

Why We Play: Play in Animals, Children and Adults

Spring 2021

Remote Synchronous

Tuesdays 9:50am-12:50pm

ZOOM

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Office Hours: By appointment	Prerequisites or other limitations:
Mode of Instruction: <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture <input type="checkbox"/> Seminar <input type="checkbox"/> Hybrid <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Other	Permission required: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes

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Course Description

Play has long been accepted as an important part of early childhood and animal development. Recent research has also shown that play, performance and pretending are critical activities throughout the lifespan, and that, far from being in opposition to learning, they are critical to creating environments where children, youth, and adults can engage in the most valuable learning-learning that leads development. Using methods that include participating in improvisational, arts-based, and intellectual play, students will engage in a study of play theories, research, and practice in animals and across the human lifespan and its impact on learning and development across developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, social-emotional, and language) and contexts (e.g., school, family, community organizations, and business/work). Far from being abstract, this course will involve engaging in play as a way of learning about play. Together we will explore the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of play, pretending, and performing for individual and community development.

- ❖ What are play, pretense, and performance?
- ❖ Why are they important to individual, community and species wide development?
- ❖ What does play look like in other species and what can we learn from it?
- ❖ How do young children and animals play? How does it support development?
- ❖ What does play look like once we leave early childhood?
- ❖ How does play support community building and social change?
- ❖ How can we continue to play freely and developmentally?

In this course students will:

- 1) Be able to identify and distinguish between different theories of play, development, and learning and their implications for practice.
- 2) Create play spaces that allow us to explore more about play
- 3) Examine and challenge some of the core assumptions about play and its relationship to other aspects of life and learning
- 4) Expand the types of tools they have for playing and working with animals, children, youth, and adults.

Required text:

Weekly readings will be available online at CANVAS

Course Requirements

- (1) This class is a seminar and workshop course—there is a high expectation of class participation, since our goal will be to co-create our learning together--playfully. It would be a shame, in my opinion, to teach a course on play that did not engage people playfully. But if you think about play, it cannot be created by one person! So, while it will be playful, it will also be rigorous and demanding. Much of the class will take place on zoom, but some of it will be in asynchronous discussion groups, both are considered key places for participation.

Each week we will be engaging in activities that require you to interact with your classmates, work as an ensemble, and perhaps even act in ways that some might consider silly. This will include playful activities of a variety of types. While I will never insist that anyone does any particular activity, your overall participation in these activities is required to be in the class. Similarly, the class will involve weekly whole group and small group discussions that everyone is expected to contribute to. This does not mean everyone has to speak up in every conversation (silence can be a form of participation), but you will be expected to contribute actively to make the conversation successful. Some people will be very comfortable with the playful activities and others with the conversation; everyone is expected to get out of their comfort zone.

One thing to note—some people find it challenging to speak up in class and others find it hard to be quiet and let others speak. Class participation in this class requires that you develop in

whichever of those is harder for you. Our job as a class is to create an environment where everyone can participate.

A note on zooming. My strong preference will be for you to make yourself visible during class, since this is an interactive course and being seen will help us build community and create together. However, I am aware that this is not always possible for either technical or environmental reasons and you will not be penalized in any way for not being seen. That said, whether you are on video or not you will be expected to actively participate in small and whole group discussions and activities. And as a class (including those who do NOT have their video on) we will have to take responsibility for making it possible for everyone to participate in the ways that they can.

(2) Playful Learning/Learningful Play (20% of final grade; 10% group grade and 10% individual):

In this activity, you (and one or more classmates) will design and offer a play-related experience for the class based on one of the assigned readings for the course. Groups will be formed at the end of the second week of the quarter. More detail on this activity is as follows:

- a. Please let me know by Friday January 22 which three weekly topic(s) of our course are of most interest to you (e.g., imaginative play in adulthood or imaginative play with children with special needs). Rank them in order from first to third interest. I will use this information to form groups responsible for each week of our course.
- b. Communicate with your group member(s) and determine which reading(s) from the syllabus you would like to focus on to develop a playful learning/learningful play experience for your classmates and me. You may choose either ONE academic reading (e.g., from a peer-reviewed journal or a book) OR TWO non-academic readings or media (e.g., a blog post or short commentary).
- c. Please determine who the group representative is and have the group representative communicate your group's choice of reading(s) with me no later than January 29.
- d. At least 5 days before the week you are responsible for creating the playful learning/learningful play experience check in with me in order to review your plans. This check-in can be accomplished via e-mail and/or Zoom. You will have approximately 20-30 minutes to offer your playful learning/learningful play experience with 15-20 minutes afterwards to debrief with the class.
- e. On your groups day you will lead the whole class in your playful learning/learningful play experience. *Please note:* This assignment is about engaging your fellow classmates and me in the material and creating the conditions for play and participation, rather than content delivery. THIS IS NOT A POWERPOINT PRESENTATION OR A SUMMARY OF THE READING(S). Your role in this activity is to engage us and ensure there are multiple ways for everyone to contribute.

- f. One week after you implement your activity, **each member** of the group will individually write a brief (400-500 words) reflection that critically explores what you did, how the class responded, and what you learned from the experience.

(3) Play Activities and Blog (20% of final grade)

You will be “required” to participate in, and blog about, 10 play activities of your choosing during the course. I will provide some suggestions of things you can try, but you are invited and encouraged to come up with your own as well. At least half of these activities must be new to you. These activities can include almost anything--from playing touch football, to dressing up in silly costumes and taking a walk, to having a pillow fight to creating a playful environment to have a disagreement. As we will discuss, in many ways play is not one type of activity, but an attitude or way of approaching activities. So, for example, you could choose to play with writing or cooking or even doing your paying job (be careful there). Once you have done the activity you should write a 2-3 (approximately 300 word) paragraph blog post about the experience.

The post should include:

- A description of what the activity and who you did it with.
- Why you chose this activity and why you are calling it play.
- A reflection on the experience and the ways it impacted you.

After your final play activity, you will look back and across all the play activities you have done *and the play activities of one of your classmates* and reflect across all the posts. You will write (2-3 pages) or record (3 minute) a reflection on the play experiences. As part of either format you can include poetry or visual arts. Some possible things to reflect on are: What kind of play was chosen; Who you (and the other person) chose to play with and how that impacted; and what you might take forward into the future. It should also include a reflection on how your understanding of what play is and why we play has changed.

(4) Inquiry Project Portfolio (25% total)

Early in the semester you will choose a question about play that you are interested in exploring (e.g. How is dog play different than cat play or Why do children play dress-up? Or “Can people who hate each other play together?”) I will then create groups of people with related topics (e.g. animal play; educational play for teens; play and democracy). These groups will meet each class session to move the inquiry forward and each person will end up with a project portfolio. For this portfolio, you will create and gather artifacts to demonstrate your learning on your topic. There are four main components designed to capture the processes and products related to your experience.

a. Individual Research Reviews & Analyses (10%)

For your project you will research and review at least five resources (i.e. research articles, books, videos, brochures, artwork, etc.) on your inquiry topic. Each inquiry group will create a

[Padlet](#), a virtual bulletin board, that will be used to maintain your records and to allow you to collaborate with your research team. Here you will review, summarize, and analyze the resources you research. You will be expected to share this bulletin board with your professor and, eventually, with the class so that they may access the wealth of resources you have discovered as well.

b. Inquiry Team Facilitation & Reflection (5%)

Throughout the course, you and your research team will meet to share and discuss your research and resources. For each research team meeting, one person will act as the facilitator for the discussion. This is where you will be able to share your research with each other and discuss the implications for your future practice. For the meeting you are assigned, you will design a playful and engaging process for how you will facilitate the research team discussion. Within two days following the meeting, you will submit a reflection of what was learned and a reflection on effectiveness of the meeting's facilitation overall.

c. Inquiry Project & Presentation (10% group grade)

Through your research team meetings, your group will collaboratively decide on a project and one hour presentation (i.e. art piece, mini-documentary, website, research paper, breakout room discussion, some form of role play or dramatic expression, etc.) that you will use to communicate what you have learned about your topic to your peers in the last week of class. According to the National Coalition for the Core Arts:

“In today’s multimedia society, the arts are the media, and therefore provide powerful and essential means of communication. The arts provide unique symbol systems and metaphors that convey and inform life experience (i.e., the arts are ways of knowing). Artistically literate citizens use a variety of artistic media, symbols and metaphors to independently create and perform work that expresses and communicates their own ideas and are able to respond by analyzing and interpreting the artistic communications of others.”

Therefore, in discussing how you will present your inquiry, you should consider ways in which you could playfully and artistically communicate it to your peers. You should be thoughtful about your choices of media, and the symbolism embedded within your work. You will cooperatively delegate the roles and responsibilities of the project and presentation so that all members of your research team are able to play a part in the creation and presentation of your work (A simple slideshow will not suffice).

(5) Independent Play Project (20% of final grade)

In this activity, you will design and implement an individual final project based on your interests. Whatever you choose, you will need to make it rigorous by including a justification (with references) for why you have made the choices you have made. We will discuss more options and flesh out our ideas through online discussion. Take a risk with this project; try to do something you may not ordinarily do, something that you do not quite feel ready to do. We will support you. Some options include:

- ❖ Create an annotated resource guide of play opportunities for a particular age group,

species or purpose (i.e. dogs, early childhood, teaching math, inter-generational group)

- ❖ Choose an aspect of play theory that was introduced in this course and write a 4-6 page research paper using additional research (other than what was assigned in class) that has been published on this topic.
- ❖ Choose an aspect of play that you are passionate about and make your own 12 minute video/TED talk. It must include evidence of research you have done and examples from practice.
- ❖ Organize a play activity (or activities) inspired by this class for your colleagues, friends, family, nieces and nephews or even pets... Create a presentation on the experience including plans for the experience that includes a rationale based on our class readings and discussions (referenced), artifacts from the experience (could be videotape, photographs, art work created etc.), and a written reflection of the experience.
- ❖ A 4-6 page evaluation of a program or institution that provides play (broadly defined) activities for youth or adults. The evaluation must include a description of the program, an analysis of its quality based on our class discussions and readings, and interviews and conversations with participants and staff.

Grading policy:

These qualities will be valued in your work:

- ❖ Responsiveness to the task or question: Are you fulfilling the requirements of the assignment.
- ❖ Clarity and organization of writing.
- ❖ Conciseness – try to write in a non-repetitious way.
- ❖ Completeness and depth – Present the necessary amount of detail to support your points. Write or present as though your audience is not an expert on your topic and in a way that demonstrates depth of analysis of the topic.
- ❖ Independent judgment – Go beyond the information presented by others. Be critical, seeing both strengths and weaknesses and support opinions with your own reasons.
- ❖ Relevance – Connections between your work and the content and organization of 300:304 should be clear.
- ❖ Attention to professional style – Papers should be typed or word-processed and follow APA format. You can find a good summary of how to use APA format at the following website: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
- ❖ On lateness – If you need an extension of time on an assignment please contact me at least 24 hours before the due date.

Letter Grade Equivalents

90-100	A
86-90	B+
83-86	B
78-82	C+
73-77	C
68-72	D+
60-67	D
Below 60	F

ATTENDANCE

We are living in difficult times—if you encounter any difficulties that might affect your ability to attend or complete assignments please do NOT hesitate to reach out to me.

That said, you are allowed one absence from the class, which we will assume are for good reasons. Beyond that, your final grade will be reduced as indicated: 2 absences--reduction of 1/2 grade; 3 absences--reduction of full grade; 4 absences--failing grade in course.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity: Make sure that you provide proper citations for all materials that you use in all written work. Any violation of academic honesty is a serious offense and is therefore subject to an appropriate penalty. Refer to <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/> for a full explanation of policies.

Important Note: This syllabus, along with course assignments and due dates, are subject to change. It is the student's responsibility to check CANVAS for corrections or updates to the syllabus. Any changes will be clearly noted in course announcement or through CANVAS email.

Course Schedule by Weekly Modules

Topic	Date	Topic and Questions	Reading Assignment
Intro to the Course and Each Other	1/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your play history? • What are your theories about play? • What are you curious about play? • Who is our play ensemble? • How will this course work 	
What is Play? Why does it matter?	1/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is play? • Traditional theories of play • How do the leading theories about play effect our lives? • What is the relationship between play and learning and development? 	<p>Huizinga, J. <i>Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon.</i></p> <p>Piaget, J Explanation of Play in <i>Play, Dreams and Imagination</i></p> <p>Vygotsky, L. "Play and Development" in <i>Mind and Society</i></p> <p>Grey, P. (2014). The Decline of Play https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bg-GEzM7iTk</p>

<p>What is Play? Why does it matter?</p>	<p>2/2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does play help us adapt? Or innovate? Or both? • What happens to play after early childhood? Does it matter? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holzman, L <i>Play Helps Us Grow at Any Age</i> • <i>Sir Ken Robinson: Do Schools Kill Creativity</i> https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity?language=en
<p>Playing, Pretending and Becoming: Why do Young Children Play?</p>	<p>2/9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assimilation, Adaptation, and Revolutionary Activity—what are young children doing when they play? • What can we learn/discover from the play of young children? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bodrova, E., & Leong, D.L. (2003, April). The importance of being playful. <i>Educational Leadership</i>, 60(7), 50-53. • Stetsenko, A., & Ho, P. C. G. (2015). The Serious Joy and the Joyful Work of Play: Children Becoming Agentive Actors in Co-Authoring Themselves and Their World Through Play. <i>International Journal of Early Childhood</i>, 47(2), 221–234. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-015-0141-1 • Nicolopoulou, A., Barbos de Sá, A., Ilgaz, H., & Brockmeyer, C. (2010, January- March). Using the transformative power of play to educate hearts and minds: From Vygotsky to Vivian Paley and beyond. <i>Mind, Culture, and Activity: An International Journal</i>, 17(1), 42-58.

From Stage Manager to Co-Player: Supporting the Play of Young Children	2/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we support young children to keep playing? • Play on a Continuum of Child and Adult Directed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paley, V. G. (1981). <i>Wally's stories: Conversations in the kindergarten</i>. Foreword and pp 10-12, 158-162. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. • Lobman, C. (2003). The BUGS are coming! <i>Young Children</i>, 58(3).
Playing to Learn and Learning to Play: Play in Middle Childhood	2/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule governed vs. Rule Created Play • Play in School and Out • The relationship between the arts and playfulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sir Ken Robinson Changing Education Paradigms https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms • Baumer, S., Ferholt, B., & Lecusay, R. (2005). Promoting narrative competence through adult-child joint pretense: Lessons from the Scandinavian educational practice of playworld. <i>Cognitive Development</i>, 20(4), 576-590. • Sierra, Z. (2000). Play for real: Understanding middle school children's dramatic play. <i>Youth Theatre Journal</i>, 14, 1-12. • Schwartz, K. (2014). How Integrating Arts Into Other Subjects Makes Learning Come Alive MindShift. <i>KQED - Mind/Shift Blog</i>, 1-7. Retrieved from http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/2015/01/how-integrating-arts-into-other-subjects-makes-learning-come-alive/

<p>Play and Adolescence: The role of Outside of School</p>	<p>3/2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play, inequities and development in adolescence • Play and outside of school development • Are video games bad for us? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobman, C. (2017): Performing on a wider stage: Developing inner-city youth through play and performance. <i>Mind, Culture, and Activity</i>, 24(3), 217-231. DOI: 10.1080/10749039.2017.131567 • Childress, H. (1998) Seventeen Reasons Why Football is Better Than High School. <i>Phi Delta Kappan</i> Retrieved from: http://www.umich.edu/~psycours/561/childress.htm • Granic, I., Lobel, A., & Engels, R. C. (2014). The benefits of playing video games. <i>American psychologist</i>, 69(1), 66. • Grey, P. (2020) http://unschoolingdads.com/many-benefits-kids-playing-video-games • Adachi, P. J., & Willoughby, T. (2017). The link between playing video games and positive youth outcomes. <i>Child Development Perspectives</i>, 11(3), 202-206
<p>Play <i>in</i> and <i>with</i> Non-Human Animals</p>	<p>3/9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do non-human animals play? • Why? Theories of why animals play? • Unusual Friendships • What can we learn/be inspired by with animal play? • How do humans and animals co-play? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/so-you-think-you-know-why-animals-play/ • https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/2/150219-crocodiles-playing-animals-science-behavior-fun/#close • Animals Like Us https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WImKDJuaCmU

<p>Play Across the Lifespan</p>	<p>3/23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does play continue as we become adults? Transform? Why? • What role does play have in ongoing development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DeKoven, B. (2017) https://www.deepfun.com/adult-play-actually/ • Göncü, A. & Perone, A. (2005). Pretend play as a life-span activity. <i>Topoi</i>, 24, 137-147.
<p>Playing Around with Crisis</p> <p>Guest: Cathy Salit and others from the Global Play Brigade</p>	<p>3/30</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has play survived or thrived during the pandemic? • What role does play have in keeping the world together? • Creating new kinds of playful organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friedman, D. (2016). Something New Under the Sun • Lobman, C. & Rich, M. (under review). Creating Community and Building Connection Through Play: An Improvisational Response to the Global Pandemic. Submitted for publication to the <i>International Journal of Play</i>.
<p>Play and Mental Health</p> <p>Guest: Murray Dabby, Atlanta Center for Social Therapy</p>	<p>4/6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are people discovering about play and mental health? • Is there anything too serious to play with? • Can you play with emotional pain? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holzman, L. (2014) "Vygotskian-izing" Psychotherapy. <i>Mind, Culture, and Activity</i>, 21(3), 184-199, DOI: 10.1080/10749039.2013.828312 • Joseph, G. (2013, November 10). <i>How pretending to be a gorilla can help veterans with PTSD</i>. Retrieved from http://www.channel4.com/news/ptsd-improv-comedy-war-vets-combat-stress-act-resilient • Todhill, K. (2015, September 11). So funny it doesn't hurt. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/09/comedy-improv-anxiety/403933/ • Wong, J. (2013, November). 'Improv is a safe space': Laughs help treat mental health issues. Retrieved from http://globalnews.ca/news/978525/improv-is-a-safe-space-laughs-help-treat-mental-health-issues/

<p>Play and Democracy</p> <p>Guest: Don Waisanman, Baruch College</p>	<p>4/13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we have democracy without playfulness? • The politics of being weird • Improv and Democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DeKoven, Bernie (20xx). The politics of public playfulness. https://www.aplayfulpath.com/ • Waisanman, D. (2020).
<p>Play and Philosophyzing</p> <p>Guest: Chris Helm, Fashion Institute of Technology and The East Side Institute</p>	<p>4/20</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking big questions about little things • Philosophyzing as a way of creating one's life • Being in history and society at the same time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newman, F. (1996). Philosophyzing from POAL • Something from Wittgenstein
<p>Play at Work</p> <p>Final Class</p>	<p>4/27</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are play and work opposites? • Can we develop at work? • What does being weird have to do with working? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown, T. (2008, May) Tales of creativity and play. [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/tim_brown_on_creativity_and_play • Salit, C.R. (2016). <i>Performance breakthrough: A radical approach to success at work</i>. Chapter 1. New York: Hachette Books.

