

University of Texas at El Paso  
Art Education 3397: Special Topics in Art Education  
(Play as Inquiry in Art, Art Education, and Childhood)  
Spring 2026\*



Jeff Koons, Play-Doh, 2014

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**Course Information**

Course Title: Special Topics in Art Education

Course Subtitle: Play as Inquiry in Art, Art Education, and Childhood

Course prefix and number: ARTE 3397

Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday 6:00- 9:00pm

Location: Fox Fine Arts Building, Room A463

**Instructor Information**

Course Instructor: Heather Kaplan

Email: hgkaplan@utep.edu

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11:00am – 12:00pm and by appointment

Office location: Fox Fine Arts Building, Room A461

## **Course Description**

This course explores play as a vital, affective mode of inquiry, creativity, and connection. Through studying playful and play-based works of art, we will consider how artists and educators use play to question, imagine, and engage with the world. Students will examine the role of play in childhood and artmaking through readings, reflections, and observation, while experimenting with their own playful processes.

In this class, we will play in the studio, in our thinking, and in our collaborations. Students will create artworks that respond to the artists and ideas we encounter and together we will design and facilitate a playful experience for children and their families. By the end of the course, participants will develop a deeper understanding of play as both a creative strategy and a form of inquiry that deepens artmaking practices, supports art education pedagogy, and builds connections.

## **Course Prerequisites**

ARTE 2307 is a prerequisite or may be taken concurrently with this course.

## **Course Goals and Objectives**

1. Students will be able to identify, analyze, and apply different kinds of play in the work of artists, their artwork, and in the art classroom.
2. Students will be able to express the relational and affective qualities of play through the creation of an original toy.
3. Students will be able to consider the connections between art, play, and the art classroom and to design strategies for playful, explorative artmaking in their future educational spaces.
4. Students will be able to analyze play strategies in a museum site. Students will be able to design and implement playful STEAM instruction.
5. Students will be able to document their learning to build deeper, reflective connections between content and experience.

## **Course Outcomes**

1. Students will identify and explore different kinds of play in the work of artists, in their work, and as it applies to the art classroom.
2. Students will create an original toy that applies and tests the affective, relational qualities of play.
3. Students will research and plan for the inclusion of play in (art) educational spaces.
4. Students will observe and catalogue strategies of educational play at a local children's museum and utilize these strategies to design and implement a playful STEAM instruction.
5. Students will document their play explorations throughout the semester utilizing a visual journal that will be used to support reflective, connection making.

## **Course Texts (will be provided)**

TBA

## **Technology Requirements**

Up to 49% of course content may be delivered online. This means that some of the course content will be delivered via the Internet through the Blackboard learning management system. Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the web and a stable web browser. Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications. When having technical difficulties, update your browser, clear your cache, or try switching to another browser.

You will need to have access to a computer/laptop, scanner, a webcam, and a microphone. Check that your computer hardware and software are up-to-date and able to access all parts of the course.

If you do not have word-processing software, you can download Word and other Microsoft Office programs (including Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more) for free via [UTEP's Microsoft Office Portal](#). Click the following link for more information about Microsoft Office 365 and follow the instructions.

IMPORTANT: If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the UTEP [Help Desk](#) as they are trained specifically in assisting with technological needs of students.

## **Course Communication**

Communication in this class may take many forms including in-person communication, email, Blackboard discussion, or zoom meetings. Below a variety of methods of communication are enumerated:

- Office Hours: My office hours will be by appointment and most Tuesdays or Thursdays 11:00am to noon. Please make an appointment as I may be working with a student teacher and my schedule may vary. I am also available to meet via Zoom at other times. Please email me to set up an appointment.
- Email: For this course, UTEP email is used as a primary means of communicating with students. Email is sent to UTEP accounts. It is the student's responsibility to check email or forward emails to an account that he or she checks regularly. Please do not utilize the message function on blackboard in the place of university email. UTEP e-mail is the best way to contact me. I will make every attempt to respond to your e-mail within 24-48 hours of receipt. When emailing me, be sure to email from your UTEP student account. In the body of your e-mail, clearly state your question. At the end of your e-mail, be sure to put your first and last name. Please DO NOT email assignments- unless otherwise indicated assignments should be submitted to blackboard.
- Discussion Board: Course content may occur on blackboard discussion boards. Please use professional etiquette when participating on discussion boards.
- Announcements: Check the Blackboard announcements for any updates, deadlines, or other important messages.

## **Modeling Professionalism and Netiquette**

You are expected to always maintain professional conduct in the class. This includes being on time to class meetings. Respect for all members of the class is expected. Please allow for individual differences and opinions. As we know, sometimes communication can be challenging. Especially online, it's possible to miscommunicate what we mean or to misunderstand what our classmates mean given the lack of body language and immediate feedback. Therefore, please keep these class and netiquette (network etiquette) guidelines in mind. Failure to observe them may result in disciplinary action.

- Always consider audience. All communication should reflect polite consideration of other's ideas.
- Respect and courtesy to classmates and to the instructor is expected. No harassment or inappropriate comments will be tolerated.
- Blackboard is not a public internet venue; all postings to it should be considered private and confidential. Whatever is posted in these online spaces is intended for classmates and professor only. Please do not copy documents and paste them to a publicly accessible website, blog, or other space.
- Synchronous zoom meetings may be held in lieu of in person discussions/lectures and/or will constitute office hours. During zoom meetings please turn on the video and mute your microphone unless you are actively speaking. When breakout rooms are used, please follow these protocols.

## **Attendance and Participation**

Regular class attendance is expected. For each absence after the second (2) absence your grade will be lowered one letter grade (A to B). Three (3) incidents of tardiness or leaving class early equals one absence. Attendance in the course is determined by participation in the learning activities of the course. Your participation in the course is important not only for your learning and success but also to create a community of learners. Participation is determined by completion of the following activities:

- Reading/Viewing all course materials to ensure understanding of assignment requirements
- Participating/ engaging in discussion with your peers on the discussion boards
- Participating in scheduled Blackboard Collaborate sessions
- Participating in classroom activities and discussions

Active participation is an important component of any studio or art-based environment. You will be expected to come prepared for class, to participate in class discussion and to share your work while contributing to an atmosphere where others may share and participate in turn. Should these issues become problematic, the instructor reserves the right to deduct a letter grade from the final grade calculation.

### **Missed Assignments**

It is the responsibility of the student to be in class to complete course work. Should you miss class it is your responsibility to complete the work missed or to propose and complete a similar assignment. The instructor must approve any proposed makeup assignment. Please make an appointment outside of class time to discuss missed work.

### **Late Assignments**

Instructor reserves the right to assign lower grades on late assignments. Work submitted after initial grading will have 10-25% reduction in points.

### **Working and Preparedness for Class**

You will be expected to come prepared for class (bringing all necessary supplies, projects, and readings) and be ready to work. On workdays you will be engaged and working. If you come unprepared to work or do not work during the entire time allotted 10-25% of the points possible for the project will be deducted.

### **Email**

For this course, email is used as a primary means of communicating with students. Email is sent to UTEP accounts. It is the student's responsibility to check email or forward emails to an account that he or she checks regularly. Please DO NOT email assignments, they will not be accepted.

### **Course Drop Policy**

I will not drop you from the course. However, if you feel that you are unable to complete the course successfully, please let me know and then contact the Registrar's Office to initiate the drop process. If you do not, you are at risk of receiving an "F" for the course.

### **In Person and Synchronous Online Meetings**

Typically, this class will meet in person. It is possible (especially in emergency situations) that this class may require that you participate in scheduled synchronous online class sessions. During these online sessions we will use zoom; however, please be flexible as issues or changes with the technology may require that we switch to Microsoft Teams or Blackboard collaborate (both of which should be available through the blackboard website). The purpose of these sessions is for you to view live demonstrations of the course material and/or to participate in small discussion groups with your classmates. These sessions will be held during our scheduled class time.

### **AI Policy: AI allowed only with prior permission from instructor**

Use of AI technologies or automated tools, particularly generative AI such as [ChatGPT](#) or [DALL-E](#), is only allowed with approval from the instructor BEFORE being used. Without permission, you will be expected to think creatively and critically to complete assignments without assistance from these tools.

If given permission to use any of these tools, students must provide an explanatory paragraph describing how the tool was used for the assignment AND the student must properly cite and give full credit to the program used upon submission of every relevant assignment. For example, text generated using ChatGPT must be cited:

Chat-GPT (version). Date of query (year/month/day). "Text of your query."

Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>

Failure to provide either an explanatory paragraph or citation will result in a zero for the assignment.

### **Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty Statement**

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as ones' own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please visit HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline.

### **Accommodations Statement**

The university is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of university programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. I will work with students through CASS to make reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities. Students requesting an accommodation based on a disability must register with the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, or email them at [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu), or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal. Once you have met with CASS, please meet privately to discuss how I can support your academic achievement.

### **Student Pregnancy and Parenting Nondiscrimination Policy**

The University of Texas at El Paso (University) is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discrimination of pregnant or parenting students in accordance

with the Texas Education Code, Section 51.982 and other applicable laws, such as Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (including pregnancy discrimination) in education programs or activities; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability (including disabilities based on temporary medical conditions from pregnancy); and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in public schools such as institutions of higher education.

### **Grade Distribution and Criteria**

All grades are calculated using percentages and converted into letter grades according to the following scale:

- A = 100 – 90
- B = 89 – 80
- C = 79 – 70
- D = 69 – 60
- F = 59 and below

Your grade will be determined across an array of activities and skills. You will be graded on participation, written reflections, lesson plans and assessments, performance-based assessments of instruction, curriculum creation and planning, pedagogical activities and your reflection and assessment of your own pedagogical practice.

The following is a general outline of the grade distribution (which is subject to change based on the needs of this class – additional determinations will be made based on the emergent needs of the class):

#### **Grade Distribution**

Ramps and Pathways	10pts
Rule-based play	10pts
Chance play	10pts
Experimental Play	10pts
Puppets/Toys	10pts
Curriculum Design – Incorporating Play in your Art Classroom	10pts
NUBE museum visit, spark (lesson and instruction) and reflection	20pts
Visual Journal, Play in practice/education, Final Reflection	15pts

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**TOTAL 100pts**

\*Please note that this syllabus is subject to change. Please pay attention for changes and contact the instructor with questions. By enrolling in this class, you agree to the conditions of this syllabus.