Game-Based Teaching Methodology and Empathy in Ethics Education

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Abstract

This article describes the experience of a group of educators participating in a graduate course in ethics. Playing role playing games and the work accompanying that play were the predominate methodology employed in the course. An accompanying research study investigated the lived experiences of the course participants. Themes that emerged from interview data included student engagement, participants' applications, empathy development, and reactions to professor modeling.

Introduction

While ethics instruction in initial teacher education and advanced preparation in education fields is fairly common (Shapiro & Gross, 2013; Strike & Soltis, 2009), less common is the particular curriculum and teaching methodology described herein. Professional educators make many daily decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Griffith, 2017; Parker & Gehrke, 1986). A number of those decisions reflect a need for and commitment to ethical frameworks that inform professional decision making. Indeed, as Shapiro and Gross (2013) point out, "The most difficult decisions to solve are ethical ones that require dealing with paradoxes and complexities" (p. 3). Often, educators find themselves at decision points in which ethical systems seem to clash.

A number of approaches to ethics education involve exposing the participants to ethical systems and then asking them to apply those systems to challenging dilemmas and decision situations. Among these systems are the ethic of the profession, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of care. While professional ethics and the ethic of justice seek to establish a legal and correct-action approach to decision making, the ethic of care:

> …asks that individuals consider the consequences of their decisions and actions. It asks them to take into account questions, such as: Who will benefit from what I decide? Who will be hurt by my actions? What are the long-term effects of a decision I make today? (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 6)

Recent work by Christian scholars has examined the value of the ethic of care as a paradigm for adoption by Christian professional educators, although the ethic of care has its roots in postmodern feminist thought, as reviewed by Freytag (2015). Indeed, in studying the work of Noddings, a noted authority of the ethic of care, Freytag concluded that, "There is clearly a need for Christian scholars to take a more active role in the dialogue on care in order that misconceptions or partial understandings surrounding Christian views of care might be elucidated" (p. 3).

Earlier work by Palmer (1993) investigated how the Christian commitment to a life of love influenced an educator's view of curriculum and instruction. Palmer presents the idea that love is the source of knowledge and also the means by which a community of trust is established between a teacher and students, thereby permitting a fuller and deeper learning experience. Wolterstorff (2002), in discussing how to educate for human flourishing, addresses a particular aspect of love that reveals the depth of commitment needed to establish a meaningful and truthful view of the world, with all its brokenness. He states:

> How can we teach our students to see the wounds of God behind the world's injustice? I do not know. Maybe teaching cannot do it. Maybe only through one's own tears can one see God's tears. Maybe we as teachers must humbly acknowledge our limitations

before the mysterious and troubling fact that suffering illuminates. (p. 154)

Reflecting on Christian conceptions of care, love, and suffering provide fertile ground for examining ethical education. The purpose of this article is to describe the experience of a professor and a group of students who participated in a doctoral level course on *Ethics, Equity and Justice* in the summer semester of 2017. This experience is worth examining in order to gain insight as to how classroom climate and teaching methodology influence ethics education.

Ethics, Equity, and Justice is a required course in a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program at a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institution on the west coast of the United States. The course approaches the study of ethics through an examination of ethical models, applying them to the dilemmas of leadership. A particular emphasis in the course is an investigation of equity and justice for marginalized students. The primary text for the course presented four ethical models. These models are the ethic of the profession, the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of critique (Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

Students in the Ed.D. program are educational practitioners, teachers, and leaders in PK-12 and higher education organizations. Five of the students who participated in the course joined with the course instructor to form a collaborative writing group, to continue the learning process that occurred in the course. The authors of this article include an assistant professor of education at a west coast CCCU school, two adjunct professors of education at two CCCU schools in the Pacific Northwest, an art professor at regional state university in the Midwest, and a high school teacher and instructional coach at a rural Oregon high school. A professor of education at the university, who had recently returned to a faculty role after a four-and-a-half-year tenure as a fulltime academic administrator taught the course described herein and co-authored this article.

Course Development Process
With the retirement of a longtime faculty member, the professor accepted the assignment of teaching the course in a four-week summer term. In preparation for teaching, he initiated a process to learn about the culture and expectations of the program and the abbreviated summer term. As a result of interviews with faculty members and students, and a review of course-related documents, he concluded that an active learning environment was appropriate, which would provide an opportunity for students to fully engage with ethical dilemmas and inequities. For continuity in the curriculum of the program, the course objectives were retained. The course objectives were:

1. Examine and articulate issues of ethics, equity, and social justice through a Christian and various additional ethical theories and worldviews.
2. Critically evaluate one's ethical framework and its implications for the application of social justice within educational contexts.
3. Reflect critically and ethically on matters of equity and social justice in educational settings, while explaining and defending the role of educational institutions in promoting social justice within contemporary contexts.
4. Collaborate on the analysis of educational problems and implement strategic actions that reflect justice for all students and stakeholders.

As the professor reflected on the unique opportunity he had in returning to teaching after a number of years in full time administration, and regarding his own concerns about what he hoped to accomplish with the course, he developed an informal set of personal wonderings about the course. These personal objectives included the following:

- What teaching methods could be used in a compressed summer schedule to get students fully engaged in the learning process?
- Would students seek to apply game-based methods in their teaching?
- How would the teaching methods employed influence the students?
- What could be done to foster doctoral students' empathy for the marginalized

students and families in their schools and classrooms?

- What impact would the course experience have in challenging and affirming students' faith and worldview?

Due to his course preparation, and in reflecting on how he might explore his personal wonderings for the course, the instructor chose to alter the primary learning activities in the course from a lecture-discussion and case study approach to methods that featured a game-based learning environment, including a pre-designed game and student game-design teams. This choice reflected his belief, based on his understanding of adult learning theory (Vella, 2008; Wlodkowski, 2003), that an active learning approach would foster student engagement, provide an opportunity for reflection, and foster empathy for marginalized student populations amongst students in his course.

The professor had not met any of the students prior to them arriving on the first day of the face-to-face phase of the course and had only course-related communication with them prior to that day. Course-related communication included instructions on the opening of the course in the learning management system, supplying detailed information about the course, and addressing a few questions for students about expectations they had for the course.

During the course preparation, the instructor read an article by Squire (2006) in which that author reviewed the lessons that video games held for educators. Squire (2006) asserted, "I argue that educators (especially curriculum designers) ought to pay closer attention to video games because they offer designed experiences, in which participants learn through a grammar of doing and being" (p. 19). At that point, the professor realized that learning about video games, and other types of games including role-playing games, would be advantageous in his preparation for the course and in meeting his personal objectives for the course. From that time forward, his course preparation included a commitment to developing a game as the focal point of the course. Key concepts from the texts and other resource materials on ethics and on gaming became the broader content for course preparation and game design.

The following definitions aid in an understanding of the nature of games and gamification of learning, A game is defined as an activity "in which one or more players make decisions through the control of game objects and resources, in pursuit of a goal" (Overmars, 2007, p. 3). Role playing games in particular are ones in which players assume a role within a particular milieu, use resources as a character, and work both with and against other players to accomplish a task or tasks in order to achieve an objective (Arjoranta, 2011; Daniau, 2016). The gamification of learning is the selection of elements, such as character, theme, goals, competition, and immediate feedback; and apply those elements to a learning activity for the purpose of enhancing participant engagement and enjoyment (Squire, 2006; Bell, 2018).

Contributing Course Texts
The texts used in the ethics course included Ethical Educational Leadership in Turbulent Times written by Shapiro and Gross, and Confident Pluralism written by Inazu. In their text, Shapiro and Gross (2013) examine multiple ethical paradigms including the ethic of justice, ethic of critique, ethic of care, and the ethic of the profession, in conjunction with turbulence theory. The four ethical models are presented to help educational leaders develop an ethical framework for approaching challenges. Inazu (2016) explores how through embracing confident pluralism in the American culture people can, and should, live together in peace, accepting and appreciating our differences, rather than allowing them to divide us. Through these texts, the ethic of care is alluded to and described as an essential element in schools and society.

The ethic of care is described as an approach to be taken in moral decision making, in contrast with the ethic of justice. The ethic of justice focuses on law and fairness in particular, while the ethic of care approaches dilemmas with consideration to how decisions will affect people (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). The ethic of care considers a variety of voices, which comes as a result of listening. Inazu (2016) speaks to this in his discussion of humility as a component to confident pluralism. He asserts that listening to others can make the way for people to understand each other while accepting that everyone

does not have to agree on everything. People are able to truly listen when they release their agenda and simply listen to understand.

In educational settings, serving students is critical to the purpose of the profession and educators must listen to their students if they are to live out the ethic of care. The emphasis of relationship with others is essential to the ethic of care and allows people to grow in empathy toward others (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Attention to the larger society also allows social justice issues to be associated with the ethic of care, for there is consideration for more than just the specific parties involved in a dilemma.

The ethic of care can include caring through discipline, caring through attention, and caring through prompting action. For example, caring through discipline may be viewed as a more logical approach, while giving attention through compassion is more emotion based (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Both responses should be valued and viewed as necessary aspects to a caring response to others. What is important to consider is that there is an intention by the educator to view individuals and situations through more than a rules-based approach, but also including a commitment to care. While Shapiro and Gross do not write from an overtly Christian point of view, their stance is similar to Shotsberger's (2012) assertion that a Christian ethic of care can inform an organization, such as a school or college, and that is accomplished through, "…intentionally thinking through the implications of a caring model and consciously implementing them…." (p. 8).

Teachers daily interact with students who are in need and when the needs of the student do not fit neatly into the structure of the system, ethical dilemmas abound. Approaching these needs through the lens of an ethic of care is imperative for educators to learn in order to grow in empathy and respond with consideration of the broader effects in decision-making.

The Function of Role Playing Games in Education

Teachers understand that their work includes interpersonal communication with learners daily, and during these interactions emotions are occurring within teachers, students, and between teacher and student. Thus, it is understandable that the study of emotions in education has become a valid subject matter as seen by the increase of research within the last few decades (Zembylas, 2007). Yet, even with all the information available in current research, understanding how to emotionally connect and even empathize with students can still be a challenge. Add to this the fact that classrooms in America are becoming more and more diverse each year (Lichter, 2013), and the task of connecting with all students can seem impossible. While personal experience can lend itself to the concept of understanding students, it is not possible for every teacher to have experienced the variety of races, social status, and cultural backgrounds found in one's classroom. However, there is a way for teachers to develop a deeper sense of emotional connection with their students through the concept of perspective-taking.

The ability to take on students' perspectives greatly improves a teacher's ability to both respond and interpret student behavior (Barr, 2011; Davis, 1983). Lam, Kolomitro, and Alamparambil (2011), in a review of empathy training in human services field characterized empathy as a form of perspective taking, where a person reacts to the observable behaviors of others. Research in education has begun to explore the concept of using role-playing games (RPGs), to equip educators in the both understanding and utilizing perspective taking with students. Squire (2013) argues that games offer a new way in which to package learning so that experience is at the forefront. He writes:

> Game-based learning can be understood as a particular kind of designed experience, where players participate in ideological worlds, worlds designed to support a particular kind of reaction, feelings, emotions, and at times thoughts and identities, which game-based learning designers are leveraging for education and training. (p. 103)

While RPGs are not a new phenomenon, their use as a way of exploring marginalized or misunderstood students is a recent development. Through the use of the RPG, teachers can mindfully incorporate personality traits and information about their students into gameplay, which leads to higher

levels of empathy and understanding for their students (Kaufman & Libby, 2012; Belman & Flanagan, 2010). The RPG enables teachers to bridge the gap between their own background and their students' backgrounds. Research has also shown that the learning benefits of RPGs are not limited to educators; students can benefit from the RPG experience in exploring concepts such as social class inequality (Sandoz, 2016), morality (Sicart, 2005), other societal issues (Kaufman & Flanagan, 2015), and in the development of empathy (Carnes, 2014).

The Course Experience
Given the positive response in the research literature around RPGs and preparatory interviews with professional gamers, the professor of the ethics class planned a transformation of the course that would lead his students, currently educators in settings ranging from elementary school to college, through an RPG experience. An initial draft of the course featured a two-week role-playing game. Upon further refinement, the final plan for the class featured a one-day gameplay followed by a debriefing session. In addition, students worked in two teams in which two additional games were designed, played and debriefed during the course.

The course was delivered in three phases. Phase one (online) was the preparatory phase in which students read the syllabus, much of the text and resource material, and completed several assignments. Phase two (face-to-face) was two-weeks long and consisted of eight three-hour sessions plus related out of class work. Phase three (online) was one week long and consisted of a students' choice assignment, completion of course journaling and two post-course assessments.

A primary aim of the reformatted four-week summer course was to have students assume the role of a marginalized student. To help prepare students for the new experience of participating in a RPG, the professor provided several research articles (Belman & Flanagan, 2010; Daniau, 2016; Overmars, 2007; Simkins & Steinkuehler, 2008; Squire, 2013) focused on the usefulness of role-playing games in education, especially in ethics education. During the first phase of the course, students read related articles and contemplated questions about role-playing games. In addition,

sections of the two course texts were assigned in the first phase of the course, introducing key ethical models. An introduction to turbulence theory, and an examination of practices to successfully live and work within a pluralistic society was the key reading content for students.

Understanding the research around role-playing games, building knowledge on ethical models and pluralistic society were not the only objective for the first week of class. Students were also asked to look at a list of possible characters that would be played during an instructor-created RPG and choose a character they would become during the game. Students created a backstory for their character given the limitations or special needs that the professor previously assigned to each character before the start of the course. The characters represented a wide range of students that can be found in many American classrooms today. These students included: English as Second Language students, students from poverty, students coping with substance abuse issues, students with special needs, undocumented students or deferred action for childhood arrival (DACA) students, recently immigrated students, and homeless students. Students in the class were free to choose whatever student they wished to embody for the RPG experience. Many of students had decided to develop characters that they had previously interacted with either through their own personal or professional lives. As such, many of the backstories or additional information provided about the character was based on real individuals.

Another key assignment during phase one was for each student to listen to the song Rockin' in the Free World, by Neil Young. Rockin' in the Free World was written by Young in 1989 and was intended to be a critique of American society. In addition to listening to several versions of this song, reading the lyrics, and viewing an original work of art representing the themes of the song, students read commentary on the song from a number of sources. After carrying out these activities, students then reflected on the song and its meaning. The professor selected this song as a metaphor for the RPG he developed, entitled Rockville: Life on the Margins, and a number of the themes in the song

(e.g. homelessness, poverty, consumerism, and drug abuse) were alluded to in the game.

Phase two, the face-to-face portion of the course, featured a review of content, and engagement in ethical decision making and the constructs of equity and justice. The primary learning activities in this phase were game-based play and related experiences. Rockville, the teacher-developed game became the defining activity and focus of the course. Players assumed the role of their character and journeyed through challenging times and chance misfortunes as they attempted to win. The setting for the game was a small town in which two students would be awarded a scholarship for life at the end of the game. Course participants referred to the entire course as Rockville well after the conclusion of the course, yet it was only the focus of the first few days of the face-to-face meetings. In the remaining time allocated to the course, some significant activities and interactions occurred. With Rockville as a model, two student teams created role-playing games that were used to apply course content, create ethical dilemmas, and provide experiences for meaning-making with regard to ethics, equity, and justice. Phase three of the course provided time for each student to complete a choice assignment, reflect on the course experience and complete several course-related assessments.

Research Methods

The professor recognized the possibility for carrying out research related to the course during the course development stage. He submitted paperwork to the Institutional Review Board and obtained approval to conduct a study related to the course experience. During the first face-to-face session of the course, he discussed the possibilities with students. All ten of the course participants agreed to participate in the study and completed informed consent forms. The primary means of data collection were game debriefing notes, course assessments, an online journal with entries made during the course, and post-course interviews. For the purposes of this article, only data from participant interviews were analyzed.

The general aim of the study was to examine the experience of the course participants and what their reactions were to their experience in the course. In particular, the personal wonderings of the professor were used as the lens by which the data were examined. The essential question to be investigated was:

> What was the evidence from the experience of the course participants regarding the professor's personal wonderings about engagement, application, empathy, impact on faith/worldview, and reaction to the professor's teaching methods?

Findings

Structured interviews were completed over the course of a three-week period, two to three months after the course's conclusion. Appendix A contains the interview questions. The five contributing student co-authors served as interviewers in two to three structured interviews each, using the predetermined interview questions. Nine interviews with student participants were conducted and recorded using video conferencing tools (Zoom and Adobe Connect). Responses to the interview questions were collected from a tenth student via email communication due to circumstances which would not allow a virtual interview to occur. The structured interview with the professor was conducted by two student researchers in a face-to-face format using an audio recording device. Ten of the eleven interviews were transcribed using the same transcription service (GoTranscript), with the eleventh interview not requiring transcription due to the email format in which it was received.

Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and coded using pre-set codes. These initial codes were derived from the personal wonderings of the professor which became the conceptual framework for analysis. The pre-set codes for student interviews included; a) student engagement, b) applications of participants, c) empathy developed, d) faith impact, e) reaction to professor modeling. Three additional categories emerged during the coding process of student interviews. These themes include; a) contributing factors to success of RPG, b) barriers to implementation, and c) initial student perception of pedagogical approach. See Table 1 for an overview of the pre-set and emergent themes with associated concepts.

Table 1

Student Interview Themes

Major thematic categories*	Associated concepts
Student Engagement	curious, meaningful, ownership, involved, really matters, immersed, connection to learning
Applications of Participants	
General	heightened awareness of equity & ethics, how to treat or respond to others, self-reflection, concept of right versus right
Professional Setting	getting to know students better, simulations or RPG development, debriefing after a lesson, focus on building empathy in students
Empathy Developed	
General	"my" person/character, connected to students/others they knew, saw classmates as characters, put myself in their shoes, labeling as an empathetic person
Feelings during "The Day After"	upset, sad, aches, concerns, regrets, invested, anger
Reaction to Professor Modeling	promoted understanding, made it work, gave deeper understanding, exaggerated approach
RPG Success Attributed to Cohort Cohesion	pre-existing cohort, honest, trust, felt safe, empathetic as a group, length of time together
Identified Barriers to Implementation	required standards/curriculum, large class sizes, short time to build cohesion, student readiness, need for trust, online setting, K-12 setting, frequency of courses
Initial Student Perception of Pedagogical Approach	a unique way to learn, uncertainty, unknown, unsure, unexpected, intimidated, irritated, nervous, concerned

*The bold categories were pre-set codes, used in analyzing student interviews. A fifth preset code, Faith Development/Impact, was not present in student interviews to substantiate inclusion. The three additional themes which emerged are bold italicized.

Student Engagement
Throughout the interviews student participants used terms to describe how they were engaged in the course experience and how they were engaged with the learning. Students described their experiences as meaningful and that it really mattered. Additionally, curiosity in the approach to learning and an immersion in the learning were experienced. Six of the student interviewees used derivatives of the term invested in their description of how they

viewed the course and learning experience. The preset code of student engagement was affirmed in the analysis process. The concept of engagement with the course experience, others in the course, and the content of the course was prominent in all student interviews. Several students stated in their interviews that they had taken an ethics class before this one, but the game design aspect was a new concept. Interviews pointed to the character design as an early connection because the characters were based off students or friends that participants had known in the past.

Applications of Student Participants

Student applications of the course experience and learning emerged in two areas; general applications and application in a professional setting. Two interviewees noted a general heightened awareness and more self-reflective practices (post-course) around the concepts of equity and ethics. "I think it [experience] just gives me a heightened awareness, that no matter what group you're in, you don't know their backstory. You don't know where they have come from. You don't know their history. Our language is so powerful, even when we don't know that it's powerful" (student interview B, 2017). One participant reflected that how they treat and respond to others was impacted by the course experience; "I think it makes you think twice about how you treat people" (student interview D, 2017). Additionally, the phrase "right vs. right" was used by three participants as they described their self-reflection and how they have applied the course learnings. The phrase indicates that there is not always a right and a wrong decision which can be made, that in fact there are many times where we are choosing between two right decisions.

In addition to general applications from their learning, students indicated there were applications in their professional settings. Professional applications included; a desire to get to know their students better, adding simulations in their teaching repertoire, RPG development, the importance of debriefing after a lesson, and focus on building empathy in students. Participants described the ability to create empathy and a similar experience. "Creating empathy through role-playing, I began to see that this could be something that we could do, and it could work" (student interview G, 2017). "I

want the students to have this, I want them to walk away with the ability to experience something that I've just experienced that they would be able to really take away personally from, this is not just an intellectual experience" (student interview G, 2017). While learning how to implement RPG was not a direct course objective it was evident as a learning result as one student stated, "Implementing this [pedagogy of RPG] into a professional practice is, it was very concrete for me. That was the secondary learning objective in the class" (student interview E, 2017).

Empathy Development

True ownership of the game characters was developed and fostered within the class as participants shared their empathy toward and for characters, which then transferred to real-life situations as the course learning stretched beyond the course. Interviewees used the term "my person" or "my character" throughout, speaking for them and sometimes as if the characters were real people. One response included "I was much relieved when I made the right decision for them" as they spoke about awarding the scholarship. Concepts of right treatment and justice were applied to fictional characters in the game. Additionally, students noted how they began to see their classmates as the characters they were playing.

Three of the 10 students who participated labeled themselves as empathetic during the interview process. While this may have contributed to the amount of empathy-related items evidenced in the interviews, three additional interviewees included the concept of putting themselves in someone else's shoes during the experience. One student noted, "I didn't really start internalizing it, and processing it, until I was feeling something about it" (student interview A, 2017). Another student evidenced a new understanding or empathy as they noted, "It [the experience] …reminded me that when we're dealing with people, we're dealing with living people with freewill and the ability to mess and up, and the ability to just have life happen to them" (student interview I, 2017).

While the concept of empathy was found throughout the course experiences the emotions used to describe student experiences were most poignant during The Day After experience, which

was the closure of the Rockville game. Words used to describe how students felt during The Day After included; upset, sad, aches, concerns, regrets, invested, and anger. One student note, "I had an actual physical response to [the professor] reading it [Day After script]" (student interview G, 2017).

Reaction to Professor Modeling

The final pre-set theme evidenced in the interview data was how students reacted to professor modeling during the RPG experience. Student responses focused on the professor RPG implementation and also generally to how the instructor approached the course material and students. In relation to the RPG implementation, students noted the professor had an "exaggerated approach", that he was "Zen-like" in how he implemented the game, and "he made it work". Some questioned if his approach and personality were contributing factors to what they saw as a successful pedagogical approach. The overall impact of the professor's modeling was captured in a student's response as they stated, "[He] has influenced and given me a deeper understanding of people" (student interview C, 2017).

Additional Emerging Themes

Through the coding process three additional themes were found: attributing the success of the RPG experience to cohort cohesion and establish community; significant barriers preventing the implementation of RPG in participants' settings; and initial student responses to the course's pedagogical approach.

RPG Success Attributed to Cohort Cohesion

There was an overwhelming amount of discussion around the success of the RPG experience being attributed to the specific group members who participated. The cohort had completed a two-week summer residency the year prior and they entered into the course as a pre-existing group who had spent time in both face-to-face settings and online courses throughout the previous year. Participants described the group as honest, trusting, and the group provided a place where they felt safe. One student stated, "We were such a cohesive group – I don't want to use the word cohort because it seemed more" (student interview C, 2017). Additionally, others described the cohort as a whole as empathetic. "I think we were right for this type of experience" (student interview D, 2017).

Identified Barriers to Implementation of RPG

While professional applications were discussed in the interview data collected, as participants did note that the experience had direct pedagogical applications, there was a continued identification of barriers to actual RPG implementation in their own professional settings. Constraints of implementing a RPG as a pedagogical approach included structural challenges like large class sizes, frequency of face-to-face class sessions, and online course delivery. "How do we teach that [RPG] given the constraints of curriculum and testing and all of that" (student interview I, 2017). In addition to these structural barriers participants questioned the ability for their students to experience a RPG as they had experienced, they questioned student dynamic barriers. Limited time to build group cohesion, questioning of student readiness for the experience, and the challenge of building trust all came to the surface as they reflected on their ability to use RPGs in their own professional settings.

Initial Student Perceptions of Pedagogical Approach

The first interview question asked students to reflect on their expectations beginning the ethics course after reading the syllabus and realizing that the major focus was a game. These initial thoughts and feelings toward a course using RPG as a core learning element show a sense of student anticipation and uneasiness. "When I first read it [syllabus], I thought it was kind of out there" (student interview I, 2017). Another student noted, "I was feeling apprehension; I didn't understand how a game could be done at a doctoral level" (student interview G, 2017). Students described it as a "unique way to learn", but more prominent were the concepts of being uncertain, unsure, or nervous. Other terms used regarding the pre-course reading and preparation included intimidated, irritated, and concerned. Concern prompted one student to action. "I still remember, I was very nervous about the [course] design. I even wrote to [the professor] and told him my concern" (student interview H, 2017).

Connections Between Student Interviews and the Professor's Interview

A theme comparison was completed using the ten student interviews and the single professor interview. Connections were found within two distinct areas: course design for empathy development and discussion of barriers to RPG implementation. The professor's interview demonstrated a core desire behind course development. "It was like I wanted you to feel what those kids were going through and you did it. That was the main goal" (professor interview, 2017). Students' "feeling" was present throughout student interviews as they shared their empathy and connection to the characters and their lives, even though they were fictional. Debriefing and reflection at multiple points during the RPG experience was purposefully planned by the professor. "I happen to think that the debriefing times that happened after the game were very valuable. I think there was a lot of learning there for me and for you, I wouldn't sacrifice that" (professor interview, 2017). Student interviews confirmed the value of the debriefing process as they transferred this concept into their own professional practices.

Structural barriers of class size and curricular freedom were noted by both student participants and the professor. While student interviews focused on the challenge of implementing this approach in their own curriculum, the freedom within a doctoral program was noted by the professor in addition to how others might view the approach to the course. The professor indicated that there may be restraints to this approach in some settings (i.e. programs with external requirements, licensure programs). The ideal student dynamics were also a common thread between both students and professor responses, noting trust as a critical element required for successful use of RPGs.

The professor noted, "Part of my desire was to have a meaningful experience for us and not just a typical experience" (professor interview, 2017). The course was atypical for students, it was a meaningful experience, powerful. The pedagogical approach was noted during one interview, "We could have easily done the typical course of action [read articles], but I was able to see that games can be used to transcend these and other ways of how we do things…not just discuss things in theory or in a vacuum but actually to get them to truly experience

things at a deeper level" (student interview G, 2017). Noting the impact of the course, one student commented: "I really felt this is one of the most powerful courses I've ever taken" (student interview F, 2017).

Conclusions
The revised version of Ethics, Equity, and Justice was a deliberate decision on the professor's part to implement a teaching methodology that he hoped would be engaging and allow for application of course content. Further, the intent was to put course participants in difficult decision-making situations and to foster within them empathy for marginalized students. A limitation of the analysis of the data in this study is that the participant interviews were only one data pool examined and what was found is not the complete picture of the experience and the meaning made by the participants. However, three conclusions can be drawn along with considerations for future game-based methodology use.

First, the course experience was meaningful for the participants and it felt to them that the course really mattered. Repeatedly, interviewees used the word invested in their responses. They were invested emotionally, and they were invested in learning the course content. They made investment of their time in the course, indeed some invested an inordinate amount of time.

Second, it is apparent that the participants found professional applications in the course methodologies. The applications that students intended to use included instructional techniques such as simulations and role-playing games, and the use of debriefing sessions after lessons. In addition, they desired to get to know their students better, wanting to develop focus in their teaching on building empathy in their students.

A third conclusion arose in regard to fostering empathy amongst this group of students. They described their experience and how they felt about their characters in particular from an empathetic perspective. The character development aspect of the course, and assuming the role of the character during gameplay created the means by which participants experienced empathy. The two instructor-written follow-ups, fictional accounts of what happened later in the lives of student-created

characters also fostered strong feelings and empathy in the participants.

Future Considerations

An important consideration regarding the students' reactions to the professor and the potential for game-based methodology, if it is to be used in other courses and by other teachers, is the fact that participants recognized the unique aspects of this experience. The cohort nature of the program in which the course is situated fostered a close learning community with strong trust amongst students and several pointed to that as a possible contributing factor in the success of the course. Participants also pointed to the particular personality and teaching style of the professor as an enhancement, while wondering if other instructors had the inclination or wherewithal to successfully carry out a similar course experience. Similarly, while participants expressed appreciation for the instructor and the course, they cited structural constraints in other learning environments that might make the implementation of game-based methods difficult.

The professor had a personal wondering how the course would affect the participants' faith and worldview. However, the interview data yielded scant information about this aspect, perhaps due to the fact that no interview questions directly addressed this element. It is possible that once the data from other sources is analyzed a more adequate picture of that theme will be seen. A question that remains unanswered is: What is the possibility for challenging people of faith regarding their view of care and the price to be paid for caring for students and others in need in their community? It is quite possible that RPGs can be effective tools in this regard. For Christian educators, those who are at their core concerned for the wellbeing of their students, the ethic of the profession is insufficient in providing guidance in addressing the difficult dilemmas of practice. Brueggemann (1982) stated,

The vision of shalom is so great that it would be nice to manage and control it- to know the formula that puts it at our disposal - either by religion or piety or morality or by a technology that puts it on call...But shalom is not subject to our best knowledge or cleverest gimmick. It comes only through the costly way of caring (p. 22).

The experience of the course participants related that the process itself—that is how the course transpired, the methodologies chosen, and professor's areas of emphases—had a meaningful and positive influence. If the intent of an educational experience is to convey the significance of human flourishing (shalom), the commitment must go beyond knowing what it looks like or building a system to bring it forth, but is represented by empathy for the other, care for individuals, and the intentional creation of culture. That commitment is costly in time, attention, and emotional investment. And, that commitment made it all worthwhile.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What were your expectations going into an ethics class when you read the syllabus and saw the major project would focus around game design?

2. Did you become invested in the characters of the Rockville game and if so what factors lead to your investment?

3. When you worked as a team creating your game what factors were most important for you to include and why?

4. What have you learned from your experience playing, designing, and debriefing the games?

- How has the experience influenced your current setting and/or role?

5. How do you see the role of RPGs (role player games) as a teaching tool?

6. Did you experience empathy and the desire to care during your participation in the course? Explain a bit about...

- When you felt empathy? For who?
- How you felt when Scot read the "day after" presentation?

7. As you reflect back now on the EDDL 700 Ethics, Equity, & Justice experience, how do you feel today about the course topics/experiences? Has there been a change in your point of view, or professional practice?