



THE INSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENTIAL JEWISH EDUCATION

M² Circles: The Design of Immersive Experiences

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[2] The Stories We Experience and Tell

[A] Foundations and Assumptions

The theory of narrative identity posits that narrative is essential to our humanity¹. Identity is formed as individuals integrate life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self, providing the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life. This life narrative integrates one's reconstructed past, perceived present, and imagined future. It has characters, episodes, imagery, a setting, plots, and themes and often follows the traditional model of a story, having a beginning (initiating event), middle (an attempt and a consequence), and an end (a result, a resolution, a newfound understanding). Archetypal stories (such as sibling rivalry, favoritism of parents, sacrifice and ambition, happy endings) to which children are exposed, influence their understandings of society and their roles within it and provides them frames within which they can orient themselves in the world – whether for the purpose of adhering to, or rejecting, these stories². Stories form and stand at the foundation of memory, ultimately contributing answers to the question, “Who am I?”³

Within education, experiences are intentionally created for learners, and narratives can (and should) play an essential role in forming the learning experience. A well-constructed narrative at the heart of an educational experience can have a significant impact on the formation of a participant's identity, helping them explore various aspects of themselves in relation to their character, their surrounding and their values. Narratives are also essential in allowing participants make sense of their experiences by recounting the educational experience, and narrating it in a personalized and contextualized way.

In education generally and Jewish education specifically, the opportunity to offer experiences that can impact the formation of identity is prevalent in immersive experiences, allowing educators to offer meaningful experiences beyond the traditional learning environments their learners typically occupy. This initiative offers participants the opportunity to explore the potential that narrative theory has in enriching immersive educational experiences and facilitating the participants retelling of their own stories.

¹ Ricouer, P. Time and Narrative

² Macintyre, A. After Virtue

³ Sacks, J. The Home we build together

Essential Questions

1. How can the curation of compelling narratives ensure that Immersive Experiences have greater impact? What are these narratives and how are they integrated?
2. How can personal narratives help learners contextualize, make meaning and grow from immersive experiences? What skills does this require and when and where are they used?

Goals

1. Understanding why narratives are important for the design of an immersive experience;
2. Learn the principles of narrative structure and apply them to shape an immersive experience;
3. Learn, experiment with and understand the role of self-authorship and the language that can facilitate it;
4. Understand, access and know to use different models in narrative development.

Outcomes

- Participants recognize the role and impact of narrative design in educational experiences.
- Participants understand various types of narrative arcs and how each yield a different result;
- Participants know & have increased capacity to apply narrative structure to their programs;
- Participants recognize the importance of, and have increased capacity to apply, principles of self-authorship.

[B] Narrative Structure

Narrative structure, a literary element, is generally described as the structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a narrative is presented to a reader, listener, or viewer. Many different ways of describing narrative structure can be found in the world of storytelling. The three primary elements of narrative structure that we describe below form a template on which immersive experiences can be built. These three elements are:

1. **Narrative type**⁴ — a style or category of different stories;
2. **Narrative arc**⁵ — the chronological construction of plot in a story;
3. **Narrative shape**⁶ — the emotional trajectory of a story.

Narrative Type

There are a number of different types of stories described in narrative theory. This section will describe four archetypes – otherwise known as genres – that can frame most educational immersive experiences. These four types are classically termed:

⁴ Booker, C. (2004). The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories. [Bloomsbury Publishing PLC](#), London.

⁵

⁶ Vonnegut, K. On the shapes of stories.

- Overcoming the Monster;
- Quest;
- Awakening;
- Tragedy

These archetypes/genres offer distinctly different answers to the following questions:

- What is the story a call to?
- What is the outcome?

Narrative Arc

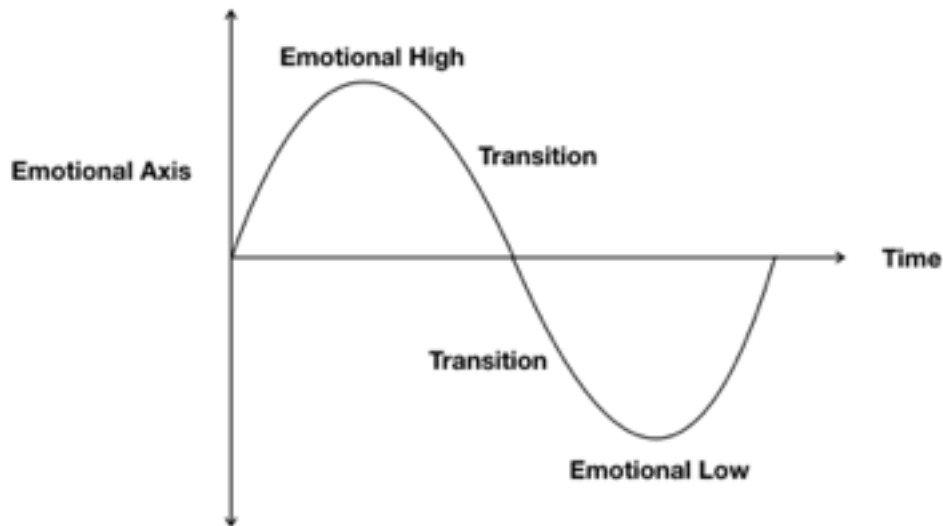
The narrative arc describes the chronological construction of the plot in a story and typically consists of four different stages:

1. Exposition — This is the opening stage of the story. It introduces the main elements of the story including the tone, content and any other information necessary to set the scene. The exposition creates a sense of comfort, familiarity and anticipation.
2. Conflict — A key element of a successful story, conflict triggers a tension in a story that makes it compelling. The conflict allows the viewer to identify and engage with the key issues or themes in the story.
3. Journey — The journey details the chronological stages of the narrative and includes elements such as progress, oscillation, confrontation and success, specifically as they relate to the negotiation of the conflict that triggered them. The journey showcases decisions faced, successes achieved and obstacles encountered. Traditionally, the story leads towards a climactic ending preceded by a severe low point or T-Junction which highlights the core conflict. The journey is characterized by a number of different stages as it progresses. These stages include:
 - a. Outlining the journey in a more detailed and nuanced way and how participants should be prepared as they actually start. The difference between this stage and the exposition is that the first step is actually taken here, where the exposition is really a contextual and conceptual frame.
 - b. Elements of emotional highs or lows or transitions. This stage can be repeated in a number of ways and will depend on the type of story used and the intended outcome.
4. Resolution — The story's end: its resolution of the initial conflict and the outcome / consequence of that resolution.

Narrative Shape

The narrative shape is the emotional arc of the story. It starts with the first step taken and features primarily in the journey. It is characterized by emotional highs and lows and the ways in which the story transitions from one emotional state to another.

1. Positive emotions (highs) include joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love;
2. Negative emotions (lows) include anger, annoyance, sadness, guilt, fear, anxiety, discouragement, despair, apathy, disappointment and frustration;
3. Periods of Transition –describes the stages as the story moves between the emotional highs and lows.



[C] Developing a Narrative

The development of a narrative for immersive experiences is achieved by integrating the three elements of a narrative structure in the most intentional and compelling way. This section will give language to this process through the lens of four narrative types. The process described below does not have to be linear. The educator designing the narrative can enter it at any point and can construct the elements of the story from that starting point. It is also important to stress that although the language used in each genre is distinct to that genre, it is not unique to it. There may be instances where language used in one genre can, and maybe should, be integrated into the structure of a different type of story.

Overcoming the Monster

In this **narrative type** (genre) the protagonist (the learner), seeks to overcome a monster (a significant obstacle) who poses a grave threat. There are victims who are suffering and the hero must slay the monster to save them. The monster can be an external or internal obstacle who must be vanquished. Among many other examples, in educational contexts the monster can take the form of hunger, antisemitism, inequity or apathy. In this category:

- There is a call for the learner to **overcome**;
- The outcome is characterized by a sense of **accomplishment**.

The **narrative arc and shape** within this type of story can be described as follows:

1. Exposition — Offers the possibility and value proposition by overcoming the monster and outlines the **barriers** in achieving success. It sets the parameters for what a successful outcome could look like.

2. Conflict — It can be captured using the following questions: *Can I overcome the monster? Should I be the one to overcome the monster? Why this monster?* These questions are best captured in the conflict between *safety and risk*. The learners might ask themselves whether they should play it safe and not suffer the consequences of overcoming the monster, or risk themselves and their resources to overcome the monster, and suffer the consequences that may result. The learner might also ask where the scope of their responsibility lies in overcoming this monster and what freedom they have to say no.
3. Journey
 - a. Once they know what the task before them entails, the participants' first step in the journey is to assess the resources at their disposal, to orient themselves to the monster, to consider what will make it possible for them to overcome it, and to initially recognize the stakes it involves.
 - b. The journey is then characterized by a series of emotional highs and lows where the feelings of "this is possible and we are going to win" to "this is not possible and why did I set out on this journey" are surfaced. At various points, participants experience different elements of success and failure that constantly resurface these questions.
 - c. Periods of transition are characterized by opportunities to understand what has been achieved and lost, how to face upcoming obstacles, and what still needs to be learned or accessed in order to progress and overcome.
 - d. The final step in the journey is the climax when the monster has been vanquished. The climax is usually preceded by the deepest emotional low where the participant feels that this is not possible and that they are going to lose.
4. Resolution — This is characterized by feelings of strength, empowerment, pride, resilience, endurance and accomplishment in the way that they navigated the ordeal. Inherent in overcoming the monster is the understanding that this was only accomplished by taking action and through confrontation.

Quest

In this narrative type (genre) the protagonist (the learner), sets out to acquire an understanding of something new, locate an important object or to arrive at a certain location (physical or metaphoric). Both the journey and the destination hold a sense of promise and excitement for them. In this genre there are often fellow travelers who are companions and there are a number of ordeals and temptations along the way. In educational terms the quest might be the quest of renewed Jewish identity, Israel, social justice or environmentalism. In this category:

- There is a call to **explore and discover**;
- The outcome is characterized by a sense of **commitment**.

The ***narrative arc and shape*** in this type of story can be described as follows:

1. Exposition — The protagonist either finds it impossible to remain at home or is enticed to go explore and discover (in educational settings, the fact that learners have signed up to a specific program might already constitute as a form of exposition, so long as it is actively named). The exploration and destination are often portrayed as having equal significance. The value proposition describes the worth of the journey and the destination. It sets the parameters for what a successful outcome could look like.
2. Conflict — It can be captured using the following questions: What other journeys could I be on? Will I really find what I am looking for? Is the journey worth what it is that I will find? The tension surfaces through the learner asking themselves whether they possess the courage or the will to undertake this journey and whether they are prepared to risk their time and resources to reach it.
3. Journey
 - a. The participants' first step towards the journey affords them the opportunity to realize what the ultimate destination is, and assess the resources at their disposal in getting there, including the people traveling with them. It also includes the learners orient themselves to the journey and what discovering the destination will be like or feel like – and the stakes involved in reaching it.
 - b. The journey is then characterized by a series of emotional highs and lows characterized by the feelings of “this is not worthwhile” “why am I doing this?” to glimpses of the object and understandings why this is worthwhile. The highs in journey reflect achievements and not just progress towards the destination so that the learner can actually see how the final achievement is really worthwhile. The lows are characterized by obstacles that seem insurmountable, feeling stuck, lack of clarity regarding next steps, distracting temptations and competing opportunities.
 - c. Periods of transition are characterized by opportunities to reflect on what has been achieved, how to face upcoming obstacles, what still needs to be learned or accessed in order to progress and overcome. They can also be used to reflect on the temptations and distractions that may interfere with the journey, and to reflect on the relationship between the journey and the destination. Often, at these moments, participants begin realizing that the journey is as important – if not more important- than the destination itself.
 - d. The final step in the journey is the climax when the destination has been reached or the object acquired. The climax is usually preceded by the deepest emotional low where the participant feels that, after all they have been through, they will not reach the end point; that the losses amounted in the journey outweigh reaching the destination; or simply that the final destination lacks the value promised or envisioned. The climax is characterized by seeing the object acquired as being a real treasure validating the exploration.
4. Resolution — This is characterized by a feeling of commitment to what the journey has given. It includes feelings of insight, conceptualization, ownership and discovery.

Awakening

In this **narrative type** (genre) the protagonist (the learner) either experiences an event that precipitates change or is enticed to change their ways and to become a better or a different person. The protagonist rediscovers or is reawakened to see things differently, to act differently or reorder their priorities. In this category:

- There is a call to **change**;
- The outcome is characterized by the sense of **change**.

The **narrative arc and shape** within this type of story can be described as follows:

1. Exposition — This is the stage that offers the possibility and value proposition of purpose. The first step outlines the dissatisfaction with the current situation and the need to change. The challenge when setting out to make this change is articulating the parameters for what a successful change process and outcome could look like. That can be named as part of the framing.
2. Conflict — It can be captured using the following questions: Can I change? What does the change look like? Do I really want to change? What are my competing commitments? What am I willing to lose in order to gain? The tension can be described through the tension between **hope and despair**, where the hope is for an end to the feeling of dissatisfaction with the anticipation of a better self. The despair describes the anxiety about embarking on a journey where the outcome is not clear, and there is an underlying insecurity about being different at the end. What does that mean for me now? What does that look like? What do I lose?
3. Journey
 - a. The participants' first step towards the journey affords them the opportunity to assess themselves and understand the motivations and purpose of change. This includes articulating what they are dissatisfied with. Embarking on the first step of the journey is categorized in narrative theory as 'the point of no return' - - once I have made myself aware of what needs to change, and begun the process of changing, there is no turning back. This escalates the feelings of insecurity.
 - b. The journey is then characterized by a series of emotional highs and lows where the highs are characterized by moments of excitement, insight and value. Learners see and even experience what a 'changed self' looks like. They are excited and tempted by what they see and experience. The lows are characterized by discomfort, feeling weak, being unsure and insecurity. Learners want to turn back or run away but they also know that what they left behind will never be the same.
 - c. Periods of transition are characterized by opportunities to process what has happened or preparing for the next stage. Change processes require time for highs to settle and for lows to be understood better. Transition periods are essential ensuring good integration and accommodation of the change process. Further, they need to recognize the turmoil participants might be experiencing. They know that there is no way back (what has been done / seen / experienced) can't be undone, but they have not yet reached the desired change.

- d. The final step in the journey is the climax when the change can be felt and is accompanied by an internal realization of the nature of the change and the possibilities that now exist. The climax is usually preceded by the deepest emotional low where the participant feels that change is not possible. Moreover, the climax is typically preceded by the need to finally let go of 'the old me' so that I can fully adopt and embrace 'the new me', which is to say that it is categorized by an enormous sense of loss.
4. Resolution — This is characterized by a feeling of change and contains within it a sense of agency, new identity and a changing status quo. Inherent to change is the understanding that change facilitates a process of becoming which contains infinite possibilities.

Tragedy

In this genre the protagonist seeks to experience without the guarantee of a happy ending. There are people who are suffering and the hero must confront this suffering to really understand. In this category:

- There is a call to **appreciate**;
- The outcome is characterized by the sense of **empathy**.

The **narrative arc** within this type of story can be described as follows:

1. Exposition — This is the stage that offers the protagonist a mirror and a window to their own experiences and the experiences of others. The language of success is shifted to a language of appreciation and catharsis.
2. Conflict — It can be captured using the following questions: Do I have the capacity to empathize and thereby appreciate and understand the real experiences of others? The tension can be described as being either open or closed. Openness allows the learner to connect with the real depth of emotions of others. Closed is an acknowledgement that the depth of emotion can be overwhelming and a need for self-protection. Another conflict can be holding on to a feeling of control in the world contrasted by a feeling of self-resignation that ultimately we are not in control and that is the way life can be experienced and appreciated.
3. Journey
 - a. The journey in tragedy is less about stages and more about the continual process of experiencing accompanied by moments of capacity, being overwhelmed and developing perspective. What emerges are the capacities to hold themselves during emotionally charged moments and to provide emotional space for others. This is contrasted by being overwhelmed and a resignation that control is sometimes an illusion.
 - b. The transitions in this journey can be characterized by periods of reflection but also by recovery and catharsis.
4. Resolution — Acknowledging feelings of gratitude, loss, helplessness, connection to others and compassion. A greater understanding of life accompanied by catharsis and greater empathy for others is achieved.

[D] Pedagogic Considerations

The implementation of this model of narrative structure in building immersive experiences requires a lot of intentionality by the designer of the program in the way that it is used. The different types of story described above are not definitive and can integrate language and concepts from each other. It is possible to use narrative structure as a template for immersive experiences that range anywhere from one hour to one year. This will depend on different definitions of what an immersive experience is. This initiative will focus on immersive experiences between two days and four weeks. This will allow participants to fully understand the model and how to implement before trying it out on more sophisticated and longer programs. In addition, it is important to keep the following considerations in mind:

Time

Programs that differ in time will especially differ in the number and type of emotional arcs that they are able to integrate into their programs. The intense nature of emotional arcs and their stakes means that more should be invested in the quality of each emotional high or low than in their quantity.

Complexity

Programs differ in their complexity relating to the number of themes that they would like to include or the richness of a specific theme. The complexity of a program might impact the number of types of story to include and the resultant shape.

Stakes

Many programs tend to stick to emotional highs and to shy away from the emotional lows. We are claiming that it is imperative to match the emotional lows with the highs for maximal effectiveness. It is also important to note that the shape of the story does not include any flat lines. The transition periods are themselves either precursors to or successors of the next high or low and are never flat. This does not mean that every aspect of a program needs high stakes but programs should avoid flat emotional experiences. These are characterized by feelings such as apathy, indifference, stagnation and boredom.

Group Process

The narrative structure can help shape a group process and can also be shaped by it. The program lead must be cognizant of the group process and decide how to scaffold it into the flow of the program.

[E] Lexicon

What are we talking about when we talk about immersive experiences?

An immersive experience is a deliberately crafted educational experience in which the participant leaves their home environment and enters a new space for the duration of the experience. In this program we will focus on immersive experiences lasting between two days and two months.

Narrative: A sequence that connects and provides meaning to a series of events or experiences. A narrative typically consists of characters, episodes, a setting, plot and themes.

Narrative Theory: A claim that narratives play an essential role in constructing our humanity; that identity is formed by integrating life experiences into a narrative; and that these narratives provide individuals with a sense of coherence, unity and purpose in life.

Narrative arc: A chronological construction of a plot, containing the following components:

- **Exposition:** The opening of a story; equips and prepares the protagonist for the journey.
- **Conflict:** A central tension that will drive the journey forward.
- **Journey:** The process of the story as it unfolds and includes elements of progress, oscillation, confrontation, failure, success and more.
- **Resolution:** The journey's end, often resolving the initial conflict and highlighting its outcomes and consequences.

Genre: A differentiated style or category of narrative. Each genre can be seen as a call to a different purpose. In this program, we will refer to four different genres:

- **Awakening:** A call to be liberated, independent and self-sustaining
- **Tragedy:** A call to cultivate empathy and catharsis
- **Overcoming the Monster:** A call to overcome an evil or a wrong
- **Quest:** A call to acquire something of great value

Narrative shape: The arc of the story characterized by episodes of constriction and release and emotional highs and lows.

Self-authorship: The process through which an individual constructs a narrative, composed of disparate experiences that are organized in an attempt to create a personal sense of order and meaning.

	Awakening	Tragedy	Overcoming the Monster	Quest
The Call to Action	Be liberated, independent and self-sustaining	Release, empathy or catharsis	Overcome an evil or a wrong	Acquire something of great value
Starting Point	Stuck; trapped. dissatisfied; ignorant; lonely	Recognition that ignoring a reality is no longer an option	Recognition that an internal or external threat must be defeated	Awareness that something of great value exists & desire to find it
Process	Recognition of need for change; encounter with experimentation and threats; ultimate liberation	Search for fulfilment; recognition of failure; exposure to destruction; catharsis	Acceptance of the call; confrontations with gains and losses; escalating failures and successes	Challenges and obstacles; allies, peers and threats; ultimate success
Questions	Can I / do I want to change? Will the future be better than the past?	Can I live with this? Why did this happen? What is my role?	Am I strong enough? Why me? Can this evil be defeated?	Will I get there? Is the goal worth the effort? Why am I doing this?
Constriction	Despair, fear, immobility, aversion	Frustration, anger, loss, despair	Tension, threat, fear, apprehension	Disappointment, exhaustion, disillusionment, unattainability, failure
Release	Illumination, clarity, emergence, hope, joy	Understanding, calm	Relaxation, joy, relief, anticipation	Excitement, empowerment, clarity, recovery, accessibility
Ending	Redemption, liberation, greater clarity, renewal	Empathy, acceptance, acknowledgement, gratitude	Accomplishment, possibility, strength, hope, pride	Achievement, satisfaction, commitment, hope

[2] Concept for Immersive Experiences

Seminar 2: The Intentional Design of Immersive Experiences

[A] Introduction

In education generally and Jewish education specifically, immersive experiences are an invaluable tool allowing organizations to offer meaningful experiences beyond the traditional learning environments their learners typically occupy. The overwhelming success of these immersive experiences means that they are now an intrinsic feature of the toolkit of most Jewish educational organizations who tend to supplement their annual calendar with these experiences.

It is difficult to articulate a definitive definition of an immersive experience as there is so much variation in duration, location, content and goals. They are usually signified by a period of predetermined length that can last anywhere from days until one year or more and involve a change of location or setting. Drawing from the disciplines of anthropology and architecture we will describe how this change in location or setting gives immersive experiences its impactful nature.

[B] The Sequence of an Immersive Experience

Immersive educational experiences traditionally follow a three-step process that begins with the participant's **separation** from their original setting, followed by their actual **experience** and culminates in a **return** to their original setting. This sequence is mirrored in the models described in the anthropological theories of Arnold van Gennep¹ and Victor Turner² and their analysis of rites of passage. The sequence they describe through their research follows a formal rite of passage process where younger tribe members become responsible members of their tribes. The process describes these three steps as including **separation** from the tribe, **liminality or anti-structure** where they participate in rituals of socialization into the tribe's norms, and finally **reintegration** back into their tribes.

¹ van Gennep A.

² Turner, V. The Ritual Process

The first step, **separation**, takes the tribe member out of their everyday setting, activities and social relations, while the third step, **reintegration**, ultimately connects them back into society with a different status. It is this middle experiential stage, termed **anti-structure or liminality**, that gives the experience its unique transformative power. These liminal periods are a time when new ideas can be explored and old symbols reinterpreted and they have a sense of **totality** to them where new realities can be experienced on a variety of levels (cognitive, emotional, spiritual, bodily). We are positing that understanding the characteristics of separation, liminality and reintegration as described in anthropology will shed light on the essential features of immersive experiences and the impactful ways of designing them.

Ultimately, the potential of an immersive experience lies in the liminal period that resides in the space between separation and return. The experience in this liminal space is a radical departure from the normal experiences of day to day life and is unique for its capacity to be deeply generative, creative and its ability to impact identity. It is the task of separation to set up the potential of the liminal period and it is through the element of reintegration that it is translated back into the participant's normative setting where its real value can be noticed and evaluated.

[C] Separation, Liminality, and Reintegration

Separation

Separation is the key precursor to liminality and creates the environment for it. Separation is the process by which the key structures preventing liminality are removed. Separation is the mechanism by which the person is taken out of their day to day structures in which identity is traditionally anchored. It is through this separation from one's traditional structures that a different type of learning occurs and impact can happen. It is this separation that creates the **liminal state** of the participant. Separation can be understood as a separation from the participant's:

- Traditional space or setting;
- Access to technology and traditional technological habits;
- Daily routine;
- Social structure and roles;
- Rituals and symbols;
- Traditional cognitive, emotional and behavioral ways of being.

The separation from traditional anchors or structures allows the person to be receptive to different types of experiences in new ways.

Liminality

Liminality (from the word limen – meaning threshold) is the fluid, and sometimes unsettling, state (feeling or experience) one has when in a transitional setting or space. **Liminal states** are created when the subject enters **liminal spaces** or settings as a result of being separated from their traditional social, intellectual, physical and other traditional structures. These spaces facilitate experiences that allow for impact and change in ways that other spaces cannot.

Liminality can be present in different types of subjects (individuals, groups and societies) and can be present in different dimensions³ whether temporal, spatial, affective, cognitive or physical⁴. Examples can include:

- Spatial liminality — a trip to another country, camp, a beach, a stairwell;
- Temporal liminality — sunset, no clocks;
- Physical liminality — hiking;
- Sensual liminality — higher awareness of body (clothes), physical presence, the blind museum;
- Social liminality — lack of titles or professions and new social opportunities;
- Cognitive liminality — exposure to new ideas;
- Emotional liminality — freedom to express more authentic expressions of self (self-states);
- Spiritual liminality — meditative states, synagogue experience.

Liminal states are very subjective and it is not always possible to predict the conditions that lead to it or that sustain it. The working assumption of liminality is that it facilitates learning during experiences that are meaningful and significant for the participant and thus facilitates growth⁵.

Reintegration

Reintegration marks the end of the liminal experience and the return of the participant to their original setting. The end is often marked ritually or symbolically and sets up the conditions for the person to return. It can include other elements such as self-Authorship, reflection and conceptualizations.

³ Thomassen, B. (2009). The Uses and Meanings of Liminality. *International Political Anthropology* 2(1)

⁴ Rattray J. (2016). Affective Dimensions of Liminality. In: Land R., Meyer J.H.F., Flanagan M.T. (eds) *Threshold Concepts in Practice. Educational Futures (Rethinking Theory and Practice)*. SensePublishers, Rotterdam

⁵ Growth is mentioned in the context of learning and includes concepts such as transformation. This framework will be explored in a different concept paper.

[D] Architecture and Liminality

These are a number of concepts in architecture that are most relevant when facilitating the condition for liminality.

Approach

Approach answers the question, how are people drawn into the experience? This describes the beginning of the immersive experience and serves to both emphasize the separation and orient people to the new experience and to a place that you would like to get them. The approach **entices** the person to enter and explore further.

Conceal and Reveal

As people move through their experience there is a real question about how much to show as they proceed. Concealment elicits **curiosity** and allows for twists along the way. People might have a sense about what's coming but concealment preserves the opportunity for surprise when the revelation occurs. Even if it is clear what will be revealed, concealing until the appropriate moment is an important theme. A duplicitous form of concealment is lying and occurs when the person would feel deceived by the reveal.

Positive Tension

Positive tension is the placing of something incongruous to a setting that makes it stand out in a way that can't be avoided and creates a reaction. The line between positive tension and negative tension (when the reaction in the long term is negative) is a subjective one and often boils down to how the majority of people feel about it. If a building surfaces a tension then it is positive. If it draws it to itself and doesn't communicate with its surroundings then its incongruency is negative. The Eiffel tower calls attention to itself (I too am Paris) and also redefines Paris. Positive tension does push boundaries and can be uncomfortable but the aim is to create a situation where removing it would be jarring.

Negative Space

Negative space is defined as the space within, between, and around objects. Learning to see negative spaces is very important for drawing proportions and relationships accurately and for creating compositions that are balanced and unified. Negative space in a composition can help identify the focal point. Negative space is most often neutral or contrasting, focusing our attention on the main subject, the positive shape, and providing a place for the viewer's eye to rest. Without enough negative space, a composition can look busy, with too many distracting elements.

This element asks the question, "how does the space surrounding the building help us understand the building. When you focus on this building what is it you are not focusing on?"

An example is going to Masada and experiencing the top of the mountain without including the impact of the desert. Another classic example is the poem “tourist” by Yehuda Amichai – he points out the missed opportunity of noticing the old man sitting by the arch when focusing on the arch. In immersive experiences, negative space is a useful tool in generating paradigm shifts. What is this program not about?

Awe

Awe can be defined as a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder. It comes about as a response to a vast stimulus and requires accommodation. These stimuli can include:

- Threat
- Beauty
- Ability
- Virtue
- Supernatural encounter

The following can be useful when thinking about awe:

1. Something that is unique or novel;
2. Something extreme;
3. Being exposed to something vast or overwhelming;
4. Being pushed to physical or emotional limits;
5. Visiting a site of great historical importance and meaning;
6. An encounter with something that defies interpretation yet has potential for overwhelming meaning

Exiting the Building

This ends the liminal experience and is connected to the element of reintegration. It brings to a conclusion the development or evolution that has occurred and the awareness that change has happened. It also marks:

- The transformation from one stage to the next;
- A recognition that change has happened and the present/past needs to be preserved, while moving forward at the same time;
- The question about what accommodations needs to happen in the future;
- A closure and conclusion for what transpired.

Name of Concept	What does it do?	What question does it answer?	Expressions (how can it appear?) Descriptors	How do I use it?
Separation (Setting up conditions for liminality prior to the IE)	Separates the person from their traditional structures. Creates space for new learnings. Creates the conditions for liminality	How are the conditions for new learnings created in immersive experiences?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Geographical 2. Technological 3. Social 4. Temporal 5. Rituals 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change the physical setting (space or geography) 2. Disconnect from technology 3. Change hierarchy 4. Change the daily routine 5. Different clothes, norms
Anti-structure (setting up conditions for liminality during the IE)	Facilitates learning from new experiences (novel and familiar)	<p>What is the optimal state for learning to take place in an immersive experience?</p> <p>This is a very subjective category. Liminal conditions precipitate liminality which facilitates learning but cannot guarantee it.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spatial 2. Temporal 3. Physical 4. Sensual 5. Social 6. Cognitive 7. Emotional 8. Spiritual 9. Rituals and symbols 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Activity on a beach 2. Sunset, no clocks 3. Hiking, wall climbing 4. Blind museum 5. Changing group structures (room designations) 6. Introducing new concepts 7. Authentic emotional expressions due to an event 8. Meditation, synagogue experience
Reintegration	Takes the learnings from the immersive experience back into the normative setting	How are learnings from an immersive experience integrated back into the original setting?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-authorship 2. Ritual 3. Symbols 4. Reflection 5. Conceptualization 	Tools to both preserve the experience and integrate it into; Catharsis; Where does this go in my regular setting?

Immersive Experience Design Tools	What does it do?	What question does it answer?	Categories	How do I use it?
Approach	Draws (entices) people into the experience. This is the first experience that the participant has on this immersive program	How are participants drawn into the experience? How should they begin their experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enticing 2. Framing 3. Orientation 4. Sets the tone 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ice-breakers 2. Expectations 3. Opening experience
Conceal and Reveal	It elicits curiosity and momentum. Creates excitement for a reveal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do participants stay interested? 2. How is excitement built for what lies ahead? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curiosity 2. Surprise 3. Appropriate moments or settings 	This dimension allows for build up to a surprising event or builds enough momentum for a reveal that people are aware of. Kotel/ sunrise on Masada/ Yad Vashem
Positive Tension	The placing of something to a setting that is incongruous, makes it stand out and can't be avoided. It creates a disruption and thereby a reaction.	How can different ways of thinking about or connecting to different ideas be introduced?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disruptions 2. Incongruities 3. Tensions 4. Creating space for learning 5. Pushing boundaries 	Visiting a JCC while on March of the Living. Inserting a different narrative (Arab) in an otherwise consistent narrative
Negative Tension	Defines the positive space that is central to the object	How does the negative space help understand the positive space?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limitations of the experience 2. Boundaries 3. Other possibilities 	Standing on Masada and not noticing the desert or Jordan
Awe	Awe is a response to a vast stimulus and requires accommodation	What is an experience that can change the way that life is perceived?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Threat 2. Beauty 3. Ability 4. Virtue 5. Supernatural causality 	Climbing a mountain with a spectacular view. Meeting a real-life hero.
Exiting	Concluding moment for participants	How do participants leave their experience?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Closure 2. Summary 3. Hold onto 4. Pack - take with 	This ends the experience and can capture what was and the potential for what could be

[3] Concept for Immersive Experiences

Seminar 3: Meaning Making in Immersive Experiences

DRAFT

[A] Introduction

This concept paper rests on the following four assumptions about education:

1. It is tasked with assisting its learners with knowledge and skill development, and to make meaning from their learnings. This is especially true regarding experiential Jewish education, in which educators are tasked with carefully crafting unique experiences through which participants come to new understandings about the meaning of Jewish life.
2. The educator has a role in helping their learner/ participant learn from their experiences such that they are able to intentionally explore¹, discover² and articulate³ the meaning in their experiences.
3. Education generally and immersive experiences specifically are opportunities for participants to develop shared meanings in addition to personal ones. This viewpoint recognizes the social nature of immersive experiences and that people have a richer experience of life as a result of social interactions⁴. This premise posits that, although the collective consists of individuals, it is not simply the aggregate sum of them. The stimulating interactions within a community of individuals will produce shared understandings that no individual could have produced by themselves.
4. The goal of an educational meaning making enterprise is to empower participants to discover what has significance for them from an experience and then integrating that meaning into their lives personally and with others.

This concept paper will address these four assumptions by asking the following questions:

¹ This highlights the use of self-exploration and predetermination. As will be explained later, a meaning exploration can be either, with each approach offering opportunities and limitations.

² Surfacing the possibilities of meaning that the experience offers

³ The articulation of their meanings transforms it into personal statements. This is an opportunity to create shared meanings with other participants as a prelude to a vision of community

⁴ Fleck. L. (1979). *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

1. What do we understand by the term meaning?
2. How do we make meaning?
3. How is meaning shared such that it transcends the personal and becomes a community endeavor?
4. What is the role of the educator in the meaning making process?

[B] What do we mean by meaning?

It is often assumed that meaning is conveyed through language. Words have specific definitions, which can be combined into sentences to transmit increasingly complex ideas and information. Language, however, is only a collection of signs, and signs can convey meaning without the presence of words. To take one simple example of a sign, see below:

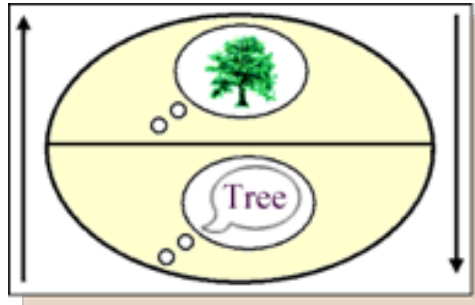


Without resorting to language, the red light expresses to the driver that they must stop as they approach the intersection. If the green light had been lit, this sign would have signaled to the driver that it was appropriate for them to continue through the intersection. In other contexts, a red light or green light may communicate something else, but as part of a traffic light, they convey clear and discernable meanings.

The field of semiotics is dedicated to the study of signs and their meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist and one of the founders of semiotics, theorized that all signs can be broken down into two parts: signifier and signified. The signifier is the concrete form that the sign takes and the signified is the meaning that is associated with that form or image.



A simple example (as shown below) would be the word “tree” which serves as a signifier for vegetation that produces oxygen, has color and is beautiful (the signified).



Ultimately, everything (experiences, signs, events, language) carries meaning where the meaning rests on the experience, sign, event or word (the signified rests on the signifier).

[C] How is meaning made?

Making meaning is an essential part of what it means to be human and the language of signifier and signified helps us understand the relationship between an experience, event, sign or word and the meanings it can have. The use of signs and language is essential for meaning making, and we use them constantly both implicitly and explicitly. The moment something is presented to us, we interpret it with a particular set of meanings. The same is true in reverse. When we give language to an event, experience, sign or word, it becomes invested with clear and defined meaning. It is important to emphasize that meaning making is continually occurring but is not always significant. Assigning significance is an intentional activity that people can do by themselves or through educational facilitation. It is important to note that meaning-making takes place not only the individual level, but is something that we do in concert with others (what is often described as the co-construction of meaning). We discuss and debate with others to reach a consensus about what our experiences mean. On a deep level, we desperately want the meanings we see in the world to be shared with others.

[D] What is the role of the educator in facilitating meaning making?

If everything is almost automatically ascribed explicit or implicit meaning the moment we interact with it, what is the role of educators in facilitating a meaning making process with their participants? The role of the educator is twofold:

1. To offer experiences that hold opportunities for meaning making as per the desired educational goals of that organization or initiative;
2. To help the participant unpack the possible meanings in that experience. This process answers two questions:
 - a. What understandings (signified) does this experience (signifier) offer?
 - b. What significance do the meanings hold for me and then for us? This process offers the opportunity for both personal and shared articulations of meaning.

Using a visit to Masada as our experience (signifier) we will explore the different ways for educators to facilitate a meaning making process with participants:

[1] Starting with the signifier

A visit to Masada is an experience where Masada is the signifier.

1. The trip to Masada can start with either a frame as to possible meanings that Masada holds for people and for the participants to see where different meanings can be found in Masada OR without a frame and for the experience to speak for itself;
2. Following the experience – the facilitator can use different methodologies to facilitate a process of description, reflection, personalization, conceptualization and expression to assist the participants in answering the questions⁵:
 - a. What happened?

The descriptive nature of this question allows the participant to recount the experience in details so that the diverse array of meanings are not lost through memory. Participants should be encouraged to recount what was done, what was seen, what was heard and what was felt?
 - b. What are the possible meanings that this experience could hold (reflection)?

This attaches signified language to Masada. I saw where they committed suicide (heroism), synagogue (tradition), heard screaming from kids (isn't this a holy site), felt cross (why did they die – unjust). This can be done both personally and as a group.
 - c. What significance does this have for me (personalization)?

This moves the participant from understanding to significance. What of the different understandings (signified) are the ones that are meaningful for me?
 - d. The final stage in this approach is to help the participants articulate the ways in which their new-found meanings (signified) can be expressed in different events (signifiers) in their own lives (conceptualization and expression).

This is, to a large extent, a self-exploratory approach to the meaning making process. It strives to help focus participants to possible understandings of the event and then to articulate those that are of particular significance to them.

The opportunities and limitations of this approach

- Allows for personal connection to Masada;
- Allows for a broad range of understandings about Masada – a rich signified language about Masada. This allows for participants to connect based on common understandings or topics of significance

⁵ These are types of processing techniques. Their definitions are found in a separate document

- Limits the possibility to really explore each understanding due to possible time and resource constraints;
- Limits the educator's ability to focus on their agenda.

[2] Starting with the signified

There are two possible ways for this to occur:

1. Assigning predetermined understandings (signified) for Masada (signifier)
 - a. Masada is about courage and heroism;
 - b. After the experience the process from description to expression is facilitated in quite a predetermined way. How can we see Masada as a place of courage and heroism?
2. Using Masada to explore a predetermined theme such as courage
 - a. The focus of this exploration is to develop a more sophisticated articulation of courage using Masada as the site;
 - b. Masada as a site of courage is then framed from the beginning;
 - c. Artefacts on Masada are explored through the frame of courage;
 - d. The process of description to expression is really using Masada to develop understandings and meanings (signified) about courage (signifier).

The opportunities and limitations of this approach

- The educator intentionally integrates the signifier with the signified. The experience and the intention of the educator are clear;
- It can provide a methodology for exploring a predetermined signified over different contexts (exploring the holiness at the Kotel, through prayer, song);
- It can result in participants opting out if the focus is too forced and doesn't allow for alternative meanings;
- The educator must decide in advance what to do with alternative understandings.

[E] Shared Understandings and Shared Significance

The process from description to expression allows for the formation of shared understandings and shared significance as they relate to a participant's experiences. Shared understandings allow for people to know the different possible interpretations as they relate to that signifier. Shared significance allows people to form communities around meanings that have significance for them. In both instances there is not a necessity for agreement but for appreciation and awareness.



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