

Lewis and Clark College  
Graduate School of Education and Counseling  
Summer Semester 2021

## **CPSY 551**

### **Play Becomes Real:**

#### **The Oaklander Approach to Gestalt Art and Play Therapy**



**“When I let go and can allow myself to imagine, I’m actually coming back to myself because they’re always projections...fantasy gives us an access to our own real experience.”**

Violet Oaklander

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1 Semester Credit

Time and Place: Five Thursdays, 9am - 12pm, May 13 - June 10

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/96335721588>

## General Course Information

### Required Class Texts

- 1) Oaklander, V. (1988) *Windows to our Children*, Gestalt Journal Press, NY (0939266067) (**available widely online**)
- 2) Mortola, P. (2006) *Windowframes: Learning the art of Gestalt play therapy the Oaklander way*, GestaltPress, NJ (0881634638) (**provided on loan/electronically in class**)

### Brief Course Description

In this course, we explore playful approaches and the use of drawing, clay, sand tray, music, and picture cards to understand their utility and application as “mediating tools” in the counseling and therapeutic context as applied to individuals and groups of all ages. We focus on the work of one particular internationally recognized therapist and author, Dr. Violet Oaklander, an early pioneer of therapeutic work with children and adolescents in general and Gestalt art and play therapy in particular.

### Extended Course Description

Dr. Oaklander’s 1978 text *Windows to our Children: A Gestalt Therapy Approach to Children and Adolescents* presented a model of working with children and adolescents in the therapeutic setting using expressive and playful approaches that has since influenced practitioners worldwide. Presently, this text is published in fifteen languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Croatian, Russian, Chinese, Hebrew, Korean and German. *Windows to our Children* is a popular textbook used in counseling programs at universities and colleges around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Brazil, Israel, Canada, the United States, and many countries in Europe. In exploring Dr. Oaklander’s work, we will be focusing on accomplishing the following goals for the course:

- 1) gaining an introductory understanding of the developmental and psychological theory supporting a Gestalt based approach to art and play therapy and counseling.
- 2) gaining an understanding of the cross-cultural and cross-generational effectiveness of this approach
- 3) gaining an repertoire of methods to meaningfully engage clients through playful means utilizing multiple expressive arts media
- 4) determining which expressive media provide the best fit for you as practitioner and for the populations with whom you work

## **Overview of the on-line class, assignments, and calendar**

Each week, there will be both asynchronous and synchronous aspects of the class. That is, I will ask you to accomplish a number of tasks before class each week (asynchronous) as well as meet together on Zoom each week from 10am-12pm (synchronous). This structure is intended to increase the learning opportunities and reduce the amount of online Zoom hours required each week. Each week before class, you are therefore asked to accomplish the following:

- 1) Locate and watch the two **videos** (one lecture, one demonstration) listed on the Calendar in our shared class *Google* folder, which is entitled: *1 Play Becomes Real SU 21 - Class Materials*.
- 2) Engage with the **readings** for the week that are detailed in the Calendar (the *Mortola/Windowframes* reading can also be found in the shared class *Google* folder as a PDF).
- 3) Create and share with me a *Google doc* entitled "PBR SU 21 Journal - *Last Name*." Each week, your journal entry will be due by **5pm on Tuesday before our class on Thursday**. This will allow me time to read and respond before class begins the next day. In each entry, please include the following sections (in 400-500 words total). Your writing should be error free, with concise sentences that easily link to each other, expressing yourself clearly.

**Video Reflection:** In this brief section please add one or two direct quotes of at least a sentence long from the lecture or slides and explain how they were important to you (e.g. a new idea? raised a question? were helpful?)

**Reading Reflection:** In this brief section please add one or two direct quotes of at least a sentence long from the readings and explain how they were important (e.g. a new idea? raised a question? were helpful?)

**Experience Reflection:** In this brief section please reflect on your experience using the materials and methods in the "hands on" section of class (e.g. what happened/how was it helpful/left you with questions). **For the first entry, due on Tuesday May 11 at 5 pm, please write briefly about your experience with and interest in the content of this class.**

**"Play Becomes Real" Course Calendar**

	<b>Weekly before class (Asynchronous): Videos (V), Readings (R), &amp; Writing (W)</b>	<b>Weekly during class (Synchronous): Class Session Activities &amp; Media</b>
<b>5/13</b> <b>Wk. 1</b>	(V) <b>Lecture</b> - PBR 1a: Introduction (V) <b>Demonstration</b> - PBR 1b: Clay (R) <b>Syllabus</b> (R) <b>Mortola/Windowframes</b> - Foreword thru Ch. 2 (W) <b>PBR Journal</b> - Entry #1 ( <b>due 5pm Tuesday, May 11</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Group Discussion</li> <li>• <b>Card</b> Demonstration</li> <li>• Siza &amp; Form Discussion</li> <li>• Pair Work &amp; Processing</li> <li>• Video Example: Violet &amp; Blake, part 1</li> </ul>
<b>5/20</b> <b>Wk. 2</b>	(V) <b>Lecture</b> - PBR 2a: First Steps (V) <b>Demonstration</b> - PBR 2b: Drawing (R) <b>Mortola/Windowframes</b> - Chapters 3-4 (R) <b>Oaklander/Windows</b> - Chapters 1-4 (W) <b>PBR Journal</b> - Entry #2 ( <b>due 5pm, Tuesday, May 18</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Group Discussion</li> <li>• <b>Drawing</b> Demonstration</li> <li>• Pair Work &amp; Processing</li> <li>• Video Example: Violet &amp; Blake, part 2</li> </ul>
<b>5/27</b> <b>Wk. 3</b>	(V) <b>Lecture</b> - PBR 3a: Contact (V) <b>Demonstration</b> - PBR 3b: Cards (R) <b>Mortola/Windowframes</b> - Chapters 5-6 (R) <b>Oaklander/Windows</b> - Chapters 6-9 (W) <b>PBR Journal</b> - Entry #3 ( <b>due 5pm, Tuesday, May 25</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Group Discussion</li> <li>• <b>Clay</b> Demonstration</li> <li>• Pair Work &amp; Processing</li> <li>• Video Example: Violet &amp; Blake, part 3</li> </ul>
<b>6/3</b> <b>Wk. 4</b>	(V) <b>Lecture</b> - PBR 4a: Emotions (V) <b>Demonstration</b> - PBR 4b: Nature Scene (R) <b>Mortola/Windowframes</b> - Chapters 7-8 (R) <b>Oaklander/Windows</b> - Chapters 10-12 (W) <b>PBR Journal</b> - Entry #4 ( <b>due 5pm, Tuesday, June 1</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Group Discussion</li> <li>• <b>Nature Scene</b> Demonstration</li> <li>• Pair Work &amp; Processing</li> <li>• Reading Discussion</li> </ul>
<b>6/19</b> <b>Wk. 5</b>	(V) <b>Lecture</b> - PBR 5a: Play (V) <b>Demonstration</b> - PBR 5b: Cards (R) <b>Mortola/Windowframes</b> - Chapters 9-11 (R) <b>Oaklander</b> - Chapter 5 (W) <b>PBR Journal</b> - Entry #5 ( <b>due 5pm, Tuesday, June 8</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Group Discussion</li> <li>• <b>Symbol Drawing</b> Demonstration</li> <li>• Pair Work &amp; Processing</li> <li>• Wrap up &amp; Closing</li> </ul>

### "Play Becomes Real" Materials Collection

Each student will be required to create their own collection of materials to be used in their own practice with children, adolescents or adults. This collection needs to include a stack of (optimally laminated) "talking cards" (to be described in class) but can also include an assortment of other materials (e.g. puppets, toys, games, art supplies, etc.) or a focus on a particular medium (e.g. Sand tray toys and table). During the last class session, students will be expected to briefly present and demonstrate their materials collection.

### "Play Becomes Real" Practica Experiences

During the course, I will facilitate a "hands on" practica experience with various media. I will also usually demonstrate with an individual or small group how such media can be used therapeutically. Your participation as part of the demonstration with me in front of the group is voluntary and will not be counted as part of your grade. After I have demonstrated how to work with the media with an individual or small group, it will be your turn to practice this work. We will break up into small groups of two or three in which you will take on the roles of client, therapist and observer. Your active and engaged participation with each experience and media is expected in order to increase your own knowledge, likes and dislikes of various expressive arts materials. Your work in these dyads/triads are also an opportunity for you to demonstrate and practice the following skills of therapeutic practice: Attentive and reflective listening; Verbal and nonverbal empathizing; Accurately facilitating the therapeutic experiences as modeled in class, and Balancing helpful playfulness with appropriate seriousness.

### CPSY Department Attendance Policy

Class attendance is expected and required. Any missed class time will be made up by completing extra assignments designed by the instructor. Missing more than ten percent of class time may result in failure to complete the class. This would be 4.5 hours of a 45 hour class (3 credits), 3.0 hours for a 30 hour class (2 credits) or 1.5 hours for a 15 hour class (1 credit.) In case of extreme hardship and also at the discretion of the instructor, a grade of incomplete may be given for an assignment or the entire course. In such cases, the work to be submitted in order to remove the incomplete must be documented appropriately and stated deadlines met. Students are expected to be on time to class and tardiness may be seen as an absence that requires make-up work.

### "Play Becomes Real" Professional Standards and Skills Evaluation

I will be using the rubric included below in this syllabus to evaluate each student's performance in the course. Regular class attendance, completion of all class readings and assignments, and active participation in class discussions and exercises are expected and necessary to make this a rich and dynamic learning experience for all involved. Due to the brevity of our meeting time together, more than one complete or partial absence from class over the term may result in a failing or incomplete grade. I will expect you to contact me prior to class sessions or due dates regarding any absences from class or problems with assignment deadlines. If you miss a significant amount of any class period, I will expect a **make-up writing assignment**, due at the beginning of the next class period: A three page paper in which you describe what you learned from interviewing 2 class participants from the session you missed and practicing with one of them using the material used in class that week.

### Disability Services Statement

If you have a disability that may impact your academic performance, you may request accommodations by submitting documentation to the Student Support Services Office in the Albany Quadrangle (503-768-7192). After you have submitted documentation and filled out paperwork there for the current semester requesting accommodations, staff in that office will notify me of the accommodations for which you are eligible.

### Professional Standards and Skills Evaluation Rubric

The following criteria will be used by in this course to evaluate student efforts in attendance, participation and professionalism. At the end of the course, the professor will be identifying both strengths as well as adding appropriate comments and goals that will facilitate further personal and professional development of the student.

- Rating Scale:    0— Does not meet criteria  
                           1— Meets criteria minimally/Area for growth  
                           2— Meets criteria appropriately  
                           3— Meets criteria exceptionally/Area of strength

1	The student relates to peers, professors and others in a respectful, ethical and appropriate manner and values cultural, familial, and individual differences, including those involving age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.	0	1	2	3
2	The student is thoughtfully and effectively engaged in all aspects of the class, makes the effort to contribute positively, and consistently shows strong and effective skills in verbal, nonverbal, and written communication.	0	1	2	3
3	The student follows professionally recognized conflict resolution processes, seeking appropriate consultation, is proactive in addressing individuals/groups involved, and demonstrates appropriate emotional self-regulation in interpersonal relationships with peers, supervisors, faculty, and others.	0	1	2	3
4	The student takes initiative, is timely, dependable and responsible, is concerned with their own personal and professional growth, and demonstrates the ability to receive, integrate and utilize feedback from peers and supervisors, and is able to give such feedback respectfully.	0	1	2	3
5	The student exhibits appropriate levels of self-assurance and confidence, balances this with a healthy sense of humility and openness to learning, and demonstrates a continuing capacity for openness to points of view, theories, experiences and perspectives different from their own.	0	1	2	3
6	The student demonstrates an ability to helpfully use attentive and reflective listening skills, as well as verbal and nonverbal empathizing skills in practice during class.	0	1	2	3
7	The student demonstrates an ability to accurately facilitate the therapeutic experiences as demonstrated, and demonstrates an ability to balance a helpful playfulness with appropriate seriousness in practice during class.	0	1	2	3
8	The student demonstrates an ability to satisfactorily complete the "PBR Journal Entry # 1"	0	1	2	3
9	The student demonstrates an ability to satisfactorily complete the "PBR Journal Entry # 2"	0	1	2	3
10	The student demonstrates an ability to satisfactorily complete the "PBR Journal Entry # 3"	0	1	2	3
11	The student demonstrates an ability to satisfactorily complete the "PBR Journal Entry # 4"	0	1	2	3
12	The student demonstrates an ability to satisfactorily complete the "PBR Journal Entry # 5"	0	1	2	3
13	The student demonstrates an ability to satisfactorily complete the "Play Becomes Real" Materials project and demonstrate it in class.	0	1	2	3
	Totals	0	1 3	2 6	3 9

Overall course grading: A= 39–28; A - = 27–26; B = 25–20; B - =19–16 (C or lower is a non-passing grade)

**Student Total Points/Grade:**

**Comments:**

## **THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS WITH CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS: The Oaklander Model**

### 1. ESTABLISHING THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

I/Thou relationship; Boundaries/limits

Children who cannot establish a relationship

### 2. CONTACT

Established and evaluated at every session

The fluidity of contact; Contact and energy; The role of resistance

Contact functions: Seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting

### 3. BUILDING SELF-SUPPORT

Experiences to strengthen the self & promote awareness of self:

Strengthening the contact functions; Engaging the body and senses;

Mastery; Making choices; Boundaries and limits; Power and control

Defining the self through self statements; Owning projections; Playfulness, imagination, humor

### 4. EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Contacting one's own "aggressive energy"

Providing self-support for expressing feelings

Providing exercises to help the child experience, express and "own" feelings

Talking about body states often described as feelings

Projecting feelings through drawings, stories, sand tray work, puppets, clay, etc.

Dealing with emotions related to past trauma

Learning skills for dealing with every-day feelings

### 5. SELF-NURTURING WORK

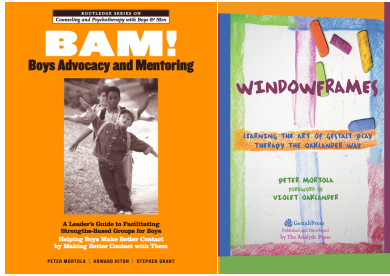
Helping children become self-accepting and actively nurturing to the self

## **AGGRESSIVE ENERGY, ANGER & CHILDREN: Therapeutic Steps in the Oaklander Model**

- I. AWARENESS: Talking about aggressive energy and anger
  1. What are they and how are they different?
  2. What are different kinds of angry feelings?
  3. What makes you angry? & How do you know when you are angry?
  4. How do you express it?
  
- II. EXPRESSING AND CONTAINING ONE'S "AGGRESSIVE ENERGY"  
Building self-support (Using projective exercises)  
Essential Elements for "Aggressive Energy" Work
  - a. In contact with therapist
  - b. A safe container with clear limits
  - c. A spirit of play
  - d. Exaggeration
  - e. Content not necessary
  
- III. ACKNOWLEDGING ONE'S OWN RAGE: "I'm angry!"
  
- IV. ACCEPTING THE ANGER:  
It's O.K. that I'm angry. There's no right or wrong to it.
  
- V. CHOOSING HOW TO EXPRESS IT:  
Learning new skills to cope with angry feelings
  - A. Direct expression – saying what you need to say to the person you need to say it to.
  - B. Private expression – anger energy must be expressed in some way to promote health and peacefulness.
  
- VI. WORKING WITH UNFINISHED ANGER

## Play Becomes Real": Further References

Peter Mortola, PhD, Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education and Counseling, pmortola@lclark.edu



“When I let go and can allow myself to imagine these things, I’m actually coming back to myself because they’re always projections...fantasy gives us an access to our own real experience.”

Violet Oaklander, (1978) *Windows to our children*, Real People Press, Salt Lake City

“It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance...something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation.”

D.W. Winnicott, (1971), *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, London,

"Plato...sees the model of true playfulness in the need of all young creatures, animal and human, to leap. To truly leap, you must learn how to use the ground as a springboard, and how to land resiliently and safely. It means to test the leeway allowed by given limits; to outdo but not escape gravity."

Erik Erikson, (1977) “Toys and reasons: Stages in the ritualization of experience”, WW Norton & Co. NY

“...the question is why [the brain] must...continue to fabulate its way through nighttime dreams and daytime fantasies. The answer...is that if the brain didn’t keep itself labile, it might rigidify in terms of its prior specific adaptive successes.”

Sutton-Smith (1997) *The Ambiguity of Play*, pg 60, Harvard University Press

“Play is, as it were, a halfway house between the night and the day, the brain and the world...the normal presence of dream and play is associated with general mental health and their interruption is associated with dysfunction.”

Sutton-Smith (2001) *The Ambiguity of Play*, pg 62

“It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.”

D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*

“The preferred state for survival would be through a ‘positive’ feeling... the state of joy as defining a greater ease to act...we may see play as children’s willful belief that they can act out their capacity for the future”

Lester and Maudsley (2007) *Play naturally: A review of children’s natural play*, Play England/NCB

“The evolutionary significance of play is not that it maintains an already existing reality, but that it provides alternatives to it.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Some paradoxes in the definition of play*, 1979

“...wherever playfulness prevails, there is always a surprising element, surpassing mere repetition or habituation.”

Erik Erikson, (1977) “Toys and reasons: Stages in the ritualization of experience.” WW Norton & Co. NY

“Play is the answer to the question: how does anything new come about?” Jean Piaget, (1950) *The psychology of intelligence*.

“Play continually creates demands on the child to act against immediate impulse. At every step the child is faced with a conflict between the rules of the game and what he would do if he could suddenly act spontaneously... A child’s greatest self-control occurs in play.” Lev Vygotsky, (1933) *Play and its role in the development of the child*

“The mystique of rock climbing is climbing; you get to the top of a rock glad it’s over but really wish it would go on forever. The justification of climbing is climbing, like the justification of poetry is writing; you don’t conquer anything except things in yourself...”

“To fill free time with activities that require concentration, that increase skills, that lead to a development of the self, is not the same as killing time by watching.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*

“All real living is meeting.” Martin Buber

“It is at the edge of anything—system or medium—that the most interesting events take place”

“Transactions at boundaries are a great part of trade & energy changes in life and nature...Go-betweens or traders, like many plants and animals, are creatures of the edge”

“It follows that edges, boundaries, and interfaces have rich pickings, from trade both ways or from constant accumulations...”

Bill Mollison (1990) *Permaculture: A practical guide for a sustainable future*, Island Press, Washington, DC

“There was a green lane amongst semi-detached houses that led – physically and metaphorically – from suburban orderliness to wild playfulness ...a ‘border’ between...that became a favourite place for playing out.”

Lester and Maudsley (2007) *Play naturally: A review of children’s natural play*, Play England/NBC

“In a circus, the animals symbolize the possibility of danger, the clowns symbolize the disruption of conventions, while the acrobats symbolize the disruption of physical safety. Yet all of this takes place in a circus tent, where it is known that nothing really dangerous or disruptive will happen.”

Sutton-Smith, B. (2002) ‘Recapitulation Redressed’



"All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand, either materially or ideally...The arena, the card table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court...are all in form and function, playgrounds...isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain."

Erik Erikson, "Toys and reasons: Stages in the ritualization of experience"

WW Norton & Co. NY 1977

"The playing child inhabits an area that cannot be easily left, nor can it easily admit intrusions. This area of playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world."

D.W. Winnicott, (1971) "Playing and reality", Routledge, London

"When we see a child playing with a flower, or in the dirt, or skipping or playing tag, we should remind ourselves that what we are looking at is the child-like result of a deep and irresistible urge to interact with and have knowledge of the world and everything in it."

Bob Hughes, (2013) Evolutionary playwork (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), Routledge, NY

"In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it."

Simon Nicholson, (1972) "The theory of loose parts", Open University

"Children come to see toys as vehicles of social acceptance rather than launching pads for imagination and fantasy."

David Elkind (2007) The power of play: Learning what comes naturally, Da Capo lifelong, NY

"Playing naturally is not simply contained in a precious sense of caring for the environment, but as a real and immediate experience of playing uninhibitedly among the diversity and potential that such spaces afford."

Lester and Maudsley (2007) Play naturally: A review of children's natural play, Play England/NBC

"I work to build the child's sense of self, to strengthen the contact functions, and to renew her own contact with her senses, body, feelings and intellect"

Violet Oaklander, (1978) Windows to our children, Real People Press, Salt Lake City

"Full humanity requires the ability to sense and be sensed in turn...We need to find our way in a tactile world again. We need to return from head to foot, from brain to fingertip, from iCloud to earth."

Richard Kearney, (August 30, 2014), "Losing our touch" NYTimes