

PELE HANDBOOK

**Questions
&
Answers**

WELCOME TO PELE!

In this handbook, you will find answers to the following questions:

- 1. I understand the PELE fellowship aims to prepare constructivist educators. What is constructivism anyhow?**
- 2. What aspects of this program are unique to PELE?**
- 3. As a PELE student, what do I want to know about student teaching?**
- 4. As a PELE student, what do I want to know about coursework?**
- 5. As a PELE student, what do I want to know about field visits?**

I hope you find this handbook helpful and informative.
Please reach out with any questions.

All the best,
Dr. Salomon

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I understand the PELE fellowship aims to prepare constructivist educators. What is constructivism anyhow?

Constructivism is based on the belief that learning best occurs when learners are actively involved in the process of meaning and constructing knowledge as opposed to passively receiving information. Learners are the makers of meaning and knowledge.

“Constructivism is basically a theory which is based on observation and scientific study, about how people learn. It says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences” (Bereiter, 1994).

“In the constructivist classroom, the focus tends to shift from the teacher to the students. The classroom is no longer a place where the teacher ("expert") pours knowledge into passive students, who wait like empty vessels to be filled. In the constructivist model, the students are urged to be actively involved in their own process of learning. The teacher functions more as a facilitator who coaches, mediates, prompts, and helps students develop and assess their understanding, and thereby their learning. And, in the constructivist classroom, both teacher and students think of knowledge not as inert factoids to be memorized, but as a dynamic, everchanging view of the world we live in and the ability to successfully stretch and explore that view” (Olusegun, 2015).

Major characteristics of a constructivist classroom are:

- *the learners are actively involved*
- *the activities are interactive and student-centered*
- *the teacher facilitates a process of learning in which students are encouraged to be responsible and autonomous*
- *there is a focus on collaboration and exchange of ideas*
- *learners research and learn topics on their own and share with the class*
- *students work in groups*

What aspects of this program are unique to PELE?

There are a few characteristics of the PELE program that are unique to the PELE experience and not part of Azrieli's traditional program:

- Cohort Model – The exclusive 10-member cohort model offers a special opportunity for camaraderie, collaboration and friendships.
- Field Visits – Your full-time commitment to the program affords the opportunity to explore different schools through monthly full-day school visits.
- PBL (Problem-Based Learning) course – This is an elective for PELE students that explores a constructivist approach to designing curricula and learning systems.
- Guest Speakers - Various seminars and sessions related to constructivist learning will be offered throughout the school year. These classes will be incorporated into the PEP/Student Teaching Seminar and will meet on select dates that Dr. Shawn's regularly scheduled classes do NOT meet. Schedule of guest speakers and dates will be shared with you.
- Final Project – A final portfolio is the capstone project for Azrieli's traditional students, where students synthesize the learning from all courses into an online portfolio. PELE's final project will be different from Azrieli's. In accordance with constructivist principles, design of the final project will be determined mostly by you, will be a collaborative endeavor, and will call for the synthesis of all learning from your coursework, student teaching and field visits.

PLEASE NOTE: The funding and stipend offered through the PELE fellowship is contingent upon completion of all master's degree requirements. Azrieli reserves the right to revoke funding, or partial funding, should a student fail to satisfactorily complete all aspects of the Azrieli program within six months of the final week of PELE courses.

As a PELE student, what do I want to know about student teaching?

- As a student teacher, you will follow the schedule of your placement school from September - May. Azrieli's January break is not a break from student teaching. Neither are Azrieli breaks for chagim, as you are expected to be in your placement schools on days when school is in session, until mid-May. Student teaching ends after the last week of Spring classes, which is sometime in May.
- Student teachers are to be in their classrooms Wednesday-Friday during the hours confirmed by Mrs. Wasser, PELE Placement Coordinator, and the host school. Absences must be reported to the cooperating teacher and Azrieli supervisor, via email, in advance. While some absences can be made up by completing student teaching at the end of the Spring semester, excessive absences may result in an Incomplete grade for Student Teaching.
- Sometimes, due to calendar needs, Azrieli classes are held on Wednesday or Thursday instead of Monday and Tuesday (see the Academic Calendar). On these days, Dr. Salomon will tell you whether Azrieli will have daytime classes or whether you should go to your placement schools.
- The PEP (Professional Enhancement Program/Student Teaching) Seminar, facilitated by Dr. Shawn, is an opportunity to share, process and reflect on your student teaching experiences. The Seminar meets weekly in the Fall and Spring. On days that Dr. Shawn is not facilitating the seminar, you will have the opportunity to learn more about constructivism from guest lecturers and other Azrieli faculty.
- There should be elements of constructivism in the classrooms where you will be student teaching, but your placement may not be a fully constructivist setting. You'll have the opportunity to discuss if and how what you're experiencing in your student teaching classroom aligns with constructivist principles, in the PEP Seminar.
- You may switch to a different school for the second semester of student teaching. This option is afforded only to PELE students.

As a PELE student, what do I want to know about coursework?

- Azrieli coursework consists of 10 three-credit courses. 7 of these 10 courses are core courses and 3 are electives. One of the 3 electives is unique to the PELE program. This course, called Problem-Based Learning (PBL) will be taken in the Fall or Spring semester. The other 2 electives will be taken next summer.
- About half of your coursework will be taken with your PELE cohort only and the other half will be taken with other Azrieli students. Generally, courses that meet before 6pm are for PELE students only.
- While Azrieli holds a constructivist philosophy, the extent to which courses model constructivist practices and principles will vary.
- Expect this to be a rigorous year of coursework with the understanding that the opportunity you have been afforded as a PELE fellow is special and unique. Please be prepared to, at times, prioritize your schoolwork over other personal needs. You will likely experience some very busy weekends and late nights, as would be expected in a 1-year master's degree fellowship.
- Azrieli has a strict policy regarding Incompletes and it is especially important that PELE students adhere to this policy. As noted in the Azrieli Handbook: *Incomplete grades must be completed within one semester. No student may register with more than one "Incomplete" grade on his/her transcript.*
- Students may take a maximum of ONE Incomplete per semester and may only do so with permission from Dr. Salomon *and* the professor for that course. Students have up to one semester to finish incomplete work. Incompletes that extend beyond one semester become "withdraws" ("W") on the transcript and will need to be retaken at the student's expense.

As a PELE student, what do I want to know about field visits?

- Monthly field visits present the unique opportunity for PELE students to experience the learning systems, cultures, philosophies and educational models of schools throughout the country. One of the major goals of these visits is to see various approaches for applying constructivist, student-centered principles in schools.
- Approximately once a month we will visit schools in the tri-state area. The schedule for each school visit varies and may call for early arrival and/or late dismissal. We recommend you take notes (and, when permitted, take pictures) during these visits and you will share the learning gained from them in your final portfolio.
- You are responsible for all fees related to travel to and from schools in NY & NJ. Travel expenses to schools outside of NY/NJ will be covered by Azrieli. This includes at least one visit to Kohelet Lab School in Philadelphia and approximately two multi-day (2 or 3 days) visits to schools elsewhere in the US (locations to be determined). For multi-day visits, Azrieli will cover travel fees as well as food and lodging expenses.
- While we have yet to confirm this year's roster of school visits, here is last year's calendar of visits to give you a sense for what you might anticipate:
 - **November:** Kohelet Lab School – Philadelphia, PA
 - **December:** Shefa School – New York, NY
 - **January:** California:
 - Innovations Academy – San Diego, Ca
 - High Tech High – San Diego, Ca
 - YULA High School – Los Angeles, Ca
 - Shalhevet High School – Los Angeles, Ca
 - **February:** Luria Academy – Park Slope, NY
 - **March:** The Heschel School – New York, NY
 - **April:** Yeshivat He'Atid – Teaneck, NJ
 - **May:** Netivot Montessori School– East Brunswick, NJ