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Game-Based Teaching Methodology and Empathy (Chapter in How Shall We Then Care? : A Christian Educator's Guide to Caring for Self, Learners, Colleagues, and Community)

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Chapter 4

GAME-BASED TEACHING METHODOLOGY AND EMPATHY

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While ethics instruction in initial teacher education and advanced preparation in education fields is fairly common,[1] less common is the particular curriculum and teaching methodology described herein. Professional educators make many daily decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment.[2] A number of those decisions reflect a need for and commitment to ethical frameworks that inform professional decision-making. Indeed, as Shapiro and Gross point out, "The most difficult decisions to solve are ethical ones that require dealing with paradoxes and complexities."[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

1. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership*; Strike and Soltis, *Ethics of Teaching*.

2. Griffith, "Preservice Teachers' In-the-Moment Teaching"; Parker and Gehrke, "Learning Activities."

3. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership*, 3.

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?[4]

Recent work by Christian scholars has examined the value of the ethic of care as a paradigm for adoption by Christian professional educators, though the ethic of care has its roots in postmodern feminist thought, as reviewed by Freytag.[5] 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."[6]

Earlier work by Palmer investigated how the Christian commitment to a life of love influenced an educator's view of curriculum and instruction.[7] 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, 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. The author 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.[8]

Reflecting on Christian conceptions of care, love, and suffering provides fertile ground for examining ethical education. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the experience of a professor and a group of students

4. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership*, 6.
5. Freytag, "Exploring Perceptions of Care."
6. Freytag, "Exploring Perceptions of Care," 3.
7. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known.*
8. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life*, 154.

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, and in particular the ethic of care.

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.[9]

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 chapter include assistant professors of education at two west coast CCCU schools, an art professor at a regional state university in the Midwest, a high school teacher and instructional coach at a rural Oregon high school, and an elementary educator in Hawaii. 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 full-time 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:

9. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership.*

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 wonderings included:

- 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 predesigned game and student game-design teams. This choice reflected his belief, based on his understanding of adult learning theory,[10] 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.

10. Vella, *On Teaching and Learning*; Wlodkowski, "Fostering Motivation in Professional Development."

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 in which that author reviewed the lessons that video games held for educators. Squire 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."[11] 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."[12] 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.[13] The gamification of learning is the selection of elements, such as character, theme, goals, competition, and immediate feedback, and then applying those elements to a learning activity for the purpose of enhancing participant engagement and enjoyment.[14]

11. Squire, "From Content to Context," 19.

12. Overmars, *Game Maker Tutorial*, 3.

13. Arjoranta,"Defining Role-Playing Games"; Daniau, "Transformative Potential of Role-Playing Games."

14. Squire, "From Content to Context"; Bell, *Gamification, Gameful Design,*.

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 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.[15] The four ethical models are presented to help educational leaders develop an ethical framework for approaching challenges. Inazu 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.[16] 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.[17] The ethic of care considers a variety of voices, which comes as a result of listening. Inazu speaks to this in his discussion of humility as a component to confident pluralism.[18] He maintains that listening to others can pave 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.[19] Attention to the larger society also allows social justice issues to be associated with the ethic of care, for there is consideration of 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

15. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership.*
16. Inazu, *Confident Pluralism.*
17. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership.*
18. Inazu, *Confident Pluralism.*
19. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership.*

attention through compassion is more emotion based.[20] 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 by 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 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 . . . ."[21]

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 daily interpersonal communication with learners, 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.[22] 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,[23] 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.

20. Shapiro and Gross, *Ethical Educational Leadership.*
21. Shotsberger, "How a Christian Ethic," 8.
22. Zembylas, "Theory and Methodology."
23. Lichter, "Integration or Fragmentation?"

The ability to take on students' perspectives greatly improves a teacher's ability both to respond to and interpret student behavior.[24] Lam, Kolomitro, and Alamparambil, in a review of empathy training in the human services field, characterized empathy as a form of perspective-taking, where a person reacts to the observable behaviors of others.[25] Research in education has begun to explore the concept of using role-playing games (RPGs), to equip educators in understanding and utilizing perspective-taking with students. Squire 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.[26]

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.[27] 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 through the development of empathy[28] and by exploring concepts such as social-class inequality,[29] morality,[30] and other societal issues.[31]

24. Barr, "Relationship Between Teachers' Empathy and Perceptions"; Davis, "Measuring Individual Difference in Empathy."

25. Lam et al., "Empathy Training."

26. Squire, "From Content to Context," 103.

27. Kaufman and Libby, "Changing Beliefs and Behavior"; Belman and Flanagan, "Designing Games to Foster Empathy."

28. Carnes, *Minds on Fire.*

29. Sandoz, "Game Design Assignment."

30. Sicart, "Game, Player, Ethics."

31. Kaufman and Flanagan. "Psychologically 'Embedded' Approach to Designing Games."

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 and 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 student's 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[32] 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. Key reading content for students included an introduction to turbulence theory and an examination of practices to successfully live and work within a pluralistic society.

Understanding the research around role-playing games, and building knowledge on ethical models and pluralistic society were not the only objectives 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:

32. Belman and Flanagan, "Designing Games to Foster Empathy"; Daniau, "Transformative Potential of Role-Playing Games"; Overmars, *Game Maker Tutorial*; Simkins and Steinkuehler, "Critical Ethical Reasoning"; Squire, "From Content to Context."

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 the doctoral students had decided to develop characters that they had previously interacted with through their own personal or professional lives. As such, many of the backstories or additional information provided about the characters were 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. The song 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 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 chapter, 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 preset codes. These initial codes were derived from the personal wonderings of the professor, which became the conceptual framework for analysis. The preset codes for student interviews included: a) student engagement, b)

applications of participants, c) empathy developed, d) faith impact, and e) reaction to professor modeling. Three additional categories emerged during the coding process of student interviews. These themes included: 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 preset 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" (fictional accounts of what happened later in the lives of student-created characters)	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	preexisting 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 preset 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 said 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 [the 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 RPGs 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" (student interview H, 2017) 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 ten 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 free

will 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 noted, "I had an actual physical response to [the professor] reading it [The Day After script]" (student interview G, 2017).

Reaction to Professor Modeling

The final preset 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 established 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 preexisting 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, questioning 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 precourse 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). Student "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 student 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, but it was a meaningful experience, and 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 the course "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 participant interviews were the only 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 also invested 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. 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 about 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 are 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 well-being of their students, the ethic of the profession is insufficient in providing guidance in addressing the difficult dilemmas of practice. Brueggemann 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.[33]

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, that it 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.

33. Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 22.

THE YEAR AFTER

After a learning experience, a teacher often wonders to what extent the learning will transfer to new settings and situations. And further, was there a community of trust established, rooted in love, which permitted a fuller and deeper learning experience?[34] The interviews conducted with Rockville participants occurred two to three months after the ethics course. At that time, participants noted a desire to transfer what they learned through the RPG experience into their professional setting. The potential professional applications included getting to know and care for their students better, facilitating simulations and RPGs, RPG development, and a focus on building empathy in students. The following stories, of both students in the course and the professor, paint a picture of what occurred in the years following the original Rockville learning experience.

The Graduate Teacher Educator's Story—Building Empathy Through Perspective Writing

I remember the first days of our ethics class vividly. A question was posed asking if we liked to play board games. I was truthful, sharing that I like to win, but beyond that, games were not my thing. Knowing this about myself, I wanted to approach the Rockville RPG experience with an open mind. I took a few words from the directions very seriously: "from here forward you will play the game in character." Since my character, DeAnna, was based on a best friend from high school, and I had spent years teaching high schoolers, becoming her was easy, but I did not realize how being "in character" would open my emotions and my heart. Fully immersing myself in character, I felt angst towards those around me and disdain for decisions that were made. I made it to the final stage of the game, giving a speech to win the scholarship. Unexpectedly I broke down in tears during my speech, barely finishing, as I knew I was not going to win. I was attempting to give a voice to DeAnna, and to so many students who have been labeled as not worthy, and that voice was not being heard. A week after the Rockville experience I wrote in my class journal, "Can I use games to encourage empathy and understanding in my courses?"

I began the next semester working with in-service teachers unsure of how RPGs could be used. I was teaching new courses, learning new program requirements, and trying to prepare for a large state licensure visit. I was overwhelmed with the idea of creating a full RPG experience. Then I

34. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known.*

was gently reminded of my powerful "in character" experience. I worked with teacher candidates who were interacting with students daily; they were beginning to hear stories like DeAnna's. I started to regularly use "in character" student perspective writing to see if it could build cognitive empathy, how well we can perceive and understand the emotions of others.

During the first class of a secondary curriculum course, I ask teacher candidates to think critically about a question that their students will repeatedly ask: "Why should we learn this?" They take on the role, the persona, of a student in their classroom to write the internal dialogue (what you think but do not say) when a teacher responds to the valid question with "because it is in the standards," "because we have to," or "because you need to learn this." The responses have immediately brought forward student perspectives of anger, frustration, apathy, and distaste for the subject matter, for the teacher, and school in general. As volunteers read the internal dialogues of students, some censor out the expletives, but no one sugarcoats their students' internal thoughts and feelings. For a moment, they gave a voice to students who have felt marginalized in the learning process. Each time internal dialogues are read out loud, it brings tears to my eyes. Then through those tears, we begin our journey together looking at how intentional curriculum design can be revolutionary for the student who feels they are often not heard, or that they are not worthy.

I also use student perspective writing in an online health education course. After reviewing health priorities for K-12 students, candidates were asked to take on the role of a student who is faced with one of the eight health issues (vision, asthma, teen pregnancy, aggression and violence, physical activity, breakfast, inattention, and hyperactivity). In character, they were asked to share: How do you feel? What are your daily obstacles? Describe your interaction with your teacher(s).

As I read their responses each semester, my eyes swell. Their writings are often based on students they have observed. One teacher candidate wrote from the perspective of a teenage father, a voice which is often silenced. Using student perspective writing at the beginning of a course can help set the tone, the focus, for our learning experiences, but can it do more? Perspective-taking has demonstrated the ability to reduce stereotypes.[35] Using perspective-taking as a pedagogical approach with teacher candidates may prove to be a powerful way to develop care dispositions in our teacher candidates and, in turn, for them to develop in their future students.

35. Moskowitz and Galinsky, "Perspective-Taking"; Wang et al., "Cultural Boundaries of Perspective-Taking."

The High School Educator's Story—Personal Impact and Potential Future Impact

As I sat teary-eyed at the end of summer term listening to our professor regale us with the postscript of our characters, I thought how this experience was unique and beautiful and a once-in-a-lifetime thing. While I still hold fast to the emotional ties I have with my cohort and my experience of Rockville, I will again tell you my experience is a once-in-a-lifetime deal. I will also say that the idea itself, the idea that an RPG can teach empathy, is definitely not a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I have the privilege of being a veteran RPG player as I have been playing since my early twenties; I am familiar with the ins and outs of gaming. However, I worried about how difficult it is to release the anxiety of role-playing . . . in front of people. I worried about people committing to their characters. I worried that this type of gaming is out of people's comfort zone, and the whole concept may be a failure. I was wrong, oh so wrong.

The fact that the professor helped us to achieve agency in the process by asking us to create our characters was one of the critical factors in the buy-in process. We loved and still love our characters; they are our people. The parameters put in place (poverty, sexual orientation, etc.) were extraordinarily helpful, but we were also encouraged to be creative and to create real, meaningful, genuine people. The attachment to our characters paired with the trust we had in the professor and the trust we had within our cohort made this role-playing within the game even more powerful.

As we played the game in class, we became more and more comfortable, truly being our characters. The entire cohort interacted with each other in character during the game, even when their character would react to a situation/player utterly different than the player. When the time came in the game to pick winners of the scholarship, we were all torn, who did deserve it? Who needed it more? Was the person with the most need even a finalist to win? How do we choose? It was a transformative experience for all involved. We left class wondering if we were doing the right thing and if we had chosen the correct person. The game made us question our values in the best way: it made us open up to discussions, and to confessions, we may not have ever had.

I currently teach high school, and the characters in this game are my students. I often know their daily struggles as well as those of their siblings; I also know that is not the case for all teachers. It certainly is not the case for people who are far removed from the classroom. This RPG allowed all people who are involved with education to remind themselves of what it is

like to be a young adult (or a child) who is struggling, who has some intrinsic factor in their lives that makes it more challenging to succeed.

With the daily grind of classroom teaching, it is easy to forget the grind your students are going through. Most teachers are not aware that they have distanced themselves from their students, that they have lost the connection to their student's daily lives and daily struggles. That is why I am working with our administration to bring this RPG to our high school staff as a way to build empathy that teachers may have unintentionally let fall to the wayside. The game is a safe way to remind educators that our students have things in their lives that they don't know about. It also is an excellent reminder of the privilege that some of us live in.

While my initial statement holds true, our experience in the first class to teach empathy with an RPG isn't too replicable; it was the perfect collision of professor and cohort, and I do believe we won't see the experience again. However, I do think Rockville is an accessible, amazing teaching tool. Empathy sometimes feels like an amorphous concept. Yet becoming another person, a marginalized person, even for a little while, can change everything.

The Undergraduate Teacher Educator's Story—The Use of Role-Play to Promote Empathy

After the original Rockville experience, I was personally impacted. While I had entered the course skeptical about the idea of role-playing, I had no idea how powerful this type of experience would be on me. Overall, the experience left me with a new appreciation for the struggles many students have to go through, a new understanding of empathy, and an interest in the benefits of role-playing.

Like many teachers, whenever I come across a great idea or have an amazing experience, one of my first desires is to share this experience with my students. Noddings notes that "schools can contribute [to students] by helping [them] learn how to care and be cared for."[36] Walking away from the profound experience with Rockville, I wanted to bring something similar to my students. In the following fall semester, I had the flexibility to adjust the curriculum in my Educational Psychology class by adding role-playing experiences. The course consisted primarily of sophomore undergraduate students, and it serves as one of the courses that determines entry into the teacher preparation program at the university.

36. Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 38.

Before I was ready to bring this concept to my students, I knew that building relationships and trust was necessary to the process. As such, I spent the first five weeks of class in preparation for implementing the role-playing scenarios by building a culture of honesty and transparency by building a judgment-free zone. The first scenario explored what happens in a family when one parent has decided to leave the family. Students were placed into groups of four, given background cards, and walked through a family dinner playing one of the family member roles (mother leaving, father staying, older child, and a younger child). After a set amount of time, students switched groups and switched roles to experience being both a parent and a child.

The second role-playing scenario explored trying to learn a new concept as a child with special needs. For this scenario, one student role-played being a teacher, while the three other students role-played being a student with special needs (a student who is deaf, a student who is blind, and a student who is deaf and blind). During the role-play, an eye mask and noise-canceling headphones were used to simulate the students with special needs. Similar to the first role-playing scenario, I had students switch roles after a set amount of time, so students would have the opportunity to play multiple roles. Before and after each role-playing experience, students would journal their thoughts, impressions, and takeaways about the topic at hand, as well as the role-playing experience. Across the board, students responded at first that they thought the role-playing activity "was weird," but afterward were glad they had participated in the activities. One student wrote in their journal:

> My perspective is that I am now more aware of how my words directly affect the children I speak to. I have the power to use my words for good or for bad. My words can either tear the children down and cause their lights to go out or have the opposite effect and give life to their eyes.

At the beginning of the process, I felt apprehension from the unknowns. Having completed Rockville with working professionals who had at least five years of teaching experience, would eighteen-to-twenty-year-old students be able to engage in the process? My experience has shown that students could engage in this process, and I have incorporated at least one role-playing scenario into every course I have taught. Students still seem hesitant and even doubtful at the beginning of the role-play, yet the majority of students have walked away expressing gratitude in getting to explore student perspectives in such a hands-on method.

The Art Educator's Story—Rockville: The Next Generation

The experience of the ethics class and game design pedagogy was a natural tie into my love of board games and the project-based nature of my art classes. I felt mimicking the experience would be a natural fit. As an art education professor working with future teachers in their sophomore and junior years, I folded game design pedagogy into preservice teacher training through a class on theory and practice in the classroom. I have been able to expose my traditional preservice art educators to the same game design literature readings as well as the project-based collaborative work to design and prototype their games in the classroom. The experience followed the three-phase format of the summer ethics course, including a preparatory phase, Rockville gameplay and collaborative student-created games, and post-experience journaling.

As a part of the initial curricular unit, the students read assigned articles and had several class discussions to flesh out the necessary parts of game design theory. Next, the class followed the example of the original Rockville experience by listening to Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World" and analyzing the many themes that come from that song. As many students were not familiar with the references within the song, such as the Thousand Points of Light Foundation, additional time was spent examining and researching that song's symbolism. Student journal writing and online discussion boards were used to take the class interaction to a virtual space where students could take time for thoughtful exchanges.

Next, the students were allowed to select their character from a list that included different attributes and social and economic statuses. The students used the listed information to create a game card and game token for their chosen character. The students spent time diving into the character lists and asking questions regarding the socioeconomic status of their game character. The original doctoral students who played Rockville developed their characters based on former students, while the art education students also selected characters that they felt they knew in real life. Clarification was given to undergraduate students on specific character traits that were not familiar (i.e., DACA status). When the class played Rockville, the ethical dilemmas of moving ahead or holding another player back based on what each character would do were still in place. The students wrestled with their group decision on which character should receive the lifetime education grant and what characters should not get the money. Different dynamics based on the characters that made it to the finals, how the game was played, and the students behind the characters led to varied conversations and different conclusions. The next class session was used as a debriefing

tool, which was an eye-opening revelation into the ethical dilemma and the individual student's thought processes. In one instance, a student refused to give the money to a character that she felt was not a natural-born citizen. This comment was a shock for some participating students, but I praised this student for her openness to share her opinion even if it is not a popular opinion in the diverse classroom setting. Due to the classroom dynamics and relationship building that had occurred, the student felt comfortable sharing a contrary opinion.

Following the model of the game Rockville, students next divided into small groups and created their board games. Being preservice art teachers, the games needed to be something they could use in their future classrooms, so they were based on the elements of art and the principles of design. Like the game Rockville, the student-created games included an ethical dilemma that the characters would face while playing the game. The student game design could fit into any category of gaming, including collaborative games, party games, deck building, or roll-and-move games. The RPG games developed by first-year students were trivia question or roll-and-move games. To counter this, the instructor adapted the unit to allow second-year students to play board games before starting their game design to show game possibilities and modern adaptions of classic board games. Because of this extra time and attention to the structure and format of game design, the games designed by the second-year students were more complex and collaborative.

The first year I implemented game design in my classroom, the students in my class were gamers and more familiar than I with role-playing games. By the second year, the class was made up of individuals who had not played a board game in the last ten or more years and did not know any current role play games, including *Dungeons and Dragons*. This confirmed the importance of knowing and understanding that the learning context is critical to implement the concept of RPG in a learning environment.

The Professor's Story

Since the summer of 2017, when we played Rockville for the first time, much has changed in my thinking and practice about teaching and learning. My decision to implement a game-based approach in teaching and learning was based on my belief that this method would enhance student engagement, and I hoped that it would foster empathy for marginalized students. In this follow-up, I am going to present some ideas about what I have taken away from that initial experience and what I am currently working on. I'll present a brief update on the game itself and how I continue to use it, and how I plan

on using it in the future. I will also share some insights I gained from the game and how I apply those insights.

I constructed the first version of the board game Rockville from a large piece of cardboard, cardstock, color markers, and tape. In the winter of 2017/18, I sought out an art student who would accept a commission to reconceptualize the game as an actual manufactured game that had a real board and game elements. Design students at my institution played the game with me, interviewed me several times, and then produced an elegantly designed board, character cards, and the related game elements, all contained within a beautifully designed box. In anticipation of working with larger groups, I purchased two sets of game elements. This well-designed and produced version of Rockville was ready for use in the spring of 2018. At that time, I was curious about whether the game had utility for courses other than my graduate course in ethics. I sought out a colleague in teacher education and asked for a venue to use the game in his senior seminar, for fourth-year teacher candidates who were in their final semester prior to graduation. Those twenty-five students played the game in two groups simultaneously. I served as the game master for one group, and an original Rockville participant served as the game master with the second group. I worked with teacher education faculty to develop content questions that were related to their coursework, replacing the content questions I originally developed for my course. Debriefing afterward with the students, I learned that the undergraduates were also moved by the experience and did a good job of developing their characters and playing the roles during gameplay. Students suggested that the game would be better played in a sophomore- or junior-level course as a good prelude to student teaching. These students were similarly impacted by the game as my graduate students in that they experienced empathy for their characters. I noted, though, that this group found it a little more difficult to play a role than my graduate students. I also noticed that it was harder for me to play the role of the game master, possibly because I had never worked with this group of students before. From this experience with the preservice students, I reflected on the following:

a) The context for the game matters and the nature of the group who plays the game needs to be taken into consideration when preparing for gameplay.

b) Debriefing after gameplay is a valuable tool and leads to powerful learning, regardless of the type of group that is playing.

c) The game has broader utility than I first thought and caused me to reflect on what other populations might benefit from its use.

During the summer of 2018, I used Rockville again in my doctoral-level ethics course. While I was pleased with the reaction of this group of students to the experience, I noted that their level of enthusiasm for the game was not as high as the previous group. This reinforced my emerging belief that the nature of the group playing the game and the context for the game are vital for its success, and are important elements to consider for the facilitator who is doing the game mastering. I reflected back to a conversation I had in the spring of 2017 with a *Dungeons and Dragons* game master, who told me that he spent at least eight to ten hours of preparation time prior to leading a game session that might take two to four hours. He told me that this preparation was necessary to facilitate the type of engaging experience he wanted his players to have.

As I move forward, I am making amendments to the game to improve it for my purpose: to help foster empathy for marginalized students. I am also taking ideas from the game experience and exporting them into other teaching and scholarly work. The following are the elements I'm working on:

a) Story: One element I had not anticipated but realized was invaluable was the use of fiction, introduced as "The Day After" in the first playing of Rockville. The words of Parker Palmer are relevant here, as he stated, "Why does a literary scholar study the world of 'fiction'? To show us that the facts can never be understood except in communion with the imagination."[37] I'll continue to explore the use of fiction in my courses, to stimulate imagination and foster student engagement.

b) Character development: Asking students to develop a character and then become a character is one of the highlights of the game. Participants developed empathy for others as a result of this activity. I want to export this aspect to other courses and for other purposes. Empathy for others who are similar to oneself is common, as supported by recent research in cognitive science.[38] However, I desire to help my students develop empathy for those who are different, and therefore intentional efforts to help my students gain the perspective of the other are needed.

37. Palmer, *Courage to Teach*, 55.

38. Han, "Neurocognitive Basis of Racial Ingroup Bias."

c) Gameplay: Enhancing game flow by making the game more challenging and engaging. My initial research into games and what they offer to educators revealed that games could be quite engaging to players, and I desired that high level of engagement for my learners. Continued modifications of Rockville, with attention to the player experience will enhance engagement.

d) Tie to academic objectives: I am wondering how important it is to overtly include academic content in the game. While an original purpose of the game was to reinforce learning of academic content in a particular course, I am currently working with the idea that removing academic content allows the game to be used in multiple courses or not tied to a course at all.

Where to Go From Here?

Since most of my teaching is done online, I am interested in discovering how I can move the game of Rockville, or similar games and activities, to the online environment. I shared the concept with colleagues at two conferences and with others within my network. I implemented the Rockville game in Second Life, a Mult-user Virtual Environment, and alpha-tested it with a group of participants who had previously played the game as a board game. I received feedback from those alpha-testers, and I am at the point of recruiting participants to try the game out in the online environment. Through the alpha-testing online and through additional rounds of the board game, I made some additional modifications to the game, including tokens in the game for defining financial levels for characters, and introducing a nonplayer character (NPC) who is a privileged character to act as a foil to the other players.

Other educators who have played Rockville have made the following observations:

a) The character development component has broad utility in providing perspective-taking and empathy-building for students in various courses and outside of a game environment.

b) The scholarship competition has good application in reviewing ethical decision-making and in setting up discussions of family and community context, privilege, and marginalization.

I now have confidence that game-based learning, in particular role-playing games for the purpose of fostering empathy and providing the

environment for ethical decision-making, are worthwhile instructional tools for use with preservice and in-service educators. I will continue to use Rockville and look for opportunities to develop additional games for similar purposes.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In reflecting on the meaning of the Rockville experience for those of us who lived it, we conclude that our desire and commitment is to engage our students in authentic relationships and to make the process of teaching and learning far more than the dispensing of information. We seek to provide an experience that will influence the thinking of our students, shape their attitude toward others, and create the grounds by which care is given and received, and given again. In working toward the development of empathy for those students on the margins, we seek to follow the example of Christ who taught us that the neighbor whom we are directed to love is the one who is in need. The ethic of care is evident in the life of Jesus where need was more prominent than rights. The story of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37 is a good reminder:

> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
>
> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"
>
> He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"
>
> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."
>
> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
>
> In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to

> the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'
>
> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"
>
> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."
>
> Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

This story sums up for us the essence of care and the importance of developing empathy for those on the margins. Jesus points out that the neighbor to be loved and cared for is the person who is in need. And it is the Samaritan, the person on the margin, who is the hero of the story. Seeking to understand another's context and need is a vital step in building a relationship that leads to care in the classroom, the school, and the community. To care does come with a cost and yet, if we choose to follow the model and direction of Jesus, there is no other way.

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 led to your investment?
3. When you worked as a team creating your game what factors were most important for your team 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-playing 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 whom?
    - How you felt when [the professor] 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?

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