

Welcome to Hidden Sparks Without Walls. We will be starting at 8:30pm.

To alleviate background noise and ensure a quiet session, your audio connection has been muted.

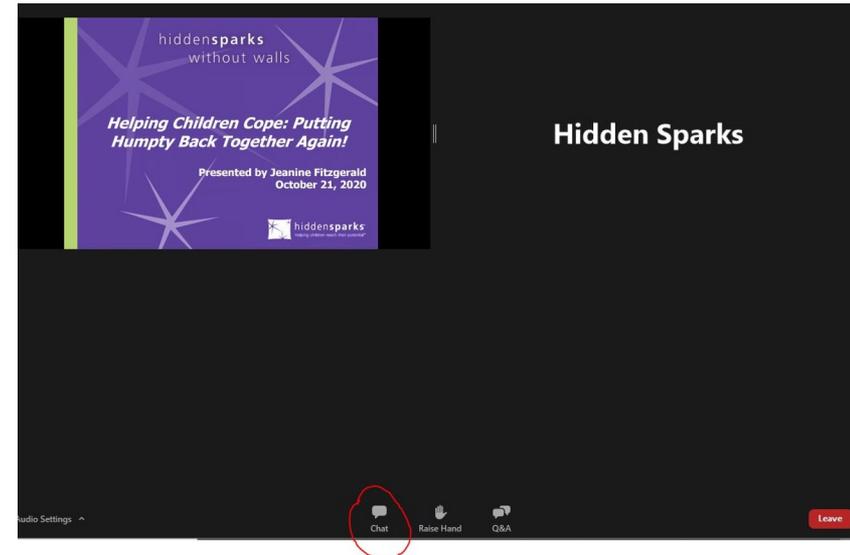
Chat: Asking Questions & Sharing Thoughts

You are encouraged to ask questions and share your thoughts on the chat.

Please activate the chat feature on the bottom of the screen. You may choose to chat to panelists and all attendees or just panelists.

Audio:

If you would like to call in via phone for audio, please look up the call in number, webinar id, and passcode information on your webinar invite.



ABOUT HIDDEN SPARKS

Hidden Sparks helps educators and Jewish day schools nurture the Hidden Spark within each student, facilitating professional development to increase understanding and support for the broad range of learners in the classroom.

Offerings include:

- award-winning **Learning Lenses** course on understanding learning and behavior
- 1:1 **coaching** for teachers
- **Internal** and **Peer Coach mentoring** within schools
- workshop on **Differentiating Instruction**
- **Hidden Sparks Without Walls** webinar series
- **Parent Learning Center (PLC)**

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without walls

From Text to Experience: Bringing Experiential Education into Your Judaic Studies Classroom

Presented by Sarah Gordon
Wednesday, January 7, 2026



hiddensparks
helping children reach their potential™

Our Guest: Sarah Gordon



Sarah Gordon is the VP of Unpacked for Educators, a division of OpenDor Media, where she leads the education team and supports educators around the world in teaching about Israel and Judaism with nuance and confidence.

Previously, Sarah was Director of Israel Guidance and Experiential Education at Ma'ayanot High School, where she taught Talmud, chaired a Contemporary Israel course, and led innovative programming. She studied in Yeshiva University's GPATS program and holds dual Master's degrees in Jewish Education and Modern Jewish History. She is currently pursuing an Ed.D. as a Wexner Fellow. Sarah lives in Teaneck, NJ, with her husband, Nafi Schwarzenberger, and their three children.

Overview of the Session

From Text to Experience: Bringing Experiential Education into Your Judaic Studies Classroom

What might happen if your students could build, reenact, or create experiences from Torah and Jewish life — not just read about them? In this session, we'll define experiential education in Judaic studies and explore best practices for weaving it into your teaching in ways that enhance learning quality and depth. Whether you want to add a single experiential element to a lesson or reimagine an entire unit, you'll leave with practical examples you can adapt for elementary or middle school classes.

Tonight's plan

- Explore the opportunities and challenges of applying experiential education to Judaic Studies
- Look at the research
- Identify best practices for success
- Share practical, classroom ready examples
- Q&A

DEFINING EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

All genuine education comes about through experience.”
— John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938)

Experiential education emphasizes **learning through experience, reflection, and application** rather than passive content delivery.

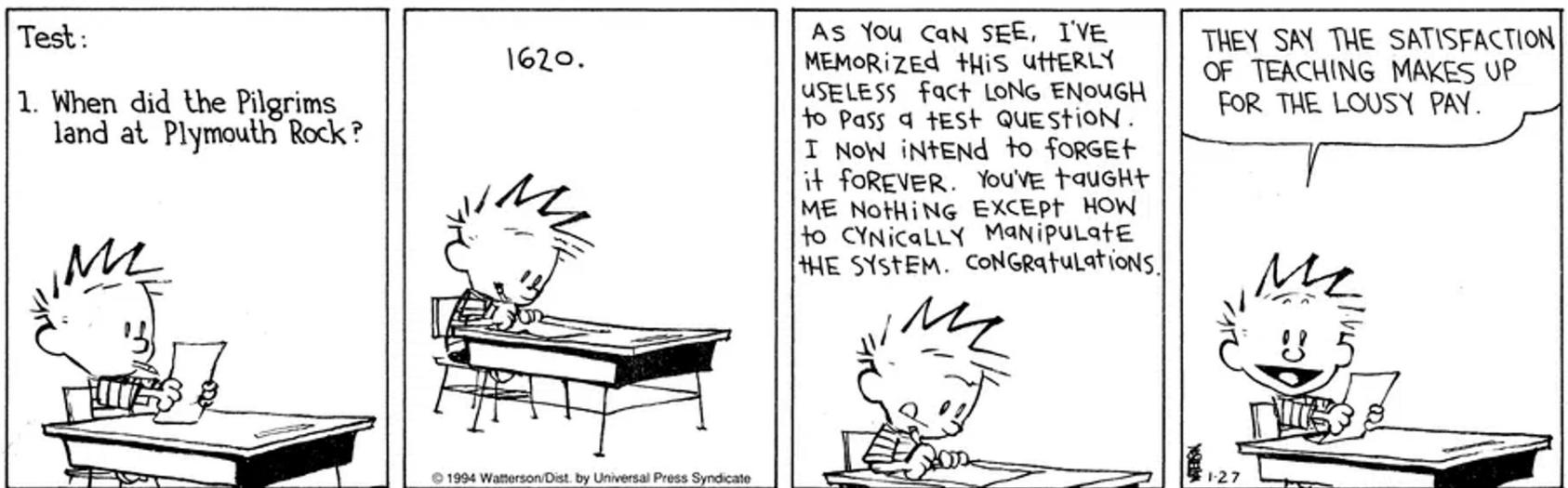
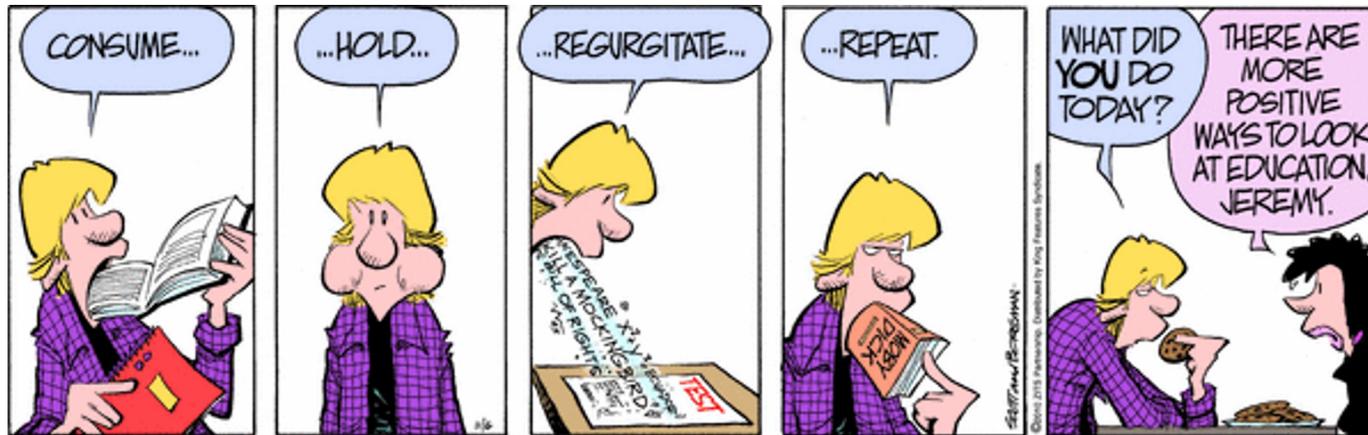
Explore the opportunities and challenges

MENTIMETER QUESTION

What are the challenges and opportunities of bringing experiential education to Judaic Studies?



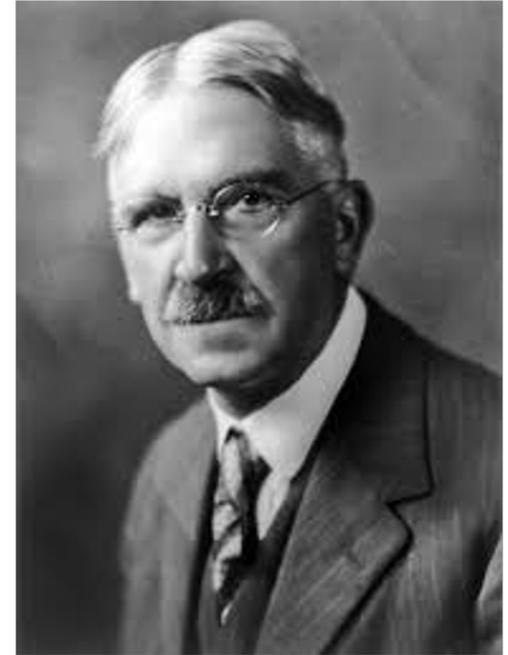
How do our students often experience education?



The power of experiential education

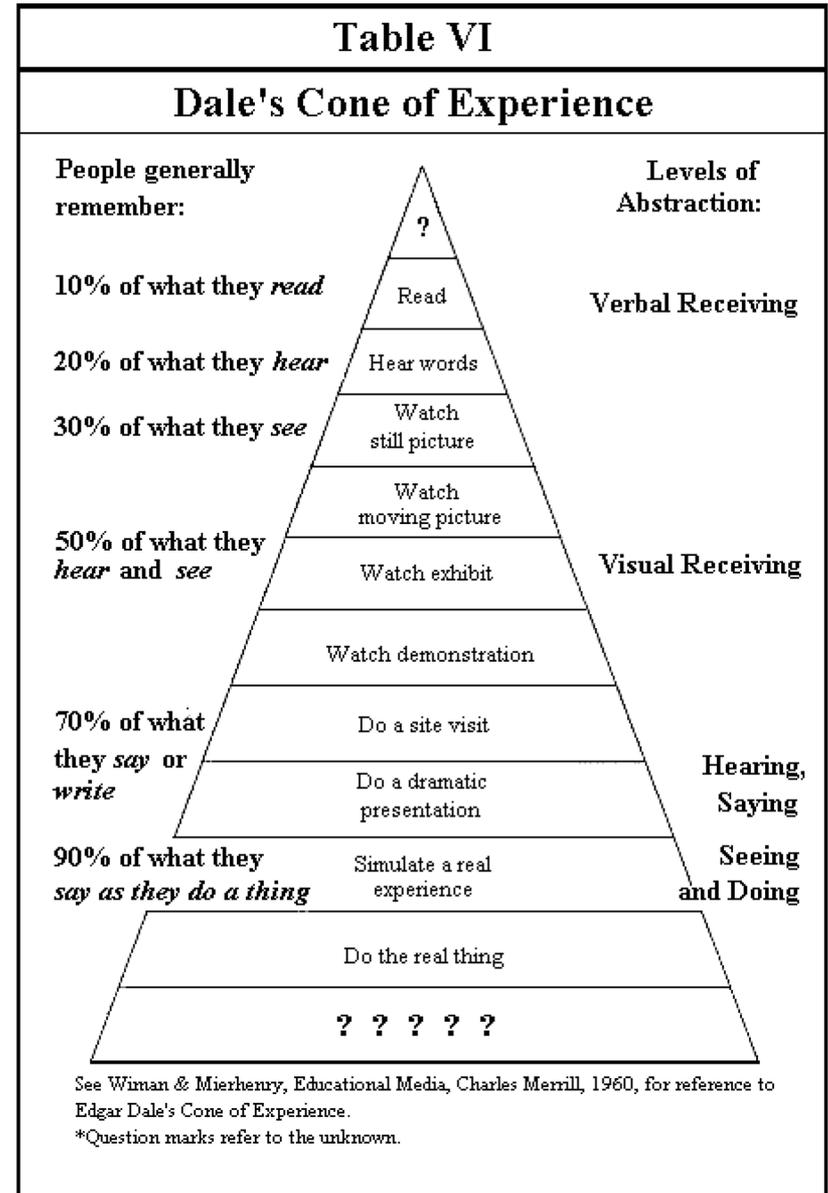
“Give the pupils **something to do**, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; **learning naturally results**”

John Dewey, Democracy and Education, 1916



Looking at the research

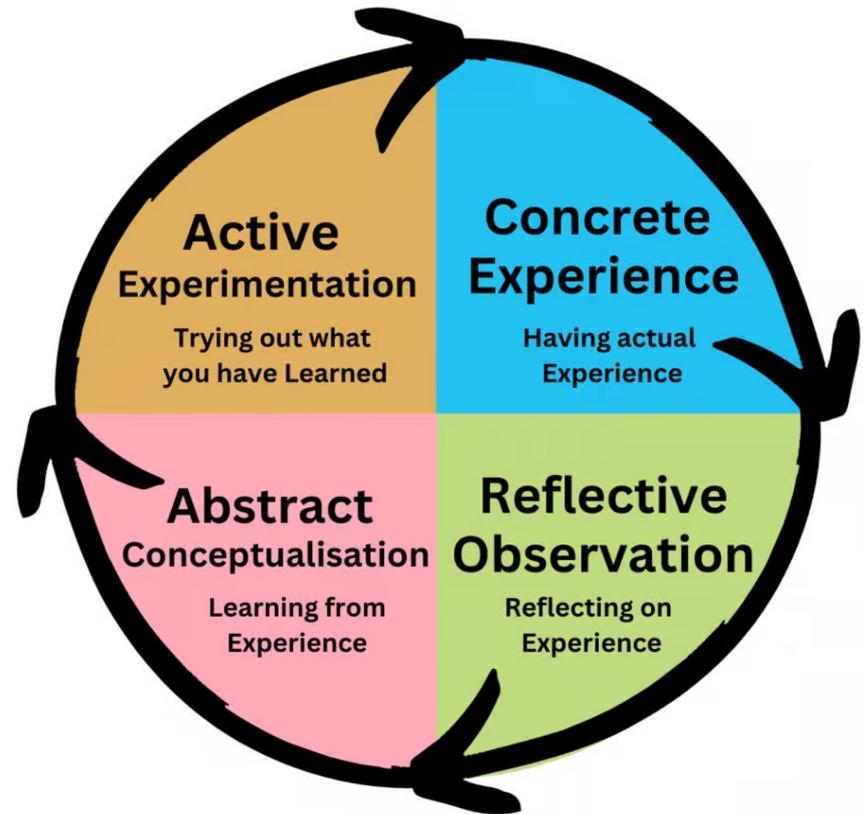
- Students are more engaged
- Students are actively involved in the learning process
- Students retain information better
- Students are more excited about what they are learning



Looking at the research

- Be involved in the experience
- Reflect on it
- Conceptualize it – give it meaning
- Use it in new settings.

Kolb's Learning Cycle



Looking at the research

Experiential education (learning through doing, reflection, application) allows students to learn and express themselves in multiple ways.



Addressing the challenges:

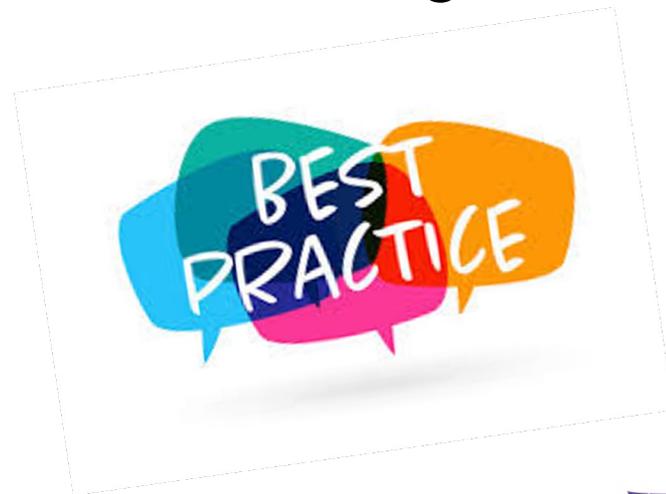
Takes away class time	Worth it for student engagement and what they will remember long term
Class becomes less serious	Experiential/creative learning should not equal chaos
Not my comfort zone	Model trying (and failing-forward) with your students
I'm not creative!	Form a braintrust to help you brainstorm
Judaic Studies: Need to cover ground and in a serious way.	Helps students make meaningful connections between Torah and their personal lives

***Experiential methods **should enhance and not replace learning**

***There should always be **accountability** for experiential learning

Best Practices for Success

1. Define your goals: What are you trying to do?
2. Reflection and rigour
3. Move away from frontal teaching in a manageable way



1. Define your goals - what are you trying to do?

1. Interactive teaching (triggers/checking for understanding):

- Put these values in order
- Gallery walk with giant post it notes
- Mentimeter/Padlet/Think-Pair-Share

2. Experiential lessons:

- Role playing games
- Bringing a concept to life
- Trips



Role Playing Games

1. Terumah game
 2. Create a Jewish community
 3. Avraham and Sarah hosting guests
 4. Jerusalem elections
-
- a. Pre work
 - b. Experience
 - c. Reflection



Bringing a concept to life

1. מצוה בו יותר משלוחו (it's better to a Mitzvah yourself than through an agent - Kiddushin 41a)

2. Yirmiyahu 18:6

a. "הַכִּיּוֹצֵר הַזֶּה לֹא-אוֹכֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת לָכֶם בַּיַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם-ה' הֲנֵה כַחֲמֶר בְּיַד הַיּוֹצֵר כִּן-אַתֶּם בְּיַדִּי בַּיַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל "

b. "O House of Israel, can I not deal with you like this potter?—says GOD. Just like clay in the hands of the potter, so are you in My hands, O House of Israel!"

3. Breishit 6:9

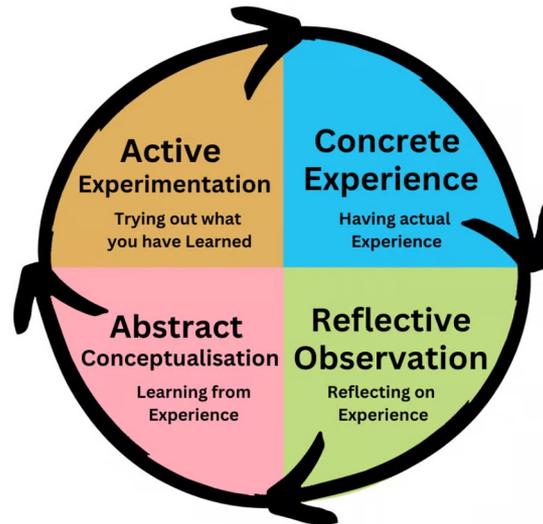
a. "נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו"

b. "Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age"

Trips

1. Scale up and down
2. What learning/texts/framing can you add in advance?
3. What reflection can you add after the experience?

Kolb's Learning Cycle



3. Reflection and rigour

1. Reflection:

- a. Include both written (google forms) and oral (class discussions, exit interviews) reflection
- b. Allows students to reflect on takeaways and apply learning to new experiences

2. Rigour:

- a. Experiential education should always include assessment
- b. Give students the materials needed so that their presentations/creations can be more sophisticated
- c. Use graded rubrics so that expectations are clear

3. Move away from frontal teaching in a manageable way

1. Questions to ask:

- a. "How can this lesson get students further along Dale's Cone of Experience?"
- b. "Do I have to be at the front of the classroom? Can students be doing this?"
- c. "What alternate methods can I integrate into this lesson?" (music, art, moving around the classroom, role playing)

1. Rome wasn't built in a day: Try to change one lesson, or adapt 1-2 aspects of that lesson.

Recap and reflection:

Best practices for success:

1. Define your goals: What are you trying to do?
2. Reflection and rigour
3. Move away from frontal teaching in a manageable way

Reflection

1. What is something that resonated for you?
2. What are you still wondering?

Conclusion:

Talmud Bavli Eruvin 53b

One time I was walking along the path, and I saw a young boy sitting at the crossroads. And I said to him: On which path shall we walk in order to get to the city? He said to me: This path is short and long, and that path is long and short. I walked on the path that was short and long. When I approached the city I found that gardens and orchards surrounded it, and I did not know the trails leading through them to the city.

I went back and met the young boy again and said to him: My son, didn't you tell me that this way is short? He said to me: And didn't I tell you that it is also long?

פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך, וראיתי תינוק יושב על פְּרֵשֶׁת דְּרָכִים. ואמרתי לו: באיזה דרך גלך לעיר? אמר לי: זו קצרה וארוכה, וזו ארוכה וקצרה. והלכתי בקצרה וארוכה, כיון שהגעתי לעיר מצאתי שמקיפין אותה גנות ופרדסים.

חזרתי לאחורי. אמרתי לו: בני, הלא אמרת לי קצרה? אמר לי: ולא אמרת לה ארוכה?

sygordon@gmail.com

Upcoming Hidden Sparks Without Walls Sessions

Monday, February 9, 2026

For Teachers

Using Literacy Strategies to Gain Deep Mathematical Understanding

Presented by Kateri Thunder

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

For Teachers

Strengthening Kriah – Building a Lasting Foundation in Hebrew Reading

Presented by Leah Zoimen

**If you are interested in bringing
Hidden Sparks**

to your school or city, please contact us:

[212-767-7707](tel:212-767-7707) or rabbihus@hiddensparks.org

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