

Professional Development Grant

Final Written Report

Spring, 2017

Paper Panel Presentation entitled “Board Games as Pedagogy in the Classroom”

For the

Central States Communication Association Conference

Minneapolis, MN

March 15-19

Alexis Z. Johnson, Ph.D.

29 September 2017

B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

The purpose of receiving the professional development grant was to present a research paper at the Central States Communication Association (CSCA) annual conference. The paper that I presented focused on an assignment that I have integrated into my interpersonal communication course as a creative component that encourages students to critically analyze an issue in communication through the development and playing of board games. The students are tasked with creating an original board game related to an interpersonal topic and using literature in the discipline to help craft their games. There was a call encouraging other scholars using board games as pedagogy to come together to discuss their ideas in their academic papers. In addition, the presentations provided a space to introduce new and innovative ways to help students retain information learned in class. My goal was that the presentation I gave would encourage other educators in our discipline to think of creative ways for students to make connections with course content.

C. Brief Review

According to Utah and Waters (2013), “as neophyte educators, we were plagued with the same question at the end of each semester: *did our students really learn anything?* Was there a qualitative change in their way of seeing, experiencing, understanding, conceptualizing something in the real world (Marton & Ramsden, 1988)? If the central purpose of education is to empower learners to take charge of their own meaning-making (Novak, 2010, p. 13), then it was painfully clear that we were missing the mark. Hence, we turned to learner-centered approaches in our teaching (pg. 2).” Board games can be used many ways in classroom settings. Games can teach student’s goals, create a sense of mystery, fantasy, and curiosity, and they are challenging. By creating board games, students are called on to be active learners rather than simply a

“passive observer” in the classroom (Kinchin, Lygo-Baker, & Hay, 2008). They are challenged to make a connection between real life experiences (e.g. board game concepts) and the knowledge they are learning in class (e.g. key concepts and ideas in interpersonal communication) (Wu et al., 2014).

The goal of my project was to develop a learner-centered teaching tool that promotes meaningful learning and enables higher education instructors to model critical thinking through the creation of board games. Board games allow students to immerse themselves in the content in ways that many traditional learning models do not. I posit, that by utilizing games in a learner-centered classroom environment, that instructors can model the basic process of critical thinking in everyday pedagogical practice. In doing so, instructors can create a space where students can engage in critical thinking skills in the classroom (Utah & Waters, 2013). Critical thinking is important, because it involves developing cognitive capabilities in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. Critical thinking is considered an essential tool of inquiry, allowing people to become more informed citizens and make productive decisions for the greater good (Facione, 2000, p. 65). As instructors in higher education, I believe it is our duty to consistently think of new tools to integrate into the classroom that can promote the process of critical thinking effectively and allow students to take charge of their education.

D. Summary of Experiences

The opportunity made possible by this grant allowed me to reevaluate ways that I implement creative components to learning and get ideas from other scholars in the field. What was most interesting about the presentation was that I was one of the few professors having students create their own board games from scratch. I brought a few of my student’s games that have been particularly successful, thought provoking, and well developed to show others. Many scholars asked if I would share the assignment and any literature that I may have on the topic. I

was also approached by those on the panel with the hopes that I would be interested in writing another paper for a future conference. The chair of the panel let me know that she was planning on putting together a book on bringing creativity into communication classrooms. She asked me if that would be something that I would potentially be willing to write a chapter for. I am excited to see what opportunities this presentation affords me in the future. As demonstrated, I was able to make invaluable connections and gain insight from scholars who take similar, yet different approaches to educating students.

In addition to attending my own paper session, I was also able to attend countless other panels. There are so many brilliant minds that come together to share their knowledge and I always take advantage of this at conferences. For example, my focus is on health communication. Therefore, I went to as many health communication panels as I could so I can stay up to date in the field. Hearing other's projects encourages me to write my own research and explore questions I find myself asking during presentations. For example, I sat in on a panel that discussed the silence and stigma that often surrounds miscarriages. They were brainstorming ways to create open communication channels about this difficult experience and how to combat stigma's associated with miscarriage. This project made me think of my own work on educating and dispelling myths associated with suicide and mental illness. My research also seeks to create more open communication surrounding these health issues to help people cope more effectively. I was able to see a clear connection in what they are doing that relates to my work. As a result, I was able to pick up some new literature from their work that informs my own.

I view conference attendance as a way to stay up to date with current scholarship in the discipline. My focus is on health communication and issues surrounding communication with mental health. However, a secondary area of my research focuses on ways to facilitate critical

thinking in the classroom and how to create interactive learning environments. Thus, a portion of my research is dedicated to finding new ways to teach my students. In doing so, I'm able to not only learn what other professors are doing that is successful, but I am able to strengthen my own skillset in the classroom. I view teaching as an ongoing process of discovery. It is a place to not only enrich our student's lives, but to learn and grow in our own experiences.

E. Conclusion

Presenting at this conference afforded me the opportunity to discuss creative, innovative, and new ways for our students to make real world connections to communication content. In sharing ideas and findings it provided other scholars a space to bounce ideas off of one another. In addition, in attending, I was also able to get other ideas for future research projects and make connections with scholars focusing on this type of research. These connections will create new opportunities for me as I continue to advance my program of research and skillsets in the classroom. I will continue to focus on learner-centered and interactive approaches to facilitate critical thinking and enhance higher education learning environments. I also hope that the connections made at the conference will potentially lead to future publication opportunities and conference presentations. I appreciate that Arkansas Tech University offers the professional development grant. Without this grant, I would not have been able to attend the conference and gain such knowledgeable information or network with others in my discipline. Thank you for your support.

F. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Facione, P. A. (2000). The disposition toward critical thinking: Its character, measurement, and relationship to critical thinking skill. *Informal Logic*, 20(1), 61-84

- Kinchin, I. M., S. Lygo-Baker, and D. B. Hay. (2008). Universities as centers of non-learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33 (1), 89–103.
- Marton, F. & Ramsden, P. (1988). What does it take to improve learning? In P. Ramsden (Ed.), *Improving learning: New perspectives* (pp. 268-286). London: Kogan Page.
- Novak, J.D. (2010). *Learning, creating and using knowledge: Concept maps as facilitative tools in schools and corporations* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge
- Utah, C. & **Waters, A.Z.** (2014). Confronting Critical Thinking Challenges “in” the College Classroom. In Shedletsky & Beaudry (Eds.), *Cases on Teaching Critical Thinking through Visual Representation Strategies* (pp. 140-156). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Wu, C., Chen, G., & Huang, C. (2014). Using digital board games for genuine communication in EFL classrooms. *Educational Technology, Research and Development*, 62(2), 209-226. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11423-013-9329-y>

2610 Friday 4:00-5:15 PM

Greenway C

More than Moving Pieces: Board Games as Pedagogy

Sponsor: Instructional Resources Interest Group
Chair: **Malynnda Johnson**, University of Mount Union

Presenters: **William P. Jennings**, University of Cincinnati
Kathleen M. Turner, Aurora University
Daniel Cronn-Mills, Minnesota State University, Mankato
Alexis Zoe Johnson, Arkansas Tech University
Alexis Pulos, Northern Kentucky University

People might think it's all "fun and games" when we talk about having students play, however this panel will provide the method and rationale for how games create opportunities for learning. Given the versatility of games this panel will present the argument for the use of games as a pedagogical tool. Specifically, this panel will discuss the various types of games we use, the theory and concepts they apply to, and the manner through which games can advance our pedagogy.