

Interview with Jodi Mishkin about Experiential Learning and Pitriworld

Intro: Jodi Mishkin has been working with Hebrew Schools for the past 20 years. As a teacher and Youth Director she has been innovative in her approach to Jewish Experiential Learning. Currently she is the computer specialist, Youth Director and Coordinator of JTV (Hebrew High) at Temple Beth Torah, Melville, NY where she has been working for the past eleven years.

Lisa: Hello Jodi and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Please tell us how you first became involved in Jewish Education?

Jodi: Hi, Lisa, it is exciting to be part of your interview here in Pitriworld. I first became involved in Jewish Education in 1990 when the Rabbi of at my Synagogue suggested that I help out in the religious school at our Temple.

Lisa: Great, now how did you become involved in Jewish Experiential Education?

Jodi: My experience working in the religious school gave me the opportunity to become familiar with teaching and reinforced the cultural, religious, and language that I had learned pre Bat Mitzvah. The same Rabbi, recommended that I spend the summer between High School and College as a camp counselor at the URJ Eisner Camp where I spent 3 summers. Once College began I joined the Hillel and a week later, I began teaching at a local synagogue in Hartford, CT. As a teacher in an after school religious school program, I found myself challenged to develop creative lessons and programs that would capture my students attention, motivate them and keep them interested in learning. At first this was a difficult and challenging task. As time went on, I began incorporating a variety of technology into my lessons, using projectors, bringing in lap tops, developing websites and creating videos with my students. This led up to my current job, as the computer specialist Temple Beth Torah.

Lisa: As the computer specialist in a Hebrew School, how have you used technology to enhance and educate the student through technology?

Jodi: This is a good questions Lisa. When presented with the opportunity to install a computer lab at our temple and run it, it was like a dream come true. I knew right off the bat that most facilities that had computers did not have staff with the training and background that I have. I knew that I did not want to use the computers to conduct average internet searches or use drill and practice software completely. Lessons like these can be done independently and at home. I wanted to use Judaism as a topic to enhance my students overall computer skills. Our computer lab services students in 4th – 12th grade. To give you an idea what I do in the lab, is parallel the curriculum with webscaveger hunts, the creation of moc facebook pages on famous Jewish people, blog, create animated cartoons, and introduce teens to Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVE) through Pitriworld.

Lisa: Now, it's my understanding that you are working on a pilot online program in Pitriworld with your JTV (Hebrew High) students. Could you describe this new program?

Jodi: Yes, we are in Pitriworld now! From a generous donation through the ProjectIncite Fellowship I am involved in, I have been given the opportunity to explore Pitriworld as a platform to educate Jewish Teenagers. Pitriworld is an immersive environment where student interact with each other and the environment through the use of avatars. The premise of Pitriworld is the utilization of models teachers can use to teach a variety of content. Our first series of Modules involved specific Jewish content. These modules can be used as they are or can be customized to fit specific needs. The modules will be housed in a virtual library and teachers can purchase each others modules.

Lisa: Can you highlight one of your classes in world and how it engages teen?

Jodi: Yes, last week we did a lesson on "Lashon Hara", each teen played the part of a character trying to find out information from the other characters to determine the truth of the situation. At the end the teens engaged in conversation and on their own made realizations in regards to the concept and ramifications of gossip.

Lisa: How does Pitriworld differ from other multi user virtual environments?

Jodi: Pitriworld is designed specifically for teens and education! Pitriworld is a closed universe in and open sym.

Lisa: How do you navigate individual learning vs. group experience?

Jodi: Well Lisa, that is a good question, Pitriworld has many possibilities, and just like learning in the regular classroom instruction in Pitriworld can be differentiated for individual learners as-well-as some modules will lend itself guided and repeated instruction where individuals can take their time learning, visit, and revisit.

Lisa: A lot of experiential education is based on emotional driven reaction, how do you achieve that via technology?

Jodi: Emotions can be seen through avatar interactions in positioning, body action, change in appearance and clothing as-well-as through chat and voice interactions.

Lisa: Can one have a spiritual experience online?

Jodi: In my opinion spiritual experiences are unique to each individual. However, I do know in other MUVE there are replicas of Synagogues where they hold services, candle lighting ceremonies on Shabbat and for Hanukkah and have a sukkah park.

Lisa: What are your long and short term goals in utilizing Pitriworld?

Jodi: My long term goals are to increase the utilization of Pitriworld by teens at Temple Beth Torah and help introduce Pitriworld to teens in other educational facilities around the United States and the rest of the world. My short term goals are to create usable modules with the help of the founders of Pitriworld, increase my design skills, and expand on the development and incorporation of Israel on our island.

Lisa: It was wonderful meeting with you today inside of Pitriworld. For more information on Pitriworld please check out www.pitriworld.com and friend them on facebook. To check out some of the innovative ways Jodi incorporates computers into Jewish Education and see her Pitriworld blog visit <http://www.computersattbt.blogspot.com/>.

Lisa

I love this interview. Partly because I know Jodi and some of her work and this gives me a greater insight into what she is currently doing and thinking – but also because you are asking great questions that get at the very core of experiential Jewish education. Can you have a spiritual experience online ? what a great question. If only we really knew the answer to that. So, what do you think? Can you? After speaking with Jodi do you feel that this fulfills the criteria for experiential Jewish education?

Thanks for another great piece of work and a really good understanding of the course material as reflected in your interview.

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