

**COURSE TITLE: UNLOCKING THE NUANCES OF DISCOMFORT IN LEARNING**

**WA CLOCK HRS: 60**

**NO. OF CREDITS: 6 QUARTER CREDITS**  
[semester equivalent = 4.00 credits]

**OREGON PDUs: 60**

**PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48: 60**

**INSTRUCTOR: Anna Switzer**  
**anna@annaswitzer.com**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The notion of the “comfort zone” has been in the cultural lexicon for quite a long time. However, not many people talk about what lies outside the comfort zone. While we might recognize that, by definition, discomfort is outside of it, we don’t necessarily understand all the nuances that can be present with discomfort. In this course, you will dive deeply into a metaphorical “map” that helps to define and develop discomfort so that it is useful, nuanced, and not just an unknown sea. In addition, you will explore the “roads” that can help you navigate your way – and assist you in helping your students navigate their way– around this map. Ultimately, the map is a form of metacognition that gives language and a visual tool for navigating learning. You will be reading, watching videos, writing reflections, and planning ways to bring this visual tool and/or language into your classroom and teaching in ways that make the most sense to you in your specific context.

This course is appropriate for all teachers who wish to engage in personal reflection and growth regarding the role of discomfort in learning. Teachers in all grades might find appropriate ways to include the map and the roads in their classroom as a metacognitive tool for students.

Required text: License to Learn: Elevating Discomfort in Service of Lifelong Learning by Anna Switzer, Ph.D. (2020, Atmosphere Press), is available at Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Good Reads, and my website (annaswitzer.com). If you order through my website and let me know you are in the course, I can inscribe your copy. In addition, as of January 2024, an audiobook version is available through Spotify, Audiobooks, Google Play, Chirp, Kobo (Walmart), and hoopla. Note that if you go this route, you'll also need to download the file of images that are a foundational part of the book. This file is called the "License to Learn Visuals" and you can find it on my website for \$6.50.

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

1. Reflected on your relationship with your own and your students’ discomfort.
2. Drawn a map of the zones that include and lie outside the “comfort zone.”
3. Explained the influences of trauma on learning and on the zone map.
4. Reflected on your “triggers” as a teacher.
5. Recognized the effects of how you handle mistakes, feedback, and assessments in your practice.
6. Synthesized your thoughts and feelings about the role of discomfort in learning.
7. Named and described the “roads” that assist one in moving around the map of zones or in knowing where they are.
8. Reflected on what it takes to reach a state of awe or reverence.
9. Discerned your current learning edge(s) and considered the existence of the gift zone.
10. Built your discomfort muscle by playing with new questions and ideas.
11. Considered new ways to create a culture of safety for all students.
12. (Re-)Synthesized your thoughts and feelings about the role of discomfort in learning.
13. Created lesson plans for sharing some portion of the map with your students as a common language and teaching tool.

**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

Required Text: *License to Learn: Elevating Discomfort in Service of Lifelong Learning* by Anna Switzer, Ph.D. (2020, Atmosphere Press)

- Available through Anna's website ([annaswitzer.com](http://annaswitzer.com)); uses Paypal; Anna will include an inscription and hand-painted bookmark. Ships via media mail next business day. Cost: \$22.99 + \$3.65 shipping.
- Available through Venmo (@Anna-Switzer), Anna will include an inscription and hand-painted bookmark. Ships via media mail next business day. Cost: \$22.99 + \$3.65 shipping.
- Amazon, Barnes & Noble, GoodReads (Kindle version available on Amazon) Cost varies per website and book format.
- An audiobook version is available through Spotify, Audiobooks, Google Play, Chirp, Kobo (Walmart), and hoopla. Note that if you go this route, you'll also need to download the file of images that are a foundational part of the book. This file is called the "License to Learn Visuals" and you can find it on my website for \$6.50.
- ***License to Learn***  
ISBN# 1636495273  
by Switzer, Anna  
Atmosphere Press

[Buy from Amazon](#)

### MATERIALS FEE

Use of Audiobook requires files "License to Learn Visual" cost of \$6.50

## 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: Relationship with Discomfort

*Reflect on your relationship with your own and your students' discomfort.*

1. Watch Introduction Video:

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

2. Read Introduction in License to Learn (pages 3-13)

3. Write a 1-2 page reflection to include answers to the following questions:

- What meaning do you make about the state called “discomfort”?
- What is your current relationship to discomfort? (Consider both discomforts in your personal life and in your teaching.)
- What is your relationship to your students' discomfort?

4. Keep this reflection as a point of comparison for later in the course.

### **Assignment #2: Map of Zones**

*Draw a map of the zones that include and lie outside the “comfort zone.”*

1. Read Chapters 1 - 3 in License to Learn (pages 17-48)

2. Write a 2-3 page reflection paper about the risks and benefits of being in one's Comfort Zone. Consider questions like:

- How do you know when you are in your comfort zone?
- How do you know when your students are in their comfort zone?
- How do you know when you are not in your comfort zone?
- How do you know when your students are not in their comfort zone?
- What are some different ways that you and/or your students behave when not in their comfort zone?
- Consider including in your response notions like curiosity, perseverance, panic, and how you have come to define learning.

### **Assignment #3: Effects of Trauma on Learning**

*Consider the influences of trauma on learning and the zones map.*

1. Read Chapter 4 in License to Learn. (Pages 51- 70)

2. Watch TED Talk by Nadine Burke-Harris (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovlJ3dsNk>)  
<https://www.youtube.com/embed/95ovlJ3dsNk>

3. Read pages 71-73 of License to Learn

4. (Optional) Use the prompts in the “Playground” to experiment with making meaning from your own life experiences. It can be helpful to do this first before moving on to Step 5, but you will not have to “turn in” any of what you create/write for this step.

5. Choose a particular student who comes to mind based on the material you've been exposed to in this lesson. Use the prompts in the “Playground” to experiment with making meaning from whatever you know about this student. What you know about this student may be information from working with them in your classroom, from talking about them with other teachers or administrators, from their parents/caregivers, and/or through other siblings. The idea is not to get anything “right” here, it is simply to use the tools to try to understand this student better.

6. As prompted in Step 6 for both Option 1 and Option 2 in the Playground, and focused on this student, answer the question, “What insights does this process bring for you?” Write a brief 1-2 page statement. Insights might range from being specifically about the student to being about your role as that student's teacher at this point in time.

### **Assignment #4: Triggers**

*Reflect on your “triggers” as a teacher.*

1. Read this article about teaching with trauma: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-trauma>

2. Consider what kinds of student behavior “triggers” you.

3. Write a 2-3 page reflection paper about these triggers, looking at how you handled these behaviors in the past and how you might handle them in the future. What additional resources might be helpful to assist you in making any changes?

4. (Optional) If this exploration of trauma and triggers makes you uncomfortable, consider that this discomfort is a good reason to lean into it. I suggest stepping away from the computer or your table/desk and just sitting somewhere quiet for 10 minutes. Set a timer; feel the discomfort. Don't do anything else during this time. What can you learn about yourself because of this discomfort? Consider writing a reflection about this experience.

### **Assignment #5: Mistakes, Feedback & Assessment**

*Consider the effects of mistakes, feedback, and assessments in your practice.*

1. Read Chapter 6 in License to Learn (pages 89-100)
2. Write a reflection about how, in your classroom, you frame “making mistakes” and “feedback.”  
What do you feel good about? Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable?
3. Read Assessment Through the Student’s Eyes. (<http://downloads.pearsonassessments.com/ati/downloads/Assessment-Through-the-Students-Eyes.pdf>)
4. Imagine the student from Assignment 3, Step 5, or pick another student for whatever reason. Reflect on this student’s responses to their mistakes, your feedback, or information that comes through from more formal assessments. What do you imagine that they are learning about learning through these avenues? What do you feel good about here? Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable? What might you consider altering in your practice and/or discussing with colleagues? Is there anything new you’d like to learn about regarding assessments and feedback?

### **Assignment #6: What? So What? Now What?**

*Synthesize your thoughts and feelings about the role of discomfort in learning.*

- Write a 2-3 page reflection paper answering these three questions:
  - a) (What?) What have I learned so far that really “strikes” me as helpful or new?
  - b) (So what?) What is the significance of this learning for me and my teaching practice?
  - c) (Now what?) What might I choose to do differently based on this learning?

### **Assignment #7: Roads on the Map**

*Name and describe the “roads” that assist one in moving around the map of zones or in knowing where they are.*

1. Read Chapters 7, 8, and 9 in License to Learn. (Pages 103-127)
2. Draw from your own life experiences to write a 1-2 page paper. Consider the roles of risk, rest, reflection, resistance, and resourcing in learning. Include the following:
  - ? How do you build each of these “roads” in your classroom, even if not named specifically?
  - ? How do you support students finding or navigating them?
  - ? Might it be useful to build a common language with students about these roads (even if you use different language) so that they can monitor where they are at a given moment and/or ask for what they need?
  - ? In conclusion, summarize your practices, whether long-standing ones or new ones you’d like to consider.

### **Assignment #8: Panic**

*Name and describe the “roads” that assist one in moving around the map of zones or knowing where they are.*

1. Watch the video.  
<https://www.youtube.com/embed/dQdIVCbGPHk>
2. Read Chapters 10 and 11 in License to Learn. (Pages 128-145)
3. Consider how “panic” (the extreme form of discomfort) might show up in your classroom. Respond in a short paragraph or two regarding:
  - ? What behaviors do your students typically display when they are panicking?
  - ? How do you, and how might you, assist them with the help of Recovery and Resilience?

### **Assignment #9: Awe and Reverence**

*Reflect on what it takes to reach a state of awe or reverence.*

1. Read Chapter 12 in License to Learn (pages 146-153)
2. Revisit a moment when you experienced awe and/or reverence for anything.
3. Draw a timeline of all the steps or events that led up to that experience.
4. Circle all the steps or events involving some level of discomfort, or of stepping out of your Known Zone into the Learning Zone.

5. Write a brief reflection about what you saw in this exercise and about how you might try to ensure that your students have the experience of awe or reverence regarding the subject(s) you teach.

### **Assignment #10: Lifelong Learning & The Gift Zone**

*Discern your current learning edge(s) and consider the existence of the gift zone.*

1. Note the error in Chapter numbers in License to Learn; there is no Chapter 13; I plan to fix this in the next edition!
2. Read Chapters 14 and 15 in License to Learn (pages 157-169)
3. Like watercolor painting has been for me over the past 10-15 years, what is a topic or skill that is driving new learning for you? Where are you seeking some discomfort in service of learning for yourself?
4. What do you consider is currently in your Gift Zone?
5. For each of your students, consider what their gifts are to you and the rest of the class. Make a list of these gifts that you refer to often, especially when one of your students is providing you with a challenge.

### **Assignment #11: Building the Discomfort Muscle in the Playground**

*Build your discomfort muscle by playing with new questions and ideas.*

1. Read Playground Two (pages 170-172 of License to Learn)
2. Consider the questions and invitations listed there.
3. Write a 1-2 page reflection about 1 or 2 ideas in the Playground that intrigue you. Is there anything you feel moved to take action on based on this exploration?

### **Assignment #12: Building a Culture of Safety**

*Consider new ways to create a culture of safety for all students.*

1. Read Appendix C. (Pages 187-191 in License to Learn).
2. Read "The Brain on Your Name" at: <https://name-coach.com/blog/brain-name-brain-responds-sound-name/>
3. Look up on the web the following resources and consider purchasing for yourself or suggesting the purchase for your teaching team, grade-level team, school library, or whatever makes sense in your setting:
  - a) We Are Crew: A Teamwork Approach to School Culture by EL Education (368 pages)
  - b) Journey to the Caring Classroom by Laurie S Frank (314 pages)
  - c) 99 Activities and Greetings by Melissa Correa-Connolly (144 pages)
4. In conclusion, write a 2-3 page summary about your practices, whether long-standing ones or new ones, you'd like to consider regarding building a culture of safety for all students.

### **Assignment #13: Final Synthesis**

*(Re-)Synthesize my thoughts and feelings about the role of discomfort in learning.*

Write a 2-3 page reflection paper answering these three questions:

- (What?) What have I learned so far that really "strikes" me as helpful or new?
- (So what?) What is the significance of this learning for me and my teaching practice?
- (Now what?) What might I choose to do differently based on this learning?

## **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 #14: Lesson Plan**

*Create lesson plans for sharing some portion of the map with your students as a common language and teaching tool.*

1. Consider which aspects of the map of zones and the roads might be useful tools for your students. Consider if there is language or terminology you would like to alter to help it fit your grade level and/or context better than what is presented in the book.
2. Using your own (or your standard/required) lesson planning template, create 2 or 3 lessons to introduce your students to the map of zones and the roads.
3. Implement your lesson with students in your classroom.
4. Write a 400-500 word commentary on what worked well and what could be improved.
5. Include any student feedback or noteworthy student products.
6. Submit your lesson to your instructor for feedback via the lesson tab below.
7. Share what you've learned with other teachers taking our courses by checking the [lesson library box](#) when you submit your lesson.

### **Assignment #15: Annotated Bibliography**

Create an annotated bibliography of eight to ten reviews of literature or online sources that relate to Learning Discomfort, primarily focusing on educational applications. For each source, provide at least 2 bullet points or sentences about how that source informs your ideas. Then describe in a 1-2 page reflection what seems most personally or professionally applicable to you from your entire bibliography and why.

### **Assignment #16: (500 Level ONLY)**

*In addition to the 400-level assignments, complete two (2) of the following:*

#### **Option A) Read an Additional Text**

Read one of the texts listed in Assignment 12, Step 3. Develop a lesson plan that is brand new to you based on what you've read in that text. Upload the lesson plan for feedback. After implementing, write a 2-3 page reflection on how it went, and any new insights you have about the role of discomfort in learning.

**AND/OR**

#### **Option B) Lead a Professional Development Session**

Lead a professional development session about the map of zones and the roads for other teachers at your school. Upload a "lesson plan" for this session for feedback. After implementing, write a 2-3 page reflection on how it went and any new insights you have about the role of discomfort in learning.

**AND/OR**

#### **Option C) Presentation**

Prepare a PowerPoint, Keynote, or video presentation that you can show to staff that explains the nuances of discomfort of learning and demonstrates strategies to support students overcoming learning discomfort in the classroom. Slideshows should be a minimum of 8 slides and videos should be a minimum of 2 minutes in length.

**AND/OR**

#### **Option D) Design Your Own**

Another assignment of your own design with the instructor's prior approval.

### **C. INTEGRATION PAPER**

Assignment #17: (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:**

Anna Switzer, Ph.D., is a long-time educator and started her career in the classroom as a high-school Physics and Math teacher. Later, she taught Earth Science (courses and labs) and Oceanography (labs) at the college level. She has also taught pre-service teachers (science) and in-service teachers (K-12, all subjects). Anna earned a BA in Physics (Kenyon College), an MS in Oceanography (North Carolina State University), and a Ph.D. in Education (University of Michigan). She has a strong background in Experiential Education, Project-Based Learning, and Environmental Education. She is a watercolor artist, lives in Oregon, and has written one book (so far) called License to Learn: Elevating Discomfort in Service of Lifelong Learning (2020).

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

##### **UNLOCKING THE NUANCES OF DISCOMFORT IN LEARNING**

**Switzer, Anna**, License to Learn: Elevating Discomfort in Service of Lifelong Learning, Atmosphere Press, paperback, 205 pages, ISBN978-1-63649-527-9, This is the first book written by Anna Switzer and it addresses the role of discomfort in lifelong learning. Anna draws from her experience as an outdoor educator, a classroom educator, an educator of educators, as well as other life experiences to create a metaphorical map that can help all people navigate learning throughout life. Anna weaves together story, educational theory, and neuroscience.

**Berger, Ron, Vilen, Anne, Woodfin, Libby**, We Are Crew, EL Education (2020)

<https://www.amazon.com/We-Are-Crew-Teamwork-Approach/dp/1683626222>

This book provides a detailed approach to creating a culture of belonging in school settings. The structure and ethos described is called "Crew" whereby every student is known well by at least one adult in the building as well as by 10-15 other students.

**Correa-Connolly, Melissa**, 99 Activities and Greetings, Center for Responsive School

<https://www.crslearn.org/product/99-activities-and-greetings/>

"Using the activities, chants, greetings, and games in this lively resource, students will develop oral language skills, self-control, and problem-solving abilities."

**Frank, Laurie S.**, Journey Toward a Caring Classroom, 2013

<https://www.amazon.com/Journey-Toward-Caring-Classroom-2nd/dp/1939019109>

This book "deftly bridges the gap between conventional and experiential education, empowering educators/facilitators to use their minds, intuition, and knowledge along with a growing body of evidence to create an environment that supports learning, community building, and social-emotional development. Educational theory, concrete in-class strategies, and engaging activities encourage educators to transform their classroom into a caring place where every learner can grow."