling
- 00:20-00:40 – Two Frameworks for Experiential Education
- 00:40-00:60 – Jewish Experiential Education

SESSION OUTLINE:

00:00-00:20 – Introduction and Quilling

Leader will lead group in a round of introductions, inviting participants to share their names, pronouns, camp, and an answer to the question, “What’s something that was hard to learn how to do but now you know how to do it?” No one can repeat an answer that was previously given.

Next, leader will give participants the paper and tools necessary for quilling (or some other project that is probably unfamiliar to all or most) and invite them to explore what it is, how the tools work, and to try to figure it all out.

After some time exploring on their own, perhaps participants will start to ask questions about what it is, or how something works, or if it’s “right.” Leader will give a brief description and maybe a demonstration of quilling and how to use the tools, allow participants to apply what they’ve learned, and then speak briefly about how this experience has felt so far. (Leader will show some examples of quilled art, such as [this](#) and [this](#), or a physical example.)

00:20-00:40 – Two Frameworks for Experiential Education

Leader will then facilitate a discussion about what “experiential education” is, what it means, how it can be facilitated, what are its elements, and what are helpful tools.

You might also: ask participants to think of a new experience that they had at camp that campers have, something new that they learn, what the process is like, what steps are in the process. Perhaps ask participants to think of the process for learning the skill they mentioned in the icebreaker, and whether they learned by being told, or shown, or figured it out on their own, etc.

Leader will let participants know that one approach to experiential education holds that

Learning is active and social. For deep learning to occur, instruction needs to access and connect to prior knowledge and give learners choices and responsibilities in their own learning experience.

[One can] explore how people learn, and ...prepare lessons and activities that are sequenced in ways that help learners engage with a topic or concept, and build their understanding. Lessons that are highly effective tend to follow a pattern...

[Instructors can use the] “learning cycle” pattern ... to make thoughtful instructional decisions... The learning cycle is a research-based instructional model that focuses on ordering phases of an activity to support learning. The model... is based on a five-phase cycle: **invitation, exploration, concept invention, application, and reflection.**

(More on this particular approach at www.beetlesproject.org)

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Leader will ask participants to reflect on the cycle, ask questions about it, disagree or agree with it, and try to name what parts of it were used in the quilling activity.

Another summary version of experiential education lists the crucial sequence as: “Awaken Enthusiasm, Focus Attention, Direct Experience, Share Inspiration” (for more on “flow learning” see <https://www.sharingnature.com/flow-learning.html>). Leader will invite participants to reflect on this version: does it ring truer? What is similar or different? Was this sequence followed in the quilling activity?

Important discussion component: **where, when, and how does this kind of learning happen at camp? Many “experiences” are not “experiential education” because they skip some of the steps. Yes, campers learn to swim by physically trying to swim, but is it experiential education? Many camp programs are *interactive*, but don’t quite reach experiential education because the “reflection” (or “share inspiration”) component is left out.**

(Another possible discussion: can you learn to ride a bike without riding a bike? When must the experience be part of the education and when can it be separate? How does this overlap or not with our understanding of experiential education?)

00:40-00:60 – Jewish Experiential Education

Leader will bring the discussion into the *Jewish* education realm, asking what might be different about Jewish experiential education in particular, and potentially open a discussion about experiential education in relationship to “informal” education, as Jewish summer camps are often referred to in this way.

(You might also: ask participants to generate personal definitions on paper, not necessarily to share, just to articulate existing thoughts)

Leader will introduce the elements in Avi Orlow’s “Excellence in Experiential Jewish Education” (available at <https://avikatzorlow.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/excellent-experiential-jewish-education.pdf>) and ask participants to think back to their answer about something that was hard to learn but now they know it/how to do it. Allow them to think more deeply about the process of learning that thing – how did it happen? Ask each to name one or more of the elements from this framework that were present in their learning process.

(You might have participants study in pairs/chevrutah, with each group reading/studying *one* item, rather than all. You might have them compare personal definition with this framework for overlap/divergence. You might ask what components feel challenging, of this or any of the frameworks. Does this feel new?)

Looking forward: leader will transition to asking participants to reflect on how any of these frameworks might inform their work at camp this summer, either explicitly in program creation or other ways, like bunk learning etc.

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP:



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The quilling component of this description can be swapped out for any content activity that is unfamiliar to most participants. Classification exercises would work particularly well; for example, giving participants many variations of any object (Seeds! Pictures of birds! Pieces of music!) and letting them explore their similarities and differences and then introducing a classification scheme and allowing participants to categorize the items.

For further academic treatment of Jewish experiential learning, see Reimer and Bryfman, “What We Know About Experiential Jewish Education” available at <https://bryfy.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/what-we-know-about-experiential-jewish-education.pdf>