

**COURSE TITLE:** LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: Utilizing Play & Choice to Enhance Learning in Elementary Classrooms.  
**WA CLOCK HRS:** 30  
**OREGON PDUs:** 30  
**PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48:** 30

**NO. OF CREDITS:** 3 QUARTER CREDITS  
[semester equivalent = 2.00 credits]

**INSTRUCTOR:** Melody Ryser  
melfree9@gmail.com

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Learning through play is a developmentally appropriate and essential activity for young learners. Opportunities for play and choice in elementary classrooms are dwindling, yet there are enormous benefits of utilizing structured play. While it is especially important in preschool and Kindergarten settings, research shows that students up to fifth grade benefit from regular play in their schedules. And best of all: children enjoy and engage easily in it! The slides and videos within this course will:

- Describe what “play” means and the types that might be observed or utilized in the classroom.
- Give suggestions on how to support play in an elementary classroom
- Describe and give examples of how play can benefit social development
- Provide examples of how play can support academic instruction

This course utilizes the fantastic text *Purposeful Play*, by Kristine Mraz, Alison Porcelli, and Cheryl Tyler to guide the understanding of play and its use in elementary classrooms, available for roughly \$22-28 on Amazon.

This course is appropriate for teachers K-5.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Upon completion of this course, participants will have:

- Explored the historical and developmental basis for utilizing play in a classroom.
- Learned about the different types, stages, and elements of play and considered which they have already observed or might observe in a classroom setting.
- Discovered strategies for specifically structuring and supporting playful situations
- Examined the benefit of play on learning.
- Explored ways in which play can support rigorous academic standards
- Modified lesson plans to incorporate student choice, student interest, and playful strategies to support academic and social goals.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Completion of all specified assignments is required for issuance of hours or credit. The Heritage Institute does not award partial credit.

The use of artificial intelligence is not permitted. Assignment responses found to be generated by AI will not be accepted.

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**HOURS EARNED:**

Completing the basic assignments (Section A. Information Acquisition) for this course automatically earns participants their choice of CEUs (Continuing Education Units), Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, or Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours. The Heritage Institute offers CEUs and is an approved provider of Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, and Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours.

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**UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT INFORMATION**

**REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

Continuing Education Quarter credits are awarded by Antioch University Seattle (AUS). AUS requires 75% or better for credit at the 400 level and 85% or better to issue credit at the 500 level. These criteria refer both to the amount and quality of work submitted.

1. Completion of Information Acquisition assignments 30%
  2. Completion of Learning Application assignments 40%
  3. Completion of Integration Paper assignment 30%
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### **CREDIT/NO CREDIT (No Letter Grades or Numeric Equivalents on Transcripts)**

Antioch University Seattle (AUS) Continuing Education Quarter credit is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis; neither letter grades nor numeric equivalents are on a transcript. 400 level credit is equal to a "C" or better, 500 level credit is equal to a "B" or better. This information is on the back of the transcript.

AUS Continuing Education quarter credits may or may not be accepted into degree programs. Prior to registering, determine with your district personnel, department head, or state education office the acceptability of these credits for your purpose.

### **ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION**

#### **REQUIRED TEXT**

Purposeful Play, by Kristine Mraz, Alison Porcelli, & Cheryl Tyler.  
Available for approximately \$22-28 on Amazon

None. All reading is online.

#### **MATERIALS FEE**

None.

### **ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR HOURS OR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

#### **A. INFORMATION ACQUISITION**

Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments.

Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

#### **Assignment #1: Introduction**

Watch my video introduction by using this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/nbjt-PW9YEE>

Then introduce yourself and your motivation for taking this course! Please make sure to include in your introduction:

- Your name and role in education
- The age range you work with
- Your familiarity level and/or experience in utilizing play in a classroom setting

Please include an answer of at least 200 words!

**Note:** All group participants must view the above video.

#### **Assignment #2: Pre-Assessment**

Prior to beginning your learning on the subject matter, please take this brief pre-assessment to see what prior knowledge you have on the subject of play in the classroom.

[Pre-Assessment Link](#)

Please make sure to comment in the submission box to let me know you have completed the pre-assessment! This will ensure it is marked as complete for the course!

**Note:** All group participants must complete the Pre-Assessment test.

### **Assignment #3: What is Play?**

View the first instructional video where I go over the concept of “What is Play?” specifically delving into the definitions of play, types of play, stages, and elements of play. This is the background of what you need to understand to observe and utilize play in your classroom. Video

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/KeUQBS62zAU>

It is encouraged that you also personally review the slideshow as part of your information gathering.

[Slide Link](#)

Now, apply your learning! Utilizing the [Google Document](#) template (please make a copy to edit) or [Word Document](#) template (please download to edit), please explain what types, elements, or stages of play you have observed in your instructional setting. If you have not experienced playful situations in your setting, give examples from other settings or describe what you expect to observe in your instructional setting. Please give as many examples as you like, but no fewer than five. **Please submit document as a PDF.**

**Note:** All group participants must view the above video.

### **Assignment #4: All About Play**

Please read chapters 1-2 in your text Purposeful Play (pages 1-26). This section correlates with the learning we did in our video and slides. After reading, please write a 300+ word reflection explaining your new takeaways from the text. You may respond in the response box, or submit a **pdf document** with your response!

Some suggestions for reflection:

- What stood out to you?
- What was new information to you?

### **Assignment #5: Preparing for Play**

View the instructional video “Preparing for Play.” In this video, I discuss strategies for setting up your classroom, structuring your free choice time, and facilitating play as a teacher. These are tools you can use to begin using play and free choice in your own instructional setting.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/Tzpgwmaq70l>

It is encouraged that you also personally review the slideshow as part of your information gathering.

[Slide Link](#)

Now, apply your learning! Utilizing the [Google Document](#) template (please make a copy to edit) or [Word Document](#) template (please download to edit), please modify a lesson plan or describe how you might modify an existing lesson plan of any subject to incorporate play, or to utilize free choice workshop structure.

**Please submit document as a PDF.**

**Note:** All group participants must view the above video

### **Assignment #6: Creating Playful Environments**

Please read chapter 3 in your text Purposeful Play (pages 27-46). This section is where much of the content from our videos and slides was developed from so there may be some overlap. With that in mind, complete the reading, and then please write a 300+ word reflection explaining your takeaways from the text, video, and slides. You can respond in the response box, or you can submit a **pdf document**.

Some suggestions for reflection:

- What strategies might you begin to try utilizing in your own classroom?
- What are your thoughts on the amount of free choice recommended for students?

### **Assignment #7: Play & Social Development**

View the instructional video “Play and Social Development.” In this video, I discuss how play can be used to support student’s social

development. Specifically, I will go over the concepts of self-regulation, cooperation, collaboration, and empathy and how play can be used to promote each. In early education, and especially with the high SEL needs in today's students, these are important skills to incorporate into your own instructional setting.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/TmWgAIUAFH8>

It is encouraged that you also personally review the slideshow as part of your information gathering.

[Slide Link](#)

Now, apply your learning! Utilizing the [Google Document](#) template (please make a copy to edit) or [Word Document](#) template (please download to edit), describe how you might modify an existing lesson plan of any subject to incorporate play or structured workshop to teach social skills.

**Please submit document as a PDF.**

**Note:** All group participants must view the above video.

### **Assignment #8: Using Play for Social & Emotional Growth**

Please read chapters 4-5 in your text Purposeful Play (pages 50 - 86). This section goes over empathy and collaboration, and how play in the classroom can support student development of both. Complete the reading, and then please write a 300+ word reflection explaining your new takeaways from the text. You may respond in the response box, or submit a pdf document with your response!

Some suggestions for reflection:

- What are some lesson ideas that stood out to you?
- How might you utilize some of the strategies in your own instructional setting?
- Are there any chart/lesson ideas you might modify?

### **Assignment #9: Play & Academic Instruction**

View the instructional video "Play and Academic Instruction." In this video, I discuss how to incorporate play into academic learning. Specifically, I discuss how to utilize student interests, how play can align with the common core standards, and specific strategies for utilizing play in math and literacy. Play can support academic rigor, and you can incorporate these strategies to support lessons you already teach!

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/0vatsaJ5WqY>

It is encouraged that you also personally review the slideshow as part of your information gathering.

[Slide Link](#)

Now, apply your learning! Utilizing the [Google Document](#) template (please make a copy to edit) or [Word Document](#) template (please download to edit), describe how you might modify an existing lesson plan of any subject to incorporate student interest and/or play-based strategies.

**Please submit document as a PDF.**

**Note:** All group participants must view the above video.

### **Assignment #10: The Whole Day Can Feel Playful**

Please read chapters 7-8 in your text Purposeful Play (pages 106 -136). This section goes over student interest and how it can be incorporated into regular instruction to make it more playful. Complete the reading, and then please write a 300+ word reflection explaining your new takeaways from the text. You may respond in the response box, or submit a **pdf document** with your response!

Some suggestions for reflection:

How might you go about gathering information about your student's interests?

What strategies from this section might you incorporate into your own instructional setting?

### **Assignment #11: Post Assessment**

Now that you have finished ALL of the subject matter, please take this brief post assessment to see how your knowledge has grown

through the course!

[Post-Assessment Link](#)

Please make sure to comment in the submission box to let me know you have completed the post-assessment! This will ensure it is marked as complete for the course!

**Note:** All group participants must complete the post-assessment test.

**ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

**B. LEARNING APPLICATION**

In this section, you will apply your learning to your professional situation. This course assumes that most participants are classroom teachers who have access to students. If you do not have a classroom available to you, please contact the instructor for course modifications. Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. ?Feel free to read and respond to others' comments. Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

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**Assignment #12: Supporting Learning through Play:**

Choose two of the following assignments.

(1) Look at the common core standards for your instructional level in mathematics. Pick one standard and create a table of at least 4 examples of each: Ways to utilize materials/the environment in a playful way to support the standard; ways a teacher might facilitate play to support the standard. (Review the slides from Assignment 9 for examples of what is expected).

**AND/OR**

(2) Look at the common core standards for your instructional level in literacy. Pick one standard and create a table of at least 4 examples of each: Ways to utilize materials/the environment in a playful way to support the standard; ways a teacher might facilitate play to support the standard. (Review the slides from Assignment 9 for examples of what is expected).

**AND/OR**

(3) Create a lesson plan utilizing choice workshop structure to teach a social skill. Share the lesson plan (and an image of an accompanying anchor chart, if appropriate).

**Please submit your completed choices as PDF documents.**

**Assignment #13: (500 Level ONLY)**

In addition to the 400-level assignments, choose two (2) of the following assignments.

**Option A)**

Plan and implement free choice workshop structure in your instructional setting twice a week for two weeks. Facilitate play, observe play, and write down your observations. Then write a summary of your observations (at least 3-4 pages).

- What skills did you focus your mini-lessons on?
- What skills did you observe students using?
- What type, stages, or elements of play did you observe?
- Are there any skills you viewed that your students could improve on?
- How might you further address those?
- Do you see the value in the structure on a regular basis?
- Submit your workshop lesson plans and observations.

**AND/OR**

**Option B)**

Observe play in an early-childhood classroom with an established play schedule/routine. Write a 3-4 page letter to the classroom

teacher describing what you observed:

- What skills did you notice the students using?
- What skills did you notice the students maybe needing?
- What did you observe the teacher(s) doing during the time?
- Ask questions about their play time.
- Submit the letter for this assignment.

**AND/OR**

**Option C)**

Assignment of your design, with prior approval of the instructor. Must be an application of your learning from this course.

**Please submit your completed choices as PDF documents.**

**C. INTEGRATION PAPER**

Assignment #14: (Required for 400 and 500 Level)

**SELF REFLECTION & INTEGRATION PAPER**

**(Please do not write this paper until you've completed all of your other assignments)**

Write a 400-500 word Integration Paper answering these 5 questions:

1. What did you learn vs. what you expected to learn from this course?
  2. What aspects of the course were most helpful and why?
  3. What further knowledge and skills in this general area do you feel you need?
  4. How, when and where will you use what you have learned?
  5. How and with what other school or community members might you share what you learned?
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**INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON YOUR WORK:**

Instructors will comment on each assignment. If you do not hear from the instructor within a few days of posting your assignment, please get in touch with them immediately.

**QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING THIS COURSE:**

Melody Ryser, M.Ed., studied Special Education and Elementary Education at Western Washington University, graduating with a dual endorsement and Special Education degree in 2011. She received her Master of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Western Governors University in 2020. Melody also became a National Board Certified teacher in 2018, certifying as an Early Childhood Generalist. She has since supported other educators toward certification as a trained facilitator and cohort leader.

Melody has spent ten years teaching in low-income school districts with a passion for early elementary and primary grades. She constantly renews her passion for education and learning and strives to support her students with new strategies and best practices. Melody is enthusiastic about helping other teachers best support their students, and her experience and expertise will motivate you to try new things in your elementary classroom.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: Utilizing Play & Choice to Enhance Learning in Elementary Classrooms.**

- Aras, S., & Merdin, E. 2020. Play-based teaching practices of Turkish early childhood teachers. Issues in Educational Research, 30(2), 420–434. Retrieved From : <http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/aras.pdf>  
An intriguing research article from Turkey: Their 2020 study found that most teachers recognized and valued the benefits of play, but the pressure of academic rigor has caused implementation to suffer.
- Bodrova, E. 2008. Make-believe play versus academic skills: a Vygotskian approach to today's dilemma of early childhood education. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 16(3), 357–369. Retrieved from: [https://slimgym.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/make-believe\\_play\\_versus\\_academic\\_skills\\_a\\_vygotskian\\_approach\\_to\\_todays\\_dilemma\\_of\\_childhood\\_education\\_bodrova\\_2007.pdf](https://slimgym.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/make-believe_play_versus_academic_skills_a_vygotskian_approach_to_todays_dilemma_of_childhood_education_bodrova_2007.pdf)  
This fantastic article outlines the historical basis of play for learning and specifically the theories of Lev Vygotsky. The article makes a strong argument for utilizing play in the classroom by describing the benefits and characteristics of play in learning and also describing how educators might scaffold and support play in a classroom.

- Brown, S. 2009. *Play, How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. New York, NY: The Avery Group. ISBN 978-1583333785  
This text, from the founder of the National Institute for Play, describes the essential role of play in social skill development, intelligence, development of creativity, problem-solving, and so much more.
- Elkind, D. 2007. *The Power of Play, Learning What Comes Naturally*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press. ISBN 978-0738211107  
This powerful text further supports the essential nature of play and its role in child development. Elkind provides situational examples from studies to show the impact play has, compared to other situations/strategies.
- Leong, D. J., & Bodrova, E. 2012. Assessing and Scaffolding Make-Believe Play. *YC: Young Children*, 67(1), 28–34. Retrieved from: [https://kindergartenab.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/4/0/38404499/assessing\\_and\\_scaffolding\\_make-believe\\_play.pdf](https://kindergartenab.weebly.com/uploads/3/8/4/0/38404499/assessing_and_scaffolding_make-believe_play.pdf)  
In a captivating article, the authors describe imaginative play and its importance in young children's learning. They introduce the acronym PROPELs as a strategy to help educators assess and scaffold children's play.
- Morgan, H. (2011). *Early Childhood Education: History, Theory, and Practice: Vol. 2nd ed.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. ISBN 978-144220743  
A resource covering all aspects of early education, Morgan discusses the history of early childhood education practices, and how play has changed in practice in modern times.
- Mraz, K., Porcelli, A., Tyler, C. 2016. *Purposeful Play: A Teacher's Guide to Igniting Deep & Joyful Learning Across the Day*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN 978-0325077888  
This text serves as a guidebook for structuring successful play workshop in classrooms K-5. Outlining the benefits of play, how it can be utilized, and how it can be set up and supported, this is an essential text for educators wanting to implement play!
- Rendon, T., Gronlund, G. 2017. *Saving Play, Addressing Standards through Play-Based Learning in Preschool and Kindergarten*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press. ISBN 978-1605545301  
This text is another essential for early childhood educators. Authors Rendon & Gronlund provide strategies and resources for connecting and utilizing play in addressing academic standards. As academic rigor pushes play further out of the classroom, this is a must read to ensure both remain in the modern classroom.