

Experiential and Informal Jewish Education:

Bibliographic Resources

Diane Tickton Schuster, Ph.D.

JEL Seminar Faculty Member

The JEL Seminar provided an opportunity for practitioners and scholars to come together to study the field of informal/experiential Jewish education, to investigate how talented practitioners integrate serious Jewish content into their programs, and to assess whether experiential learning instructional strategies contribute to success in such program. Over the two years that the Seminar met, the group endeavored to identify educational principles and academic resources that could help us to articulate elements of effective practice in the field.

From the outset, the Seminar participants were familiar with Barry Chazan's analyses of the characteristics of informal Jewish education, as well as Joe Reimer's critique that Chazan's typology was more *prescriptive* of an ideal than *descriptive* of the existing field. However, the group felt the need for a broader, more eclectic scholarly literature on which to base its collaborative inquiry about practice. Constructing a bibliography of sources from a variety of academic disciplines enabled me not only to bring an informed eye to the Seminar discussions, but also helped to situate our activities in a wider intellectual context.

This bibliography contains three sections. First is an annotated list of selected resources from theory and research about informal education, experiential learning, adult education, adventure education, transformative learning, situated learning, psychology, business, and play. The range of these selections demonstrates that the practice of informal/experiential education is

inherently interdisciplinary and that, to be effective, practitioners need to be knowledgeable about diverse orientations to learning. Section I includes descriptions of some excellent texts on experiential education; other outstanding overview materials are available at www.infed.org, the online Encyclopedia of Informal Education.

Section II brings together annotations of works that focus on the theory and practice of informal and experiential Jewish learning. Although there is now a modest literature about how informal and experiential learning approaches are adapted in various Jewish settings (e.g., camps, day schools, family education programs, touring, youth programs), presently this bibliography includes only one annotation about venue-specific programs (Michael Zeldin's article about summer camps).

Section III showcases an issue that the JEL Seminar did not specifically address, but surely is something that needs to be considered by the informal/experiential Jewish education community. To date, informal/experiential Jewish educators have not established standards of practice for the field. In contrast, the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), one of two national organizations dedicated to the professional development of experiential educators, has published a sophisticated code for its members to follow. The NSEE's Standards of Practice document touches on many issues that were raised in the JEL Seminar; its inclusion here is intended to serve as a reminder that, to become a genuine professional field, colleagues who participate in the enterprise of informal/experiential Jewish education must begin to take systematic steps to codify standards of behavior, document phenomena, develop assessment tools, and establish criteria for recruitment and professional development.

Experiential and Informal Jewish Education: Theoretical, Philosophical, and Historical Underpinnings

Bibliographic Resources

Compiled by Diane Tickton Schuster, Ph.D.

I. Experiential Learning and Informal Education

<http://www.aee.org>

This is the website of the Association for Experiential Education (AEE), a nonprofit, professional membership association dedicated to experiential education and the students, educators and practitioners who utilize its philosophy. The website indicates that the goals of the organization are to “connect educators in practical ways so that they have access to the growing body of knowledge that fuels their growth and development; publish and provide access to relevant research, publications and resources; raise the quality and performance of experiential programs through our accreditation program; increase recognition of experiential education worldwide.” The AAE publishes the *Journal of Experiential Education* and an electronic newsletter called *Horizons*. The website includes an online bookstore that offers a wide range of publications and dvds not readily available through most libraries or stores.

Beard, Colin and Wilson, John P. (2006). *Experiential Learning: A Best Practice Handbook for Educators and Trainers*. London: Kogan Page.

Beard and Wilson provide a practical overview of the theory and practice of experiential education, bringing together perspectives from human development, training, adventure and leisure education, and psychotherapy. They offer a complex model for analyzing the design of experiential learning activities and point to the diverse cognitive, sensory, and emotional processes that affect the learner’s understanding. Chapter 2 summarizes Dewey, Freire, and Kolb’s views of experience and meaning making and offers a critique of experiential learning cycles. Chapter 4 analyzes learning environments. Chapter 11 addresses learning and change, focusing especially on reflective practice and action learning, and applies the the work of Schon and Argyris to experiential learning venues. A rich array of practical strategies are described.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. (1997). *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. New York: Basic.

Ever since the publication of *The Evolving Self*, Csikszentmihalyi has been writing about how “flow experiences” are the exceptional moments that occur when one’s “heart, will, and mind are on the same page.” In this slim volume, he reviews the emotional and cognitive processes that shape experiences and offers a framework for psychological engagement that leads to optimal moments of flow. He reports on his research about the different work, leisure, and relational activities that lead people to a sense of well-being in life, and then offers suggestions for how individuals can increase their happiness and quality of life.

Dewey, John. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

Dewey articulates his educational philosophy and reflects on what constitutes the “criteria” of experience. He provides a critical framework for thinking about the relationship between experience and learning in educational settings.

Fenwick, Tara. (2003). *Learning Through Experience*. Malabar, FL: Krieger.

Fenwick provides a careful of key experiential learning theorists (Dewey, Piaget, Kolb, Lewin, Mezirow, Schon, among others) and points out that the term “experiential learning” has been “appropriated to designate everything from kinesthetic directed instructional activities in the classroom, to special workplace projects

interspersed with critical dialogue led by a facilitator, to learning generated through biographical writing, and even to team-building adventures in the wilderness.” She delineates five “perspectives” (constructivist, situative, psychoanalytic, critical cultural, and ecological) that contribute to our understanding of the various ways people use experience as part of learning and meaning making and recommends that practitioners draw selectively from each approach, ever careful to consider the ethical implications inherent in each perspective.

Freire, Paulo. (1992). *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, a Brazilian educator who sought to help illiterate adults acquire personal and political authority, challenges the traditional “banking” model of education and advocates the use “problem posing” to promote the development of the learner’s critical consciousness. He also argues that dialogue between the learner and the teacher is at the heart of learner transformation and that a deliberate process of “action and reflection” must occur if the learner is going to grow and change.

Hein, G. E. (1998). *Learning in the Museum*. London: New York: Routledge.

This book addresses some of the recent popular trends in museum education, in particular audience-centered and informal museum learning. A compilation of current museum learning theory, the book suggests that the constructivist museum is the ideal approach for museums to adopt. Looks specifically at the ways in which patrons make meaning of their museum visits. (annotation by David Bryfman)

<http://www.infed.org>

This website of the *Encyclopedia of Informal Education* includes articles on informal education, lifelong learning, social action, and related topics. See especially articles on the professional training of informal educators: <http://www.infed.org/archives/usinginformaleducation/jeffsandsmith2.htm> and on the role of conversation in informal education: <http://www.infed.org/foundations/w-inf2.htm>. Mark Smith, a British educator, is the editor of infed.org; he actively updates the website and makes his extensive scholarship on informal and experiential education available online to readers around the world.

Lave, Jean, and Wenger, Etienne. (1991). *Situated Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Extending basic principles of social learning theory, Lave and Wenger posit that because a social context impacts the learner’s experience, much can be learned from studying the environments in which learning occurs. They profile several apprenticeship learning situations (e.g., Yucatec midwives, non-drinking members of Alcoholics Anonymous, meatcutters) and show how these learners are impacted by their participation in “communities of practice” in which they acquire new knowledge and adapt to the sociocultural practices of the group. Learning is explained in terms of the learner’s ongoing experience of being in relationship with the group and the social milieu.

Mayer, R.E. (2001). *Multimedia Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Multimedia presentations provide a situation where people can learn from both words and pictures. This book summarizes ten years of research looking at multimedia learning from a cognitive perspective. The design principles articulated in this book provide the basis for a great deal of our understanding of the current trends within cognitive learning as it is applied in technology and education. (annotation by David Bryfman)

<http://www.nsee.org>

This is the website of the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), a nonprofit membership association of educators, businesses, and community leaders. NSEE’s goals are “to advocate for the use of experiential learning throughout the educational system and the larger community; to disseminate information on principles of good practice and on innovations in the field; to enhance the professional growth and leadership development of our members; and to encourage the development and dissemination of research and theory related to experiential learning.” See especially the Society’s Standards of Practice: http://www.nsee.org/about_us.htm and the description of the NSEE’s Experiential Academy, professional development programs for experiential educators: <http://www.nsee.org/eea.htm>.

Pine, P. Joseph, and Gilmore, James H. (1999). *The Experience Economy*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Written from a business entrepreneur perspective, Pine and Gilmore offer perspective about how consumers respond to events and environments that are provided by companies that offer memorable experiences that keep the customer coming back for more. Using a range of corporate examples (e.g., Disneyland, shopping malls, internet websites, the Cleveland Indians baseball team), the authors describe the nature of the customer and the ways that various companies (including use experiential learning strategies to engage and retain consumers.

Rogers, Carl. (1983). *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

In this 1983 revision of his earlier work, *Freedom to Learn*, humanistic psychologist Rogers describes the changing context of education and the societal conditions that impede the teacher's desire to help students "learn how to learn" and love learning. In a series of essays he discusses the elements of experiential learning ("The Challenges of Present-day Teaching"), the qualities that facilitate learning ("The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning"), and strategies that give students the "freedom to learn" ("Methods of Building Freedom").

Smith, Mark K. (2006). Beyond the Curriculum: Fostering Associational Life in Schools. In Bekerman, Zvi, Burbules, Nicholas C., and Silberman-Keller, Diana (Eds.), *Learning In Places: The Informal Education Reader* (pp. 9-33). New York: Peter Lang.

Concerned about the increasing emphasis on the commodification of education and the role of "teacher as specialist," Smith argues that it is now more important than ever for educational institutions to find ways to bring "conversation and association" into the classroom. Informal educators understand that conversation is the process by which learners explore and enlarge experience. Schools should invite informal educators to serve as "learning mentors" who move beyond the management and accountability roles of teachers and offer interpersonal support and a "vocabulary of hope" to students, families, and the larger school community.

Smith, Thomas E., Roland, Christopher C., Havens, Mark D., and Hoyt, Judith A. (1992). *The Theory and Practice of Challenge Education*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

In an attempt to synthesize "a variety of therapeutic, educational, recreational, rehabilitative, and enrichment strategies," the authors offer a broad-brush review of diverse literatures in such fields as camp education, adventure education, awareness education, somatic education, humanistic education, play education, recreation education, and experiential education. They discuss what they view as the philosophical foundations for challenge education, drawing on principles of existentialism, humanistic psychology, perceptual psychology, confluent education, holistic education, transformation theory, and other related schools of thought. A series of essays at the end of the book raise questions about such contemporary issues as leadership development in the field, corporate experiential training programs, and the design of postsecondary degree programs that focus on adventure learning.

Sutton-Smith, Brian. (1997). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sutton-Smith provides an overview of play theory and argues that, as a concept and practice, play is complex and ambiguous, referring to a host of activities and behaviors. He offers seven "rhetorics" (intellectual frameworks or ways of thinking) that help us to understand the multiple meanings of play: the rhetoric of play as progress (how play helps children to grow); the rhetoric of play as power (sports, athletics, contests); the rhetoric of play as identity (traditional and community celebrations that advance the power and identity of the community of players); the rhetoric of play as the imaginary (e.g., improvisation in literature, drama); the rhetoric of the self (solitary activities, hobbies, aesthetic experiences); and the rhetoric of play as frivolous (actions that are "not work"). Primarily a theoretical discourse, this book dynamically describes the life domains and experiences in which various play dynamics are manifested and valued.

Taylor, Kathleen; Marienau, Catherine; and Fiddler, Morris. (2000). *Developing Adult Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Applying transformational learning theory to the work of adult educators, Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler offer a framework for teaching that draws heavily on the work of Dewey and Kolb (experience and reflection), Mezirow and Brookfield (the role of dialogue in learning; meaning making), and Kegan, Belenky et al., and Daloz (what supports learner growth and change). Chapter 3 offers five “developmental intentions” that educators should employ in order to help learners to experience learning and themselves in fuller, more lasting ways.

Warren, Karen; Sakofs, Mitchell, and Hunt, Jasper (Eds.). (1995). *The Theory of Experiential Education*. Boulder, CO: Association for Experiential Education.

This collection of articles addresses the historical, psychological, social, and psychological foundations of experiential education. Particular emphasis is placed on the contribution of Kurt Hahn (Outward Bound) and other adventure educators, as well as the spiritual dimensions of experiential learning.

<http://wilderdom.com>

According to James Neill, the creator of this website, Wilderdom is “a place or space in which one experiences natural living,” Neill is an Australian researcher about outdoor education who has written extensively about Outward Bound and other wilderness and adventure programs. On the website is a page on experiential learning that links to numerous articles about the philosophy, theory, and practice of experiential education and cites extensive references and resources in the field.

II. Experiential and Informal Jewish Learning

Chazan, Barry. (1991, What is Informal Jewish Education? *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 67, 300-308.

Chazan offers a generic definition for the term informal Jewish education: “Informal Jewish education refers to an approach to Jewish education, the objective of which is to enable people to participate—usually with others—in a diverse series of Jewish life experiences for the inherent value in them. It is aimed at affecting Jewish attitudes and experiences of a person in the present, with the hope that these patterns will continue in the future. It is shaped by some set of Jewish beliefs, values, and behaviors that are deemed desirable, and it implies planning and structuring of settings in order to enable internalization of these beliefs, values, and behaviors. It is an activity that is freely chosen by a person (or his or her proxy) and that is very dependent on that person’s active involvement and positive motivation. It is not effected in any special place, but may happen in a variety of settings and venues. It implies a ‘teaching’ style that is highly interactive and that invites a high degree of participation and self-learning by the ‘student.’”

Chazan, Barry. (2003), The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education. *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, www.infed.org/informaeducation/informal_jewish_education.htm

Chazan articulates eight attributes that characterize informal Jewish education: person-centered Jewish education; centrality of experience; a curriculum of Jewish experiences and values; an interactive process; the group experience; the “culture” of Jewish education; an education that engages; holistic educators. He explains that informal Jewish education is “inherently about affecting the lifestyle and identity of Jews,” and thus must be curricularized to assure that impact. He also asserts that informal Jewish educators “are inherently shapers of Jewish experience and role models of Jewish lifestyle,” and thus must be prepared to foster group loyalty and Jewish awareness. Finally Chazan responds to criticisms of informal Jewish education, arguing that the field is driven by specific content, takes the Jewish canon seriously, can offer substantive teaching of Judaism, has approaches that fully engage and energize the learner, and has talented skillful practitioners who have already set a high standard of practice.

Reimer, Joseph. (2003) A Response to Barry Chazan: The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education. *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, www.infed.org/informaleducation/informal_jewish_education_reply.htm.

In a commentary on Chazan's overview of the field of informal Jewish education, Reimer argues that Chazan's description is more about what the field "ought" to be than what currently exists. Reimer reviews Dewey's insights about the nature of "experience" and argues that informal Jewish educators must think more holistically about what makes an experience truly Jewish and what helps the learner to move from the experience itself to something educational.

Reimer, Joseph. (2007). Beyond More Jews Doing Jewish: Clarifying the Goals of Informal Jewish Education. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 73(1), 5-23, and *Journal of Jewish Education* 73(2). (2007). Special issue devoted to responses to Reimer's Beyond More Jews Doing Jewish.

Reimer addresses the challenges inherent in defining the *goals* of informal Jewish education and argues that educators must have dual goals of both socialization and educating for deeper Jewish understanding—for finding personal meaning by "going deeper" into Judaism. Reimer challenges informal educators to develop strategies and create venues and conditions that are both appealing and Jewishly meaningful for learners.

Eleven scholars and practitioners respond to Reimer's points about socialization and deep Jewish education, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by informal educators who seek to create experiences and/or environments that foster deeper Jewish understanding.

Reimer, Joseph and Bryfman, David. (In press.) What We Know About Experiential Jewish Education. In Roberta Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Bloomberg (Eds.), *What We Now Know About Jewish Education*. Los Angeles: Torah Aura.

Reimer and Bryfman propose that the term "experiential Jewish education" be used to describe "what educators do to promote experientially-based" Jewish education. They hypothesize that experiential Jewish learning should involve goals of recreation, socialization, and challenge, and should aim to "inspire participants to experience Jewish living at its creative best." Citing resources in outdoor education, museum education, and information technology, Reimer and Bryfman encourage educators to more thoughtfully identify the goals of their programs, to develop skilled professionals for the field, and to broaden the venues and activities that engage learners in Jewish education.

Reisman, Bernard. (1990). *Informal Jewish Education in North America*. Report submitted to the Commission on Jewish Education in North America. Cleveland: Mandel Foundation.

Reisman's monograph on the state of informal Jewish education--its historical roots, current practice, professional development challenges, settings, methodologies, and priorities of service--provides a template against which recent developments and debates in the field may be assessed. It identifies the range of settings in which Jewish education occurs and describes the potential impact of informal educational approaches on the deepening of Jewish life and Jewish identity.

Reisman, Bernard, and Reisman, Joel. (2002). *The New Jewish Experiential Book*. Jersey City, NJ: Ktav.

Chapter 2 summarizes the principles of experiential education as they pertain to the learning needs of contemporary American Jews. Reisman and Reisman review recent social forces that make experiential learning methods and settings especially important for today's Jews, but they also note that, to be complete, Jewish education must include a range of instructional approaches that anticipate diverse learner needs. The remainder of this book is devoted to active learning strategies that Jewish educators can incorporate into their educational activities.

Resnick, David. (1993, Fall). What if Formal Jewish Education is Really Informal. *Agenda 3*. 9-14

Resnick reviews Barry Chazan's 1991 article about eight characteristics of informal Jewish education and argues that these elements actually characterize much of what goes on in so-called formal Jewish education venues (supplementary schools) that are, by their nature, voluntary and not focused on deep Jewish learning. He advocates greater integration of formal and informal learning approaches in both supplementary schools and JCCs.

Sh'ma (2001, May). Special issue devoted to informal Jewish education issues.

The emphasis in this issue of *Sh'ma* is on the informal educator and how the Jewish community can support the professional development of this contingent of important set of role models in the world of Jewish education.

Zeldin, Michael. (1989, Fall). Understanding Informal Jewish Education. *Journal of Reform Judaism*, 26-34.

Zeldin describes the elements of education that occur in youth work and contrasts how they are practiced in formal (religious schools) and informal (the National Federation of Temple Youth) settings. He then explains why curriculum development in informal educational settings must move beyond the "scientific management model" and be guided by emergent goals, a broad sense of purpose (especially the purpose of transmitting Jewish culture), and careful attention to the "non academic" outcomes of Jewish education (e.g., how learning relates to lifelong Jewish practice).

Zeldin, Michael. (2006). Making the Magic in Reform Jewish Summer Camps. In M. Lorge & G. Zola, *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Zeldin advocates for more sophisticated programming in Reform Jewish camp settings, noting that camps share important features with day schools in their capacity to strongly impact Jewish identity. He describes three distinctive elements of both settings: charismatic people, intense identification with the group, and ritual reenactment, and builds the case that these elements transcend so-called formal and informal educational settings and methodologies. Camps need to adapt curriculum principles more deliberately in the areas of aims, staff development, planning, and the link between curriculum and desired outcomes. Camps must also help campers to transfer what they learn to their lives back home and to find communal resources that reinforce positive Jewish identity.

Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities

National Society for Experiential Education¹

Regardless of the experiential learning activity, both the experience and the learning are fundamental. In the learning process and in the relationship between the learner and any facilitator(s) of learning, there is a mutual responsibility. All parties are empowered to achieve the principles which follow. Yet, at the same time, the facilitator(s) of learning are expected to take the lead in ensuring both the quality of the learning experience and of the work produced, and in supporting the learner to use the principles, which underlie the pedagogy of experiential education.

1. **Intention:** All parties must be clear from the outset why experience is the chosen approach to the learning that is to take place and to the knowledge that will be demonstrated, applied or result from it. Intention represents the purposefulness that enables experience to become knowledge and, as such, is deeper than the goals, objectives, and activities that define the experience.

2. **Preparedness and Planning:** Participants must ensure that they enter the experience with sufficient foundation to support a successful experience. They must also focus from the earliest stages of the experience/program on the identified intentions, adhering to them as goals, objectives and activities are defined. The resulting plan should include those intentions and be referred to on a regular basis by all parties. At the same time, it should be flexible enough to allow for adaptations as the experience unfolds.

3. **Authenticity:** The experience must have a real world context and/or be useful and meaningful in reference to an applied setting or situation. This means that it should be designed in concert with those who will be affected by or use it, or in response to a real situation.

4. **Reflection:** Reflection is the element that transforms simple experience to a learning experience. For knowledge to be discovered and internalized the learner must test assumptions and hypotheses about the outcomes of decisions and actions taken, then weigh the outcomes against past learning and future implications. This reflective process is integral to all phases of experiential learning, from identifying intention and choosing the experience, to considering preconceptions and observing how they change as the experience unfolds. Reflection is also an essential tool for adjusting the experience and measuring outcomes.

5. **Orientation and Training:** For the full value of the experience to be accessible to both the learner and the learning facilitator(s), and to any involved organizational partners, it is essential that they be prepared with important background information about each other and about the context and environment in which the experience will operate. Once that baseline of knowledge is addressed, ongoing structured development opportunities should also be included to expand the learner's appreciation of the context and skill requirements of her/his work.

6. **Monitoring and Continuous Improvement:** Any learning activity will be dynamic and changing, and the parties involved all bear responsibility for ensuring that the experience, as it is in process, continues to provide the richest learning possible, while affirming the learner. It is important that there be a feedback loop related to learning intentions and quality objectives and that the structure of the experience be sufficiently flexible to permit change in response to what that feedback suggests. While reflection provides input for new hypotheses and knowledge based in documented experience, other strategies for observing progress against intentions and objectives should also be in place. Monitoring and continuous improvement represent the formative evaluation tools.

7. **Assessment and Evaluation:** Outcomes and processes should be systematically documented with regard to initial intentions and quality outcomes. Assessment is a means to develop and refine the specific learning goals and quality objectives identified during the planning stages of the experience, while evaluation provides comprehensive data about the experiential process as a whole and whether it has met the intentions which suggested it.

8. **Acknowledgment:** Recognition of learning and impact occur throughout the experience by way of the reflective and monitoring processes and through reporting, documentation and sharing of accomplishments. All parties to the experience should be included in the recognition of progress and accomplishment. Culminating documentation and celebration of learning and impact help provide closure and sustainability to the experience.

¹ http://www.nsee.org/about_us.htm