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Limed: Teaching with a Twist
Season 2, Episode 2 – Try a Claim Game

Matt Wittstein (00:00:11):

You are listening to Limed: Teaching with a Twist, a podcast that plays with pedagogy.

(00:00:23):

Hi, everyone. We hope our podcast invites conversation about teaching and learning practices and we would love to get your feedback. Reviewing and rating our show wherever you listen to podcasts is a great way to share with us what you think. On this month's episode, we hear from William Quayd Snell who teaches rhetoric and argumentation at Sinclair Community College and Wright State University. Quayd makes learning argumentation fun by using his Try a Claim Game, a board game designed to walk students through the steps of making, developing, and supporting their ideas around disputed topics.

(00:00:56):

Sophie Miller, Elon University senior, Pratheep Paranthaman, Elon University computer science and game design professor, and Shane Wood, director of first year writing at the University of Central Florida talk about ways to make learning fun, why Quayd's game might be an effective strategy to engage his learners and other ideas to play around with a game in the classroom. I'm Matt Wittstein. I hope you enjoy playing this episode. See what I did there?

(00:01:30):

Hi, Quayd. Welcome to the show. It's really exciting to have you here today. Would you first introduce yourself to our audience? What's your name? Where do you teach? What do you teach?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:01:39):

Yeah. My name is William Quayd Snell. I'm an English instructor at Sinclair Community College and Wright State University.

Matt Wittstein (00:01:46):

So you come with us today, you're teaching English and we've talked a little bit offline, but you're teaching rhetoric and argumentation and you have a very novel way of going about that. Can you tell our audience a little bit more?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:01:58):

Yeah. So basically I made a game that takes students through the process of argumentation and gives them insight into my sense of generic version of how academics argue through the different mediums that they argue through.

Matt Wittstein (00:02:13):

Cool. So tell us a little bit more about the game. How does it fit into your classes? Do you use it in all of your classes, in a specific class?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:02:22):

I use it in both of my classes, but the first year English class, I use it mostly at the end. They don't really engage with it too much. It's mostly in the argumentation and research class that I use it and they play it pretty much the whole year whenever we're not doing something else.

Matt Wittstein (00:02:38):

It sounds like you've created a tool that works in a lot of different settings, which is really cool. And I'm curious to learn a little bit more about what are your learning objectives for your students in using this game? And before we get there, do you have a name for the game?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:02:55):

Yeah. It's just Try a Claim Game. So I've had different names for it throughout the years. At one point it was just the claim game, but I like the word try there because the idea is that you're not getting a definitive stance on the claim. You're not deciding whether or not the claim is true or false, you're just trying it out and testing it in different ways along with an argument to back it. And in terms of learning objectives, really the objective is to get students to be able to explain and use the argumentation process.

Matt Wittstein (00:03:26):

Can you give us a little bit more detail about the game itself? Is this like a monopoly style game? Is this a card game? Is this a video game?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:03:34):

It's monopoly in the sense that it's very complicated. So it shares that it has card game elements to it. It's pretty novel in that each step that I can think of in terms of arguing the different moves you can make in an argument with points involved. And the game, I call these authority points or ethos points and you can actually make a claim. And then once we have the details of the claim sorted out defining certain things, the student can decide how much authority points they want to give the claim, to bet essentially, and then they can regain those if the claim gets to certain steps in the game.

Matt Wittstein (00:04:12):

So it sounds like it's a little bit complex, but also there's some simplicity to it that it sort of works in a linear fashion, but it really makes your students think about those individual pieces of their argument, which is fantastic. What made you want to make a game for rhetoric and argumentation?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:04:30):

I've been interested in argumentation for close to a decade now, I would say. Just watching a lot of different debates or listening to people talk about controversial topics, I tended to not like the way the conversations went. They seemed to be more complicated than they needed to be. There was a lot of talking past each other, but then there were some debates that I would see and I would see somebody doing something and I would be like, "Yeah, that's the thing. That's the move that I think was actually the next logical step to take that would actually progress the conversation."

(00:05:00):

And then I recognized we have an issue in the US where there's this huge divide between expert consensus and what the general population or certain people think, and I was interested in why that divide exists and if there's ways to bridge that gap. So that's when I started doing research on

argumentation, the forms of argumentation and really what's the difference between the epistemologies of expert communities in the epistemologies of the general population and where are there similarities and can we build off of those similarities? I think ultimately I found that there were similarities and that's where this game really developed and came to fruition.

Matt Wittstein (00:05:39):

Do you think that concept is resonating with your students as they play this game or do you think the game might be just the checkbox that they have to check to get through your class?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:05:53):

It's definitely a mixture to be honest. So I can say for certain that I'm getting more engagement than I was before I made the game. Other strategies that I've used to try to teach students haven't been as effective as this game. There are still students that it's clear that they're checking a box, but there are other students where it's clear that they're thinking more dynamically about the claims that they make and the arguments they make. And that's where the real breakthroughs came in for me from what I can see.

Matt Wittstein (00:06:23):

Thinking about that argumentation and research course, you said that they play it all semester. How does that sort of scaffold for you throughout the semester?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:06:31):

So the idea is by the end of the year to get them to write a pretty proficient research paper. And throughout the year they're also going to have to engage with a lot of different sources and the game helps them think about how to dissect, to analyze and evaluate the different sources that they're reading and then also how they're going to construct their own argument using those sources.

Matt Wittstein (00:06:54):

So what are some of your goals for improving the game? What can our panelists think about to make this work better for you or consider different applications? What types of things do you think that it needs work on still?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:07:08):

It definitely needs to be streamlined. That's one thing that has to change and this comes down to the formatting. Right now the game is made up using three different websites. And so what that means is there's a lot of switching back and forth, switching from the rules of the game to the place where we'll put the claim and the information and the reasoning. And then there's cards. Whoever's making the claim, they'll get one deck and then people who are going to be the critics will get a different deck.

(00:07:36):

So it's really in a lot of different locations right now and that makes it more complex than it needs to be and sometimes confusing even. I think bells and whistles help too. There's no bells and whistles for the game. So those things that those sounds we know that are more likely to garner attention and images.

Matt Wittstein (00:07:54):

You'd mentioned that you noticed that some of your students are engaging a lot more in that. What does that deeper level of engagement look like compared to your class prior to this game?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:08:05):

So one thing that happens that I absolutely love and that I think is something that the game is clearly bringing out in students is that they will actually change their claims. This was tougher to do before. It seemed like students would make a claim and once that claim was made they were stuck to it like glue and it was a matter of force through revisions or through peer review and some of these things to get them to change their claim at all.

(00:08:32):

Whereas in the game, they'll sometimes change their claim in a matter of minutes just because of the first step, which has them define things. That's one level of engagement. I see certain students doing a pretty fair amount where they will make a claim and that claim will sometimes be radically different in significant ways by the end of the game.

Matt Wittstein (00:08:54):

I really appreciate that and thinking about... I mean you've brought it up a little bit with today's sort of cultural environment, social environment that we seem to be very strong in our stances without giving the due diligence to the fullness of an argument of a complex issue. So I really appreciate that piece of that. This made me think of another probably important point is that you have to have good topics for them to talk about. So how do you come up with your topics? What types of topics do you use?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:09:25):

Essentially the topics are ones where expert communities have reached consensus, but there is some segment of the population that doesn't necessarily agree or doesn't understand the expert consensus. So these will be things like climate change, evolution, all the way down to rent control, pretty much anywhere where there's a discrepancy between expert consensus and some segment of the population.

Matt Wittstein (00:09:50):

Have you gotten any feedback from your students about the course directly, either through student evaluations or just candid comments or anything like that? And on the flip side are there any feedback you've gotten from other instructors or other folks that you've engaged with on this topic?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:10:06):

The students seem to like it both in conversation, just candid conversations and the feedback I've gotten. I don't even have a question. At the end of the evals, they can write whatever they want and they will often mention the game as like, "Yeah, that was a cool game." I've gotten some feedback at conferences. There's some skepticism about the game I think because they're wondering how I account for the subjective.

Matt Wittstein (00:10:37):

So what types of concerns do you have about the game as a whole?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:10:41):

Some other things that I didn't mention which are based on scholarship, it doesn't do much to address emotional components or social components of arguments. And those are things that I can incorporate. They would make the game even longer, which I wouldn't feel comfortable doing until I could streamline the game more. And then there is an innate feature in that students know that we just follow the steps of the process and then I do have this thing called the snowflake card, which may be in bad taste and I think about it almost every semester that I'm playing it and I let them know, I'll probably never actually use this card, but you should just know that we've already agreed on the steps of the process. If you disagree, you can let me know, but if not, then we need to follow the steps of the process and not deviate into other things or let our emotions overwhelm us on this topic. We're just trying to get through these processes.

(00:11:30):

So that's a bit of an emotional mitigator but not as big of one as it could be. Having students think about what are their emotions in regards to certain topics and then also what social groups do they belong to that may have a position on the topic that they should be thinking about I think is also really important but not a part of my game.

Matt Wittstein (00:11:48):

I think I want to know a little bit more about the actual mechanics of the game. So we're focused in on your argumentation and research class. You said they play it all semester. Is that once a week they check in with the game board and see how they're doing or is this the framework for how you actually teach your entire course or somewhere in between?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:12:08):

It's somewhere in between. There are things later in the game that they don't learn until I would say halfway through the semester. So we're playing the game as we go. Sometimes I have to fill in gaps, but somewhere by the middle of the semester they know everything they would possibly need to know about the components of the game. The game really starts when someone makes a claim. They're really allowed to make a claim over anything in the class. I will check in with students. If somebody makes a claim that I think is going to evoke a lot of negative emotions, I'll check in and have people email me if they don't really want to do the claim.

(00:12:40):

And then we have like the "who caress" card that's the next thing that you would do. So someone can play a "who cares" card. And there's two reasons that they can play this. One is if they don't think that anything would change in the world if it were true or they would play it if they thought that there would be too much agreement on the claim if they don't think anybody would reasonably disagree with the claim.

(00:13:00):

So there's that. We have defining certain terms in the claim, so that's where somebody can ask for clarification on a definition. And then setting standards. What would indicate that the claim was true and indicate that it wasn't true? What kind of information are we looking for? Then they give information, then we try to connect the information to the reasoning. There's something called a source search card where we're actually looking for the sources to support the information and people can challenge the different sources as they come up and are given in class.

(00:13:33):

So that's really a lot and some weeks we don't do it at all because we're too busy learning the stuff that we need to learn even though everything is tangentially related to it in some way. And sometimes we're playing it the whole week. It just depends on what week we're on and how much we've gotten done.

Matt Wittstein (00:13:48):

If I'm understanding this right, and maybe it needs just a little more clarity, it's not like on Monday you're like, "Hey, we're going to play the game today." It's more like you're in the act of going through your normal teaching activities and someone realizes sort of impromptu says, "Hey, I think we need to go to the board. We need to play the game now."

William “Quayd” Snell (00:14:08):

I do have one day where I want us to get to it, so I have the first day that we do it. But yes, the rest of the days are impromptu.

Matt Wittstein (00:14:16):

Do you have any other examples of when students have sort of initiated this game?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:14:20):

And this is where I can understand it would get dicey for some teachers, but it's worked out completely fine in my context. The bible has come up. People have made comments about our biases in the court system. So usually there's things going on in the news that people are listening to that students are listening to and something else that I'm doing in the class makes them think of that and they end up making a claim naturally.

Matt Wittstein (00:14:45):

I think it's really powerful that you've found a way to you yourself engage them in playing the game, but also giving them some autonomy in starting this, which probably makes the topics more relatable. If we could boil it down to just a couple things that you wanted to learn from our panelists, what would those things be? I've got streamlining. I've got how to add some bells and whistles, maybe how to include some emotional and social components as that streamlining happens. Is there anything else that you want our panel to address?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:15:16):

Yeah, actually. And it's again, the way that the game's developed is I would be interested in just from what you've heard, ways that you feel like maybe this game deviates from the way that you build knowledge personally. So is there a way that you build knowledge that you think I haven't brought to the game yet that you feel like would be an important component?

Matt Wittstein (00:15:37):

That is a fantastic question. Quayd, thank you so much for the conversation today. I really appreciate having you on the show and I can't wait to get back to you soon.

William “Quayd” Snell (00:15:45):

Thanks for having me.

Matt Wittstein (00:15:56):

We had a great conversation with Quayd about his Try a Claim Game and I'm really excited to be here with Shane, Pratheep, and Sophie. To introduce yourselves to our audience, what I really want to know is an example of a time that you remember that teaching or learning was really, really fun.

Shane Wood (00:16:12):

Hi. I'm Shane Wood and I am an associate professor and director of first year composition at the University of Central Florida. Happy to be here. Thanks for letting me join this panel in this conversation. A time that I felt like learning was really fun, in my first year of writing class, my teacher has a real short assignment. But in my first year writing class at Western Kentucky University, my teacher just asked us to write about a particular person that meant a lot to us.

(00:16:39):

So I think what made it fun was that there was a sense of agency as a writer and as a student, and as a learner where my knowledge and my experiences were being validated. So it was just a very open-ended prompt that asked me to think about a role model or someone who's been influential and I decided to write about my older brother who's been very impactful in my life. I think that's one just brief assignment. That was really fun.

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:17:03):

Hi. My name is Pratheep Paranthaman. I'm an assistant professor of computer science at Elon University. I'm also the coordinator of the game design minor program where I primarily teach courses on game design, game production and then game programming. That was an interesting question, Matt. So in terms of my learning experience or the part where I enjoyed learning was I could recall one of the workshops in game design that I attended during my PhD research. So I was about to complete my PhD research and then I joined this wonderful game design workshop with some of my colleagues.

(00:17:33):

And one of the tasks that we received in that particular workshop was to design a game that would solve a real world problem. So it was an open question and then we were thinking of different options or what we could bring it over here. And the concept that we took for this, is to create a game to teach the basics of Italian for enrolling students in Italian institutions.

(00:17:55):

So what are some of the Italian terms that you have to learn in order to apply for an Italian universities and then onboard here? So once you reach to Italy and then once you onboard to university, what are the steps that you have to follow? The reason why I found learning to be interesting in this aspect was when we joined our university, we ran into a couple of challenges and then we were able to reflect upon some of the experiences that we had been through as a student. And then translating that experience as a designer was sort of fun.

(00:18:23):

We were able to associate the challenge that we're having in this design with the real world experience that we had. So that's the point, right? I felt learning all these fundamentals of game design and then applying them into a real world situation was fun.

Sophie Miller (00:18:38):

I'm Sophie Miller. I am going into my fourth year at Elon University. I'm studying psychology and then I have two minors, one in early childhood education and one in adventure-based learning. And a time that I had fun learning was actually in my intro to adventure-based learning class my freshman year. This was a really fun class. It started off, we were sitting in a circle. We were not in a classroom. We were in this random part of campus and the professor kind of said, "Here is my syllabus." And I didn't really have anything on it, and he told us that we could help create the syllabus.

(00:19:17):

So already we had tons of ownership in the class. Power dynamics were broken down. And then throughout the class we ended up meeting on our experiential learning campus, which is basically a low ropes course. There's a little pond. And so being a first year student without a car on campus being able to travel down half a mile down the road from our normal campus and take a class somewhere else in a new environment was really exciting. And then lastly, we were doing a lot of physical challenges on the low ropes course with classmates that we did not know, and this type of physical challenge really encouraged the academic challenge as well and vulnerability there.

(00:20:00):

A lot of trust was built in the classroom as well. And so we were able to kind of dig into topics that I haven't been able to dig into in other classrooms that are more traditional settings like lectures. So that was a really, really fun class.

Matt Wittstein (00:20:13):

I noticed that the common theme that you all have is that there's sort of some element of agency and integrating your own lived experiences into what you were doing, which I think is really cool. And I think it relates to what Quayd shared with us about his Try a Claim Game. So I'll give you the brief synopsis. Quayd teaches first and second year primarily students in English and rhetoric, and is really focused in on his argumentation and research course. Over the last few years he's developed what he's called the Try a Claim Game. It's sort of a traditional board game. There's no dice or anything. You go through every space, but each of the spaces sort of unlock and ask students to participate with the steps of argumentation of okay, make a claim.

(00:20:58):

What are some of the pieces of evidence that would tell you that this claim is a good claim, is factual or maybe more subjective? How do we find sources for that claim? And throughout the game, students are able to challenge things, take votes, critique pieces of it. And he's sort of used it and seen some positive outcomes from using that in his course. He's seen students start to maybe make some changes in their claims through peer review and through feedback. They're actually seeing people respond to that.

(00:21:29):

But what he's looking for is how do we take a game like that and make it more fun? One of the challenges he has is that you can't really run through it in a 50-minute class session. You need more time than that. It takes a little while for students to warm up to the game that it doesn't onboard as easily as you might like if you were just playing board games with friends. And he is also just curious how well it maps on to the goals that he has for his students of them actually developing those rhetorical skills for argumentation. So I know each of you, I've shared with you all how that game works. What are some of your first impressions of his Try a Claim Game?

Shane Wood (00:22:10):

So one thing that I really enjoy and appreciate about this Try a Claim Game is that I think it really encourages students to better understand the process of research and argumentation of making claims. So I think it allows students or at least provides opportunities for a teacher to talk about, "Okay, what does it look like to make a claim, to provide evidence, to provide support, to research and look at other sources?" So I think in some ways it is very focused in nature. We're talking about claims, we're talking about argumentation, we're talking about research. It does that type of work in a different way other than a lecture. I think Sophie mentioned this earlier. It's not a lecture. It's asking students to participate to be involved in a learning, a concept or a skill.

Sophie Miller (00:22:56):

Bouncing off of that, I think that the relationships that are probably being built while playing this game are integral for a safe learning environment whether that be relationships peer to peer or student to faculty rather are being built through trust. You're having fun together. You're learning and becoming vulnerable through playing a game and getting feedback in more of an informal kind of context.

(00:23:24):

And then when it comes time, I'm sure later down the line in his class there is peer editing or you're asking your peers for feedback on a paper or something like that. And having something like this in the classroom I think sounds like it would set up for a really nice learning environment.

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:23:42):

I think the first point that I noticed was that it had like well-established rules. Even though it's small, it had those proper rules. And the set of onboarding like how do you onboard the players within the game? That's the biggest challenge that we have regardless of whichever game that we develop. Whether we are developing it for the context of education or context of entertainment, onboarding the users with, "Hey, what you can do with this and what you can learn with that?"

(00:24:05):

So that establishment was good. Each card, it had proper descriptions and on top of descriptions there were several examples like, "Hey, this is what I mean as a claim and this is what I mean as not a claim." So that part was well established like onboarding instructions and the examples. And also there were a lot of variations of those cards like Socratic cards and then the claim cards. And these things are intertwined towards his subject. And then the learning goals, which is also an interesting component.

(00:24:37):

So how do you take your subject elements and then converted into this game parts? That is also one of the key factors that stands out to me. I was able to relate towards those standard points and aspects. He also used a point system like you do. You get plus five or minus five points towards the standard gamification, but this kind of intertwines towards the goals that he has initially envisioned. I was able to see that from the standpoint of an educator. So that part is something that I really liked.

Matt Wittstein (00:25:05):

So you all seem to have some good positive, initial impressions of the game. I'm curious if you have some ideas of ways that it might just be more fun. Because honestly, I look at the board game, it seems very linear to me, which is not always the most fun game to play. Why is this maybe a better way to teach the process of argumentation than say a lecture or a PowerPoint based classroom activity?

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:25:31):

I think from my experience, if we have it more PowerPoint or lecture-based, most of the engagement it becomes passive where students are just listening to some of your points and then viewing the examples that you're presenting onto the slides. But whereas if you going to give them an opportunity that they can experience for themselves like be it an activity or sort of a game that they can play and then learn, you are actually switching gears and then making it more of an active engagement.

(00:25:58):

So they're taking the wheels and they're working on with that. So I think this particular strategy is promoting that active engagement within the class where you introduce a notion or a background about a subject and after that what you're doing is you're just handing out the wheels to the students and having them explore and then experience within game and then learn these concepts.

(00:26:19):

So that's why I think this sort of supports that aspect of student engagement within the class. And the reason why I'm using the term engagement is because I'm also seeing this from the perspective of a game designer. So if you see it from the lens of game design, one of the things that we constantly talk about in the design process is, "Hey, how do we improve engagement within the game system?" And the same goes, right? If you try to put this in the context of education, we as educators, one thing that we constantly talk about in department meetings and so on, "Hey, how do we promote engagement within this class?"

(00:26:52):

So this is the concept that I teach. So what can I do to have or promote student engagement? So that engagement is sort of a pivotal point in both of these aspects like games and then in education. So I see this particular method supports that than the traditional lecture.

Shane Wood (00:27:09):

In terms of engagement, I mean, I think of the word of participation as well, that participation, it's inherently built into this activity. It's that type of critical engagement. Students aren't passive in their relationship with this. It's almost required of them to participate in order for something to be learned. From another design perspective, I think of the word user experience. This is a user interacting with a game. They're experiencing it. Again, they're not distant or disconnected from the activity itself. So I think it could actually provide really interesting ways to think about how a user is experiencing this game and how students are taking it up.

(00:27:48):

Matt, I will say that I agree with you about the linear nature of it. As a teacher, what I would probably recommend and suggest is like writing is not linear, writing is recursive. So I think we have to talk about argumentation and research in that recursive way too. So even though the board might feel linear, I think there's ways that you could provide context and a clear base foundation and saying that argumentation and research isn't linear and that it's a recursive process. But this might allow us to walk through the different steps of that process. So I think that's how I would maybe handle the linear nature of it and just share and discuss that.

Matt Wittstein (00:28:27):

Do you have any specific suggestions of how Quayd might take this and either make it more recursive or non-linear? I could imagine going back a few spaces and then jumping back ahead just as a teaching tool might work as well. Do you have any suggestions on how he might do that?

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:28:43):

So one thing that I would suggest from the design perspective is the track that seems linear. We can change the overall anatomy of that and include multiple paths that players can explore or the students can explore. And the reason why I'm talking about these paths is because it creates autonomy, right? Students can choose their path and they can explore certain areas within the space. And each path that is going through, it can catch some specific topics as well.

(00:29:10):

So it promises sense of autonomy within the space. If we are thinking about breaking the linearity within the space, it's not just introducing the paths but also how these paths contribute towards the overall experience. Experience was also one of the points that Shane mentioned. That's an excellent point. What is that we can do to improve this experience? So I think in that perspective, so if we solve that problem, so that kind of addresses this linearity issue.

(00:29:36):

So that problem of addressing that experience is improving its autonomy. So how can we do this? Allowing students to choose their paths as they expand through the space. When we talk about board game, it is basically a space that they're expanding. So we are introducing all of those learning goals within that space. So in that if we give some variation set of topics that students can explore for themselves, so that would contribute for learning experience.

Sophie Miller (00:29:58):

I think about the layout of the game. And for all of our listeners who may not have a visual representation of the game, it's almost a backward S at the moment with a start and a finish. And my most immediate thought is a chutes and ladders or something like that if people are familiar, but basically a rectangle or square grid where you can take those different paths. I think that would be really cool and maybe still requiring that people or the students are hitting certain benchmarks, certain kinds of squares so that they're getting that same experience and fulfilling that requirement of landing on those same type of squares that are in that backward S shape at the moment. But then you can also interact and see, "Oh, my friends are in different areas of the board," and things like that. I think that would be a cool idea.

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:30:52):

Also, one point I wanted to add as a supporting aspect which is the way that it looks linear is because he had certain goals within the assignment that has to satisfy. Because there are some instances where when we are designing certain tasks, it might look linear. It may be because we have to check certain boxes in terms of those skills that we are offering. So if that is the case, but even you want to keep those goals linear but still offer some variations, what he could possibly try is a foldout structure. You have those set key points that players have to visit, but then in between those points you can keep some diversions.

(00:31:29):

You can keep some additional paths that they can explore, but no matter what part that they explore, they converge at that important take home message. So within that, it's combination of what players can choose and also it works with those check boxes that from the instructor's perspective that we have to hit these goals.

Matt Wittstein (00:31:47):

This makes me want to circle back to Shane. You brought up the idea of gamification, of thinking about when I think of gamification in the classroom, I don't think of a literal game in the classroom. Although it can be that. I usually think of point systems and how to have maybe some competition-based pieces in there to make learning fun. But to me the biggest part of gamification is that it's still a learning activity. It's still a learning setting. And I think, Sophie, you touched in on how do you actually do the evaluation and the benchmarking of each of the students getting where they need to be through playing this game. So do you all have any suggestions on how you might specifically look into how student learning is going while we're playing this game?

Sophie Miller (00:32:33):

Something that I want to highlight while we have this conversation about student evaluation that's been coming to my mind while we talk about this interactive board game as a learning tool in a classroom are students with disabilities or different learning disabilities, and the inclusion of those kinds of students. I think that it's an important thing to address and that some students may not be comfortable with interacting with a game or the use of the technology or things like that.

(00:33:02):

It also feels more of a social time while you're playing a game and maybe those kinds of settings are not accessible for all students in the same ways. And so when student evaluation comes into play while playing a game, I want to be mindful for those kinds of students who are not as outgoing or things like that. So I think that feedback is a really good tool. And it sounds like Quayd is really utilizing feedback already, but talking with students about their own reflections of their learning and not just feedback on the physical game structure or the game play, but actually about this is how I felt before we played the game. This is how I felt during the game. Maybe it's confused or stressed or overwhelmed or excited. And then after the game, I feel like my comfortability as a student has changed in this way, or my learning in the class has changed in this way, or my ideas of the class content have expanded and integrated into my other classes in this way.

(00:34:05):

And having those kinds of conversations I think would be a really good mode of evaluation so that it's not just focused in on the student participation during the game play.

Shane Wood (00:34:15):

I think one thing to add to that question and maybe to expand what Sophie is saying is that points are very central to this game. Students have 100 points. So I think the thing that I would like to know as a teacher are what are the moments of where we can measure learning in the gameplay, again, maybe through a user experience perspective? Because the points aren't going to really tell me anything as a teacher. They're central to the gameplay, but they aren't going to tell me learning. To me, they don't measure the learning.

(00:34:45):

So I think there's got to be elements in this game where students can self-reflect kind of be metacognitive where they can write about their learning to share their learning, to share how they're engaging or how they're understanding argumentation and research and claims more robustly. Because the game itself isn't going to tell me that. As a teacher maybe I would look at this and say, "Hey, how can we build in reflection more?" And maybe that looks like starting with pre-reflection measuring or having students think through what do students already know about argumentation and claims and research? And then maybe middle way through, how is the game helping them better understand argumentation?

(00:35:25):

So having these checkpoints more or less. And then at the end, again, kind of an added reflective component of that where the teacher is getting a sense of actual learning.

Sophie Miller (00:35:36):

That's an interesting point, Shane and I thoroughly agree with that part. Having this component of self-reflection help students to review some of the points that they learned from the game. And also one of the points that you mentioned was the game is not going to teach them. That is true. And here's where I want to emphasize one thing, which is where when we are applying gamification, the context of education, we exactly don't have to follow that hard and fast rule of this has to be a game. Right? So they don't have to play that complete board game in that entire session. So instead, we can give manual passes.

(00:36:05):

So we say, "Okay, we started squad zero and then you're going to move on until squad 23." And we take a stop there and we are going to have that reflection check. So either that activity could be students like they're writing a document of a self-reflection, or it could be a quiz that relates to some of the learning objectives that students have to satisfy for that particular lesson.

(00:36:28):

I strongly agree with that point, which Shane mentioned like the game is not going to teach, so you have to set those manual points within your game to review and then to assess those key learning objectives of the course.

Shane Wood (00:36:40):

It makes me think of this framework, it's called the postsecondary framework for success. And I think there's also an iteration, it's called habits of mind, which is what are the things that we're actually trying to foster in students in a classroom? And some of them are like creativity, curiosity, perseverance, metacognition. So the game itself is kind of the tool, but those are the elements of learning that we really care about as educators. And I think the thing with the gamification at times too is questions about do we want to foster competition? Do we want to foster extrinsic motivators?

(00:37:17):

I feel like in education research that has been challenged a lot throughout history. We're trying to actually foster intrinsic motivation. So we started this conversation by thinking through what are the learning experiences that maybe we remember and it's ones that we've had agency. Or it's ones where we have felt a part of it. Well, that's intrinsic motivation, right? That's not an extrinsic motivation. So maybe the assignment is that kind of more outside external force, but what's really happening is that intrinsic motivation that causes us to remember it, to participate in it, and to have that agency.

(00:37:53):

So I think that's really interesting about this conversation as it relates to gamification and then also learning. I think there's a lot of different ways to talk about it, and I think it's really fascinating that he's allowing us to do this through the board game.

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:38:09):

That's a wonderful point that you brought about intrinsic motivation. In fact, I think when I see gamification more than fun, like I don't see you take gamification and then say, "Hey, I'm going to apply gamification because I want to turn something that is unfun to fun." It's not like that, but I see gamification as a tool that promotes that emotional engagement of students within the task. So how do you create that emotional engagement? So that's where this intrinsic motivation plays a major role.

(00:38:38):

So students have to feel invested within that gameplay. So that's one of the things that happens within the games. If you take traditional games that players play hours and hours. So if you boil down to the question, "What's going on there?" How do players play these games hours and hours because they're emotionally engaged within that gameplay because they have a lot of intrinsic motivation that they can relate and associate to within the gameplay and then they're working on. So if we could leverage those components and bring it over here, we could promote that aspect of intrinsic motivation.

Sophie Miller (00:39:06):

Something that I'm thinking about as a student who is very invested in my education and I love going to class, I know that that's not everybody. I'm very aware of that. And I think about the students that I see two or three times in the semester in a class, and what happens if that student comes to class on the first day and then comes to class, five classes later and they're in the middle of this board game? I know that it takes a couple class periods to get through the whole thing. Do they feel like they can enter it? Are they down a bunch of points?

(00:39:42):

Everybody is already invested and they've lost that hook that you get right at the beginning of a good book kind of thing. And so I was thinking about that in terms of the intrinsic motivation that you two were mentioning, and how do we create that for students that maybe got carried away with something else the last couple class periods and still wanting to include them and create that intrinsic motivation for them even though they might be coming in partway through.

(00:40:08):

So I don't know if I have a firm suggestion or answer there, but it's something that I'm cognizant about. And again, going back to that linear board game and maybe linear isn't the best option for these students that may come in halfway through. I think that groups or teams could work well for all kinds of students that may struggle with some intrinsic motivation being around others who have a lot of it and are very invested and things like that.

Matt Wittstein (00:40:36):

Sophie, that's the perfect segue to my next question is thinking about how to scale this in different ways. Quayd's class is typically about 30 people, and this doesn't feel like the type of game that you could really play all 30 people working through one argument at the same time. How does this scale to maybe group work and thinking about... I know we've all experienced the weird group work dynamics that can happen. Sometimes groups work wonderfully together and other times one person dominates

and other times there's genuine conflict. How do we scale something like this so that it does work for as many students as possible?

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:41:11):

That's actually a great example for a real world problem, the situation that you mentioned. Because building a game of the scale can obviously hit the continuity. If you were to extend beyond one class session, it's always a problem. So in this case, what I would envision is to probably the space-based approach, which I said we set some manual points and each goal for a particular... Rather than thinking of this game as a big picture, setting down into set milestones like that. So that's your big goal. You got to traverse through the map, but we are going to do it into milestones like milestone one, you are going to go over and then we are going to learn these skills. And then milestone two, milestone three.

(00:41:53):

So taking this big goal and then breaking it down into multiple sub-goals could be one thing where you are completely into the process where I have to do this on multiple sessions. So each session we are thinking, of course, it's easier said than done in this case, but it requires a lot of iterations to go over this. But first one would be to break it down into sub goals. And in terms of groups, I would usually suggest playing this game as part of a group.

(00:42:19):

And it's okay. There'll be problems within the group, and that's how it is. In real world if you go, there are a lot of issues within the group and understanding. And then collaborating with the group is always a challenge in which our organization, we work. So I'm a strong supporter of group work, but shuffling the groups frequently can also cause some issues. So probably we could stick onto same small groups. And also one thing that I realized with these small groups is because students, they find more comfortable expressing like when they are within short groups about several perspectives that they have.

(00:42:53):

So having these short groups for X amount of time or for this entire topic or for this entire game would be one way to go. And then breaking down into sub goals would be an issue.

Sophie Miller (00:43:04):

I think that the small groups is a great idea. I'll mention a small group that I had last semester actually that worked really well. And what the professor did was gave us a Google form in the beginning of the semester and asking about our learning styles, preferences for the classroom if you like sitting up front or if you like sitting in the back, if you like to procrastinate, if you don't like to procrastinate, if you're usually a leader or a follower, things like that. And then he made our groups.

(00:43:36):

And while that felt a little bit elementary at the time, it was really nice because I didn't have any friends in the class. I didn't know anyone in the class. I don't know who I would've paired up with had he not assigned me with somebody or a group of people. And so it kind of leveled the playing field for everybody. He assigned our groups. He told us exactly where we were sitting. And then we were given the ownership back a little bit when he said, "Make a team name and make a group chat." And then we just sat with these people.

(00:44:05):

Whenever he did turn and talks, we already knew who we were talking to. And a lot of comradery was built through that, and there was continuity in those people and those peers. So that was really helpful

for a successful group. I know there's always going to be conflict and things like that. So those were just some strategies that my professor had used. In terms of a different kind of layout for the game.

(00:44:29):

I'm thinking about how currently there's a clear start and a clear finish to the game. And what if there wasn't? Maybe it would make it more accessible so it didn't feel like you had to spread it across multiple classes where you could use it throughout multiple classes, but there didn't need to be a firm pause or play when you resume. Maybe there are specific goals that you have to reach instead of reaching an end.

(00:44:57):

Maybe each group has different set of goals. Things like that that could kind of make it more transformative, more individualized, more flexible for each group or each class that the professor may have. And that agency may be given back if there are options given to the students to say, "How would you like to play this game? What goals do you have in mind when you're playing this game?" And he had a list of goals that you can choose from, and those are your goals that you have to meet to win or to build points, things like that.

Shane Wood (00:45:28):

Yeah, I agree. I think that context is really important of 30 students per class. And from what we know, we're talking about a first and second year writing rhetoric argumentation class. So I think knowing that context and as someone who teaches similarly those courses is I personally would not have this an entire class game. I would break this up into groups, small groups, probably three to four students. I think circling back to the points that we made earlier about engagement and participation is you're just going to get more engagement participation in that smaller group setting than a larger setting.

(00:46:04):

I think something that I'm also cognizant of that this is probably a general education curriculum class, so students probably didn't even have the choice to be in this class. So you have to think through as a teacher in this particular context that not every student is going to love reading and writing and talking about research and argumentation.

(00:46:22):

But with that said, how do you get them involved in participating and engaged in the work that you're trying to do throughout the semester that centers on reading and writing, right? I think one great strategy is using these smaller groups where students are engaged in that participation together. I just don't see this working as successfully in a large group like a 30 class, and you're all trying to do it together. To me, I'm thinking about, okay, what students are excluded? Sophie talked about this a little bit from a disability studies perspective, who's included in this? And what we know of ourselves and students is thinking through that personality of intrinsic and extrinsic, and you might have some people who dominate a larger classroom space more than others.

(00:47:07):

So I think in terms of its effectiveness, I would use it in that three to four more intimate personal, small group settings and then have points of reflection where we can move from those small groups to larger maybe class discussion, talking about challenges, successes, experiences within that.

Sophie Miller (00:47:26):

I think that's a great point, Shane. When students are coming into a class, a lot of students have different goals. Some students might just feel like, "I'm paying a lot to be at this school and I don't have that much time. I have my job, I have my roommate problems, and if I'm going to come to class and play a game, I don't want to be there." And so I think what's really important is that there's a balance of engagement and fun, but also strong learning initiatives and objectives.

(00:47:54):

And maybe that is part of the reflection that happens before the game starts or at the beginning of the class for the semester is, "How silly do you want this class to be? How engaging, how fun, how focused do you want to be? What are your career goals? What are your goals of being in a university? Why did you come to university? Did your parents make you? Are you paying your way through?" That's a very personal question, but getting the context of which the students are coming into the class may shape and frame the way that the game is being played. And so I think that's a very important balance that needs to be kept in mind with this game as well.

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:48:34):

Nice point, Sophie. Speaking of goals, I also agree with both points with what Shane and then Sophie expressed about like, "Hey, this can expand to multiple sessions." And also thinking about the specific hard stop. You have the start and then finish. You play through this, and then you take a hard stop. So thinking it from game designer's perspective, if I have to sit and design a game, what is the first thing that I start with? I first start with a goal. Here is a goal. This is what my players have to achieve. That's the main point.

(00:49:03):

But if you're taking the same structure and employing it in a classroom or an education environment, we have to negotiate these terms. It doesn't have to be a [inaudible 00:49:11] Right? So what really matters here, is it the students to complete the game or to finish our satisfy all of those learning objectives?

(00:49:18):

So in our case, it's not about finishing the game, it's about getting those learning objectives done. Right? So rather than having that fixed up, expanding this into multiple sessions and having those sub-goals would be a supportive factor. So that's one point that I wanted to highlight. When we take the actual game elements and then apply to this non-gaming area, the context like education, we have to negotiate certain parameters to fit the context of our class learning objectives, the goals that we have decided for the course.

(00:49:45):

So it is okay. It's not a hard and fast rule that we have to exactly follow those measurements of game design over here, taking those elements, fitting within this context. But what really matters over here is that the context and then the needs, the needs of the students. So here, what are the needs of the students? So those objectives and giving them that engagement within the overall process.

Shane Wood (00:50:04):

It makes me think of how a teacher could have a small group of students play this game with three to four and then say, "Hey, you know the goals here is to communicate research argumentation, how to make claims? I want you to design another game. You group of three or four. You design the game. The goal is the same. You design the game. You get to create it." I think that would be really cool and

interesting to see the different games that students come up with. And again, it's kind of promoting that agency more where, "Hey, here's one model. This isn't the only model. You design it."

(00:50:39):

Or maybe a teacher comes in and says, I want us to co-create a game together. Again, maybe that's a little bit larger, but I'd be really fascinated to see in a class of 30, if there's three students per groups, what are the 10 different games that the class can come up with that has the same goal in mind?

Matt Wittstein (00:50:57):

Well, I just want to thank you all for this awesome conversation and discussion. I think we've got a lot of good stuff to take back to Quayd and help him sort of improve and tweak this idea that I think is already a pretty cool idea. So thank you all so much for being a part of the show.

Sophie Miller (00:51:11):

Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed this conversation.

Pratheep Paranthaman (00:51:12):

Thank you.

Shane Wood (00:51:14):

Thank you.

Matt Wittstein (00:51:18):

Hi, Quayd. Welcome back to the show.

William “Quayd” Snell (00:51:20):

Thanks for having me back.

Matt Wittstein (00:51:22):

So we had a robust conversation about your Try a Claim game with our panel, which included Sophie Miller, a fourth year psychology major, early childhood and adventure-based learning, double minor and Center for Engaged Learning student scholar. That's a mouthful. Pratheep Paranthaman, an assistant professor of computer science and the coordinator of our game design minor at Elon University. And Shane Wood, associate professor and director, first year composition at the University of Central Florida.

(00:51:51):

I can honestly say that the panel liked a lot about what you've developed for your argumentation course, specifically how it aligns well with learning goals. It keeps students actively engaged in the learning process. And Sophie commented on how this would really likely help build positive relationships in a classroom, which we all know is really important to a good learning environment.

(00:52:13):

Our discussion stayed close to a few main points. In thinking about some of the strengths you might lean into improve the game, the panel suggested that any changes you make to the game should really focus on keeping or enhancing the engagement level and the autonomy built into it for your students. This might help support intrinsic motivation and also allow students to explore the process of argumentation

on their own terms. We often think about fostering particular ways to enhance learning, such as creating competition or valuing creative output. And Shane saw some great opportunities for you to intentionally develop some of this through your game.

(00:52:49):

As we started talking about how evaluating student learning intersects with playing a game like this, Sophie really wanted to emphasize just centering equity and accessibility into that piece as this game might favor more outspoken individuals or be difficult to follow for students with, say, a vision impairment. The panel agreed that playing this game in and of itself doesn't necessarily provide clear points at which to do sort of learning check-ins. So thinking about your assignments that might parallel playing the game or using some elements of pre, during, and post game reflection could create that opportunity for you to assess students' learning while also receiving feedback on the game itself.

(00:53:29):

Mechanically, there were some mixed feelings about the linearity of the game, maybe a necessary piece for your learning goals. However, having some milestones or clear stopping points could serve two purposes. One, clear times for you to check in with your learning outcomes. And two, easier points to start and pause the game activity as the semester unfolds. I know we talked about how sometimes you sort of play through it and sometimes there's these natural starts and stops. Having those milestones might help you know when to have a start and a stop when using the game.

(00:54:00):

Pratheep, coming from a game design perspective suggested keeping the linearity, but maybe creating some variations and rules and mechanics to allow autonomy. Two of the ideas I especially liked from the conversation were to have groups of students after playing the game, create their own games that teach argumentation and adding a visualization that shows students learning progress alongside their game progress.

(00:54:24):

Shane also envisioned the materiality of a board game potentially being valuable to this while also thinking of collaborating with students or colleagues to create a digitized version of the game using game development engine such as Unity or Unreal. And that would definitely require some partnership, but it could be a cool way to sort of put it on your phone or put it on a computer instead of doing it with a Prezi in front of the class.

(00:54:48):

Overall, we were thrilled with how this really leverages gamification to really get students to be active participants in their own learning without adjusting your course or activity learning outcomes. So kudos to that. I mean, it's really cool that you've linked this to your course and your learning outcomes because I don't think it came up when we talked before. How do you or might you integrate using the game into your student learning assessments, like when you're giving an assignment and grading a student?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:55:16):

I don't really have any assessments within the game, so that's something I'll definitely think about that I think could be an interesting part. The points do that in some way in that I call them ethos points or authority points, so they understand that at the beginning of the game, the person making a claim is essentially waging how much authority they want to put on the claim that they're giving. And we can use that and kind of check in with students to see where they're at regarding their authority points.

(00:55:43):

I feel like maybe there's a better way to do it, but the main way I do it is through the assignments. So the second assignment that I talked about before, which involves them picking a controversial topic, one where there's expert consensus, but some portion of the general public disagrees with a consensus. From there, they're going to pick four sources. They'll pick an academic source and then they'll pick what I call a popular academic source.

(00:56:06):

So it's kind of like popular science, but it can be over any academic topics. And those should ideally be representing the consensus, whatever the consensus is representing it or taking it for granted. And then they have to pick a news source and an opinion piece, and those should be representing a different position. And then from there, what they're doing is they're essentially playing the game with those sources.

(00:56:29):

So they need to be able to identify the claims in each source. They need to find anything is defined. They have to think about what would indicate the claim was true or not true, and give information and think through the reasoning. And they actually give me the Word doc that we put their claim and information in. They'd give me those for each of their sources. So they're also turning in a version of argument maps for each of their sources. And they'll also do this again at the end when they're writing their own research paper, so I can see how well they understand the game and how well they're implementing the strategies we play in the game.

Matt Wittstein (00:57:03):

Are there any ideas that our panel shared particularly resonate for you that you think will work well, that you might try out?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:57:09):

I think definitely the learning check-ins. And now that I think about it, the trophies. I'm definitely concerned about, and this has been an issue, the extroverts dominating the conversation. I've really just kind of taken it upon myself to get the introverts to speak or to participate. They have to in some way because everybody has to vote in the game. And then also I'll encourage them to play the game outside of class with each other. They have access to the materials or I'll create assignments outside of the class that have them implement aspects of the game.

(00:57:42):

But during class time, there's really nothing to do that. So I think definitely doing things to involve introverts more, making trophies. Again, there's a concern there that might favor extroverts, but I've already thought of 10 trophies off the top of my head that I think would be great that I could give at the end. So also it could distract them from the authority of points if they don't like the amount of authority points they have at the end of the game. I think that could be great. And then again, those learning check-ins I think will be important.

Matt Wittstein (00:58:11):

I know you're thinking about how to extend the offering and maybe more formalize how folks can play this game and maybe ways that you can share it more readily with other folks. How do you feel about

that piece of student partnership and campus partnership? Are those resources practical for you to be able to develop this into something more meaningful?

William “Quayd” Snell (00:58:32):

A little bit. My students are always going to collaborate with me. I try to create that type of atmosphere, so I'm sure that will happen. And I've had a couple students in my class who are interested in games who have given me great suggestions in the past, and I would be open to ones in the future. I do have a few multimodal centers on my campus. At one point, I was at them all the time, but because of COVID and certain other things, they became harder to access. So in terms of working with colleagues, that's going to be a little bit more difficult though it is technically available.

Matt Wittstein (00:59:07):

Wade, I just want to thank you one last time. Your Try a Claim Game is super cool and I'm really excited that you were able to share that with us and our panel had such an awesome conversation. So thank you and good luck with your future development with it.

William “Quayd” Snell (00:59:21):

Thank you.

Matt Wittstein (00:59:29):

Limed: Teaching with a Twist was created and developed by Matt Wittstein, associate professor of exercise science at Elon University. Dhvani Toprani is Elon University's assistant director of learning design and support, and serves as a producer for the show. Jeremiah Timberlake is a class of 2024 computer science and music in the liberal arts double major at Elon University and summer 2023 intern for Limed. Music for the show was composed and recorded by Kai Mitchell, a class of 2024 music production and recording arts student at Elon University.

(00:59:59):

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