CHAPTER 14.

KINGDOMS OF ADARYA: CONSIDERING THE ETHICS OF A GAME FOR SCHOOLING

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Games and learning research is no longer novel and no longer new. We have experienced a solid decade of work on better understanding the forms of situated learning found in games,[1] exploring their nature as designed experiences,[2] and applying games to numerous instructional contexts (e.g., McCall's use of games in a high school history class).[3] While there is still value in advocating for advantageous approaches to the implementation of games within instructional contexts, there is also much room for the critical and reflective analysis of what games are actually good for in these settings, at what times and in what places they are appropriate, and how the details of their implementation can support and conflict with the daily work lives of teachers. That is, while advocacy *for* games in classrooms is the emphasis of many of the chapters in this book, perhaps what we need most at this juncture is a critical exploration of the limits of games in formal instructional environments. What can games do beyond affecting learning outcomes? Can they be implemented as classroom-management systems? Could games be a way to moderate or deescalate tensions in the classroom?

One of the key legacies of early games and learning scholarship (such as the foundational work of Gee and Squire) is that games are often promoted as means to challenge existing models of "traditional schooling,"[4] implying their utility as primarily critical devices to illustrate situated, designed forms of learning that can be aligned to the teaching of many forms of instructional content. But the realities of how games can be and are implemented within schools are where the rubber hits the road, so to speak, for many teacher practitioners. As an additional complication, the realities of contemporary "traditional schooling" leave many open questions about the ways that games for learning may privilege particular instructional environments and imply specific work environments for teachers.

1. Gee, J. P. (2003). What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. Squire, K. (2006). From content to context: Videogames as designed experience. Educational Researcher, 35(8), 19-29.
3. McCall, J. (2012). Gaming the past: Using video games to teach secondary history. New York, NY: Routledge.
4. Gee, J. P. (2004). Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling. New York, NY: Routledge.

We need a further advocacy of not just "good games for learning,"[5] but a frank critical discussion of the forces and concerns that lead us to implement games in certain ways in instructional contexts.

In this chapter, we begin to explore this alternate path, discussing a challenging recent case of games for learning, which approaches a set of questions about core assumptions of games-for-learning practitioners while raising new questions about the means by which games may give rise to valuable learning experiences. In particular, through a look at this illustrative case—the tabletop game *Kingdoms of Adarya*, co-designed and co-implemented by one of us (Lucas Cook)—we wish to complicate the discussion of when and where in a school games can be applied, and who may benefit from their application. In advocacy-oriented discourses on games and learning, games are often cast as valuable tools for addressing specific forms of content within classroom environments (cf. Gee, 2004, railing against the "content fetish" that pervades much of schooling).[6] Through a look at the design of *Kingdoms of Adarya*, we ask: Games may serve as valuable tools, but to whom are they valuable, and valuable in *what contexts*? What are games *for* in learning environments, and who exactly are they for?

We explore several of these questions in this chapter by focusing on a game designed not for the delivery of content knowledge or professional practices, but toward the goal of *behavioral management* in a challenging, inner-city school. The use of a game for this purpose is certainly controversial, and clearly not unproblematic, but one that allows us to explore some of these prevailing questions. In the following sections, we will attempt to do so, first by discussing the ways that one of us (Cook) co-designed and implemented *Kingdoms*, and by describing the game's goals and mechanics in detail. Next, we will outline the ways in which specific elements of the game tied into school-mandated behavior-management systems, and issues we faced through using a game for this purpose. Finally, we will step back and reflect on ethical considerations of using games for the quotidian tasks of managing student behavior and motivating social pressure toward maintaining the activity of schooling; we will do this through reflections on the game design, the nature of implementing games in challenging schooling environments, and ultimately the role of teacher vis-à-vis the task of designing games for learning in these environments, as well as the vis-à-vis labor and employment.

A note for the reader: The description of the design and implementation of *Kingdoms* necessarily involves the individual reflection of the coauthor who was directly involved in the design of this game (Lucas Cook), and so we will switch between singular and plural first-person voice when appropriate throughout this chapter. Sections written in the plural first-person indicate either the group of teacher/designers who created and implemented *Kingdoms*, or, later, indicate the reflections of both authors (Cook and Duncan) on the significance of the game.

DESIGNING *KINGDOMS OF ADARYA*

The first year of teaching is a well-known and documented challenge. I (Cook) took on my first year of teaching in a school that was in a last-chance turnaround year, in which the school has a year to make major improvements in student learning, as measured by standardized tests, reenrollment, and finances, else the school may face closure. Before I joined this school in Southeast Washington,

5. Gee, J. P. (2007). Good video games and good learning: Collected essays on video games, learning, and literacy. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

6. Gee, J. P. (2004). Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling. New York, NY: Routledge.

DC, it had been threatened with closure because of low student performance as well as several administration issues, such as holes in attendance tracking down to the minutiae of not holding enough fire drills. I knew it was going to be a challenge, but I went into it viewing it as a challenge to be tackled, and a space in which I, a new teacher, could learn.

Very quickly, however, the school brought in new administration as well as a mostly new staff of teachers. Many of us were from alternative certification programs and were relatively inexperienced. The staff was told that, based on test scores from the previous year, the school might be shut down at the end of the year regardless of any progress we made this year. Ultimately, it was, but at the time, all we could do was to strive to help maintain the school environment, teach what we needed to teach, and make sure we kept student learning at the forefront of our efforts. It was a challenging environment, but one that I still saw as an opportunity to promote innovative instruction within.

I was assigned to teach sixth-grade English Language Arts, with a homeroom class of 15 sixth-grade girls. There was a shifting group of teachers in the classroom during the course of the year, as well as many changes of schedule as the administration and the teachers tried many different schedules and teaching methods to try to help the students succeed. Amid these issues, there was inconsistency between what I, as a new teacher at this school, was told do in terms of behavior management in my classroom, and what the administration did in terms of discipline and consequences. I was told to use Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS),[7] a system in which the goal is to focus on the positive behaviors that students show and to reward those instead of punishing negative behaviors. These rewards were tangible and served, essentially, as a form of in-school *currency*—dollars to use at the school store, among other rewards. While we tried to implement this system with fidelity in my classroom, the administration's response to reported behaviors was either to give out suspensions, or to do nothing. In general, I struggled with classroom management, not simply talking and out-of-seat behaviors but fights between students and other inappropriate physical contact between students, among my students, and among the students in the school in general.

I found this disconnect a challenge to deal with, and, on several occasions, I chose to not report behaviors of students for fear that the student would get suspended, operating under the belief that having the students in my classroom (and thus potentially *learning*) was better than their missing school. This fit my training at other schools, wherein I was supported in an approach to classroom management based on mutually agreed-upon rules and discussion as well as time to reflect upon behavior and why it was the right or wrong behavior for the situation. This was either through Responsive Classroom or Developmental Designs.[8] At this school, though, I had my classroom rules posted before students arrived, was to directly instruct them on the expected behaviors as defined by the school administration, and I was not able to construct classroom rules *with* my students, nor was I able to use any of the training I had received before joining this school as part of my classroom management.

I was an inexperienced teacher, in a challenging environment, faced with a series of classroom tasks

7. Sailor, W., Dunlap, G., Sugai, G., & Horner, R. (2008). Handbook of positive behavior support. Berlin, Germany: Springer.

8. Wood, C. (2007). Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom, ages 4-14. Turner Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children; Crawford, L. (2012). The advisory book: Building a community of learners grades 5–9. Minneapolis, MN: The Origins Program; Denton, P., & Kriete, R. (2000). The first six weeks of school. Turner Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children; Kriete, R. (2002). The morning meeting book. Turner Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.

in which I was not able to fall back on most of the training for classroom management that I had had during my career working with students. I certainly struggled in a context in which every day was a challenge in which I felt unsuccessful in managing behavior and, more important, I knew my students were not learning as much as they could. I asked colleagues, family, and administration for ideas and help and tried many things, most of them with limited, if any, success. Though my interest in teaching was not originally driven by a desire to manage classroom behavior—and whose interest ever is?—I found myself in a situation in which I needed to better motivate students to not just learn, but to participate in the project of *participating in school itself*, regardless of my own problems with the way the school operated.

The behavior-management issues in the classroom led to consequences for my teaching. The administration was unhappy with how my classroom was managed and, as a result, my classroom was combined with the other sixth-grade teacher's class, which changed the dynamic of the class in several ways, including creating a newly co-ed classroom. For the rest of year, another teacher (Mr. Marsh) and I shared a classroom with a combined class of about 25 students. Mr. Marsh was a more experienced teacher than I was, and he was one of the few teachers in the school who had been very successful in both managing his classroom and in getting his students to learn, at least as measured by mandated standardized assessments. He was assigned to me as a mentor and helped manage the classroom while I taught English Language Arts (ELA) content, and I would pull a small group to do targeted math instruction during his classes.

Though we were put together because of some of the pervasive classroom-management issues faced in the school, Mr. Marsh and I both discussed and experimented with innovative techniques for teaching and management. Through our discussion, we decided to incorporate a game into the daily class activity—initially this was as a means to motivate students, pulling in the athletic director (Mr. Collins), who had, with Mr. Marsh, also worked on an earlier version of the game. One of the many challenges we faced was motivating students after standardized tests were completed, and we devised a competitive game that we'd hoped would give students a degree of agency, motivation, and excitement over participating in the class activities. Put in charge of managing small, student teams, we hoped that this might be an exciting way to give some students leadership opportunities as well as something fun that could motivate them in other areas of school. (Note: Other than that of the coauthor, Cook, all teacher names presented in this chapter are pseudonyms).

Goals and Mechanics

To understand the impact and some of the issues around our implementation of *Kingdoms of Adarya*, we first need to address the ways in which the game was structured, how the students participated with one another in the game activities, and how our design process evolved during the course of the two months that the game was run. The challenges we faced with the design of *Kingdoms* illustrate the potential interaction between a game's design and the contextual factors in a school that guided the design.

After the three of us (Cook, Marsh, and Collins) decided to go forward with *Kingdoms*, we spent about a month and a half with weekly design meetings and much more frequent emails discussing the logistics, mechanics, and implementation details. At first, Mr. Marsh and Mr. Collins brought me up to date on what they had done in the past in earlier iterations of the game, and then we focused on

what would be changed with my involvement as a co-designer. The biggest change was that *Kingdoms* would now be implemented over the course of, at most, two months whereas before it was a semester- or yearlong project, and thus the design cycle was necessarily truncated. We were under the gun to make significant progress with a game that could have an impact on our students' learning and classroom behavior.

The first key element of *Kingdoms* was that it was a game that was intended to be run not as a means of teaching curricular content, but as a game that could, through its play, facilitate the rest of the classroom instruction. That is, *Kingdoms*, in this implementation, was considered as a means of addressing the classroom-management issues that had plagued the school and my classroom, while connecting to the behavioral-management mechanisms ("behavior sheets"; see Figure 1 for a sample behavior sheet structure) that were approved by the school. This was an unusual implementation of a game for learning, we knew—rather than inculcate students into a set of content or professional practices, we intended to guide them through play into practices that supported nondisruptive and engaged behavior in school in general. After several weeks of redesigning the game with Mr. Marsh and Mr. Collins, we introduced the behavior sheets, general idea, and concept to the students on a Thursday and started the game the following Monday.

THIS IS EMBEDDED IN TEXT

Period	Behavior	Work	Teacher Initials
1 (ELA)	3	4	ldc
2 (Reading Huddles)	3	3	ldc
3 (Math Clinic)	4	2	ldc
4 (A&A)	4	4	ldc
5 (L&R)	4	3	ldc
6 (Math)	1	2	ldc

Figure 1. An example of a completed sample behavior sheet. Behavior and work in each class for each student would be graded on a simple 1-4 scale and then signed off by the teacher. Clinics and huddles were targeted small-group instruction. ELA indicates English Language Arts, while A&A refers to Arts and Athletics, and L&R refers to Lunch and Recess.

In *Kingdoms*, students were organized into several competitive teams, or "kingdoms," that included student participants who adopted different roles. Each kingdom/team had six students, one per role: *Leader* (who was empowered to make final decisions); *Treasurer* (who managed money and resources within the game); *General* (who was in charge of conflict between kingdoms); *Ambassador* (who made trade deals and alliances); *Scribe* (who kept historical records of the kingdom's actions); and *Scout* (who

spied on other kingdoms). We picked the leader and the treasurer for each team, and then let the students draft the rest of their teams and assign roles to their teammates.

We initially believed (perhaps naively) that we had no direct role in the game and were available as advisors for each kingdom, but in retrospect, it is clear that our decisions had key consequences. First, on the choice(s) of the leader and the treasurer for each group, and most important, through our daily assessments of student behavior, we were the engine that drove the game. After all, the game was based around student behavior sheets, which were a common tactic used by the school and which we were determined to reframe from something punitive into something that could afford students a degree of agency. The behavior-management goals of the game were simultaneously intended to help improve the aggregate behavior for the classroom while also giving students an additional reason for good behavior.

Behavior sheets were a common tactic that the school counselor used with students, so they were a familiar tool to the students and not a new imposition on their daily school lives. Regardless of our comfort with these forms of behavior assessment, behavior sheets were going to be in the classroom; we attempted to develop them into a more engaging, fun incentive structure for the students. Also, because behavior sheets had been tied to rewards for students, many students had actively *sought them out*, and we attempted to cater somewhat to that desire of students. We incorporated them into the game as a main mechanic without much reservation, choosing to track two elements of student behavior on our sheets: behavior in class and work completion. We defined good behavior in class as following directions the first time they were given and not distracting other students, choosing these two elements of classroom activity as they were areas that we had trouble with in the past with many of our students.

At the end of each class, each of the teachers would give ratings to students, rating from 1 to 4 for each student based upon the desired classroom behaviors. If there were multiple teachers in the room, each teacher would take care of the groups of students he worked most closely with in an effort to keep the ratings as fair and as accurate as possible. This was the ideal, at least—unsurprisingly, however, I often had to rate students with whom I had little interaction during a given class, and I felt pressure to rate certain students highly so that I wouldn't have to deal with a meltdown or tantrum. Behavior sheets were not intended to be shared among students, but it was done, and each team leader and treasurer would see the sheets at the end of the day. They were thus *not* private assessments, but nor were they completely public, as there was a great deal of score sharing and bragging as well as many protestations that a score was not fair. While improving upon the use of behavior sheets was one of our goals with the game, it became quickly apparent that there were many issues around using this approach to classroom management as the consequential engine that drove *Kingdoms.*

In terms of classroom structure, during the last period of the day, students would break into their kingdoms. They would then give their behavior sheets for the day to their team's treasurer, who then translated the behavior sheet marks into two forms of in-game currency—money and resources (one resource type per kingdom). While the treasurer was tallying the behavior sheets and converting them for use in the game, the leader would inform the scout where to go, the ambassador which team he or she needed to try to make a deal with, and the general if there were going to be any battles with other kingdoms. If there were any students whose roles were not used that day, they would go onto the classroom computers and use educational software, either Lexia Reading or TenMarks Math, to earn

more "money" and "resources" for their team. We had conceived of other uses of educational software as, essentially, consequential "side quests" to grind up a bit more gold for one's kingdom that day.

Each team was given a mission card at the beginning of the first game period, and then again after it completed each mission. These cards would help direct them to building up their kingdom. The first eight missions were the same for each team, and after those eight were completed, the missions were randomly chosen by the leader each time the team completed a mission. The game featured a common, overarching goal embedded in a fantasy-themed narrative: to find the "ring of power" by solving a riddle that became clearer through time. Kingdoms earned a line at a time by completing missions, and mirroring the narrative of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the team that solved the riddle and acquired the ring could then take it to be destroyed in the volcano, or use its power to take over the world of the game. Once a team decided to put on the ring and use its power to fight the other teams, it had committed to that path; in essence it became corrupted by the power of the ring.

Once the leader sent his or her other team members to do their jobs, he or she convened with the scribe and treasurer to decide upon their team's army movement and build actions for the day. If two armies moved into the same space, or an army moved into an opposing town or castle, a battle would ensue. The leader was welcome to solicit advice from the other team members but was not obliged to take their advice, giving the leader an unusual degree of power within the game. Teams would have 20 minutes to make their choices and could consult the map (see Figure 2) that was on the wall and doubled as the game board. After the time was up, each team had five minutes to make its moves on the board.

Figure 2. A reconstructed map of the fictional world of Kingdoms of Adarya. Each "starting point" represents the starting location for a different kingdom. The map in the classroom was painted by Mr. Collins on four trifold poster boards.

Turn order was based on which teams had earned the most money and resources during the day, with the teams that had behaved the best in class and completed the most work going first in the game. We would then resolve any battles that happened through the generals of the opposing teams, calculating their army size and rolling a number of six-sided dice equal to their army size divided by five. The generals would then order their results highest to lowest and compare. Any ties were removed and then for each pair of dice the higher result won and killed five soldiers of the opposing army. This would repeat until either an army was destroyed or one or both armies retreated. By the time they had all taken their moves it was time to clean up and dismiss the students for the day. These combat mechanics were at the heart of the conflict within the game, but they ultimately had only an ancillary relationship to behavior; the "game" elements of *Kingdoms* served, in this fashion, as a "carrot on a stick" to draw players into the game.

Many of the other rules were left intentionally vague and did not cover every eventuality, with the explicit purpose of letting students have as much freedom of action as possible. We said that if the rules did not expressly forbid a game action, then it could be taken. This led to many interesting interactions, including, at one point, a team's banding together to overthrow a leader who was not performing his duties. Though we were not able to bring students in as co-designers of classroom behavior assessment, we brought them in as co-designers and co-constructors of the game, letting them surprise us with how they interacted through the course of the game's play.

Overall, the design of the game reflected a genuine desire to incentivize particular behaviors among the students throughout the day, while incorporating a behavioral assessment and incentive structure that was already in existence (and desired by students) at the school. While the game featured numerous moments of conflict and collaboration, the roles of several of the designed elements of the game bear more attention and need to be discussed in detail. In the following section, we will discuss:

1. the game's use of behavior sheets to guide the player and kingdom actions throughout the day;
2. our desire to leverage social pressures and social supports to push students toward our desired behavioral goals; and
3. the use of a fantasy-themed, combat-oriented gaming structure at all, and the ways that such framings provided an escape from the day-to-day of a difficult schooling environment.

KEY DESIGNED SYSTEMS

It is worthwhile to step back a bit from the game's details and think about the ways that our implementation of *Kingdoms of Adarya* connected to and augmented elements of the classroom experience that we sought to foster. Looking at behavior sheets, team structure, and the choice of a game framing, we will show in the following section how *Kingdoms* raised new issues and questions about the ways one can and should implement games to foster desired forms of school behavior.

Behavior Sheets

The behavior sheets were, clearly, the linchpin of *Kingdoms of Adarya*'s game system. These in-class assessments were the engine that drove the game forward as well as serving as a way for students to track their own accountability throughout the school day. These were based off similar sheets that had been implemented by the school counselor to assist some students who had a history of behavior challenges. As other students noticed that a few students had these sheets, and in particular, were

getting rewards for their performance on them, more and more students asked for them. The three co-designers of the game decided that we had a perfect opportunity to give the students something that they wanted, a behavior sheet linked with a reward, while using it as a part of the game we wanted to implement. We realized that if we linked the kingdom's ability to function to the behavior sheets we could use them without linking them to a tangible reward.

Reflecting on the behavior sheets' use within the school, I was uncomfortable with linking in-class behavior with tangible rewards and expressed that I would like to seek out alternatives. All of us were uncomfortable linking behavior to tangible rewards, but we were much happier with the meager distance of linking them to rewards that supported the collective ability of a team to play a game. The fictional and narrative distance of a game such as *Kingdoms* served to remove the consequences of behavior sheets a step away from the accrual of tangible, material rewards (as many of the students in the school desired), and allowed us to give some kind of consequence to the desired behaviors that might motivate students to participate more fully in school.

As seen in Figure 1, we chose to separate out work completion and behavior because we noticed two different issues. We had challenges with disruptions in the classroom (such as talking, walking out of the class, and throwing objects) as well as a lack of work being done in the class. We made it so that if students sat silently and did not disrupt themselves or others they would get credit for that, but to get their team's resource they also had to complete the work. For these purposes it was less about how correct the work was, as that would be impossible to determine by the end of every class every day, but if the effort were made to try to complete it.

The game's co-designers thought about how best to incentivize both behavior and work completion and realized that we could make each one give a different in-game reward. Gold was required for every in-game action, and because we were more concerned with behavior we decided to link behavior and gold. We hoped that as students saw the rules and the costs for each action in the game, they would realize how important gold was to their kingdom's success and, consequently, would behave in a fashion during school to earn gold to keep their kingdom competitive. On the other hand, each team had a different unique resource (wood, stone, or iron) that was used in smaller amounts for each action. The basic buildings and actions used whatever resource the team had, but the more advanced buildings (such as hospitals that healed soldiers after battle and the ability to recruit a champion) took all three resources in combination. To get other teams' resources they had to either trade with the other team or conquer their armies in battle, thus pushing kingdoms to interact with one another either peacefully or through meaningful conflict.

We were generally pleased with the design choice here, connecting behavior and work to gold and kingdom resources, respectively. Clearly, this is one of the most controversial elements of this game's design, and we will reflect upon this further in the final section of the chapter. We took attitudes and dispositions toward school itself and essentially "commodified behavior" as a means of incentivizing participation in a troubled school. But, suffice it to say, we were experimenting and made our choices on what to focus on based on our specific needs at the time, and then we stuck with them throughout the game to see if they made a difference in the class atmosphere.

Team Structure

Distributed expertise and distributed roles in games were key elements of good games that I wanted to make sure we leveraged in the design of *Kingdoms*. I was well aware that my students cared far more about what their peers thought of them than what I thought or said, and that if I could leverage that to help make my classroom a better and safer learning environment it would benefit everyone. With the team structure and competition between teams I hoped to encourage students to encourage each other and help keep each other on track.

For instance, the three co-designers intentionally told kingdom leaders that part of their job as leader was to help their team do as well as possible, not only during last period when we played, but also during the day. If one or two people on a team didn't pull through that could mean the difference between building a castle, successfully waging a battle against another kingdom, or not doing anything that day. Leaders were thus given extra responsibility and social pressure (by us, as teachers) to continue to motivate their kingdoms, and to work toward the goals set out by us through the game activities. Additionally, this spread the reach of the game from a single period at the end of the day toward a structuring activity for the *entire day* that elevated certain students to positions of power, at least vis-à-vis the game.

We were careful about whom we picked as kingdom leaders. We tried to pick students we perceived as generally well liked and affable and who would take the role seriously; this is clearly a moment in which the power positions of the teachers shaped a key structure of the game, and within which we were attempting to use other students' activities within the game to drive students toward a particular kind of attitude toward schooling. We also chose the leaders we chose because we wanted to use the leadership roles as a chance to give some students, who otherwise would not get the chance, the opportunity at a leadership role. We gave, in some cases, leadership roles to the students we had identified as having the *most* behavioral challenges in school as a means to empower them and give them additional responsibility with managing other students.

Finally, we decided on a competitive team structure because we had noticed how much our students enjoyed competition with each other. We reasoned that if we could engage them with the game, we could then reduce behaviors that were disruptive to the classroom and learning as well as increase on-task behavior. I hoped that tasking the leaders with this role would lead to students' helping each other to stay on track or to bounce back from a rough class. Again, though, this reified a particular approach to schooling within which collaboration between students (within each kingdom) was in service of a larger, competitive structure. Behavior in school was, ultimately, in service of helping some students to "beat" other students at a fictional task, and we will return to considerations of these choices by the end of this chapter.

Why Use a Game at All?

Though this is not a designed element of a game per se, the framing of the activity as a "game" was important to us and deserves some discussion. Why did Mr. Marsh, Mr. Collins, and I choose to take behavior and work and translate them into the play of a multiplayer, collaborative, and competitive game in our classroom? First, we wanted to capitalize somewhat on novelty—we were interested in trying something different that we thought our students had not experienced before. Second, Mr.

Marsh and Mr. Collins had experimented previously with games in their classrooms, and that seemed a natural next step for me, a new teacher who was eager to adapt my knowledge of games into instructional contexts. Third—and this is not insignificant—it was near the end of the year and we wanted to do something fun with our students that genuinely excited us.

As we have discussed, behavior management was a yearlong struggle throughout the school. After trying several different iterations of PBIS implementation, along with many other methods of incentives and disincentives for behavior, I (Cook) was at the point in my employment at which I was willing to try anything that might engage students and to address our behavior problems. Rather than approach a game from a situated learning (e.g., Gee) perspective,[9] wherein mechanics and structures of games were leveraged to situate learners in a new, meaningful environment, we chose to implement *Kingdoms* for pragmatic reasons. It seemed to be a way to get students to buy into a new behavior-management system at this late point in the year, I had not found the token economies to be very effective, and I thought that getting to play a game for an hour at the end of every day would be a fun, interesting, and effective incentive for my students.

Additionally, I note that *Kingdoms* was also something that I was able to help design and deploy without a backbreaking amount of effort. We had older variants of the game that my two coteachers had used at another school in the past to work from as a base, and which we modified to fit the time constraints and the particular needs of these classrooms. If we had to design a game from the ground up without a base to work from I doubt it would have been able to happen, given our time constraints atop the work constraints. I was empowered to experiment with such instructional experiments, but *only* after mandated testing was complete and with the support of the other teachers.

The timing here has interesting relationships to my role as a teacher in this environment. I fully recognized that after the high-stakes testing was over that we had more of a chance to try new and different instructional experiments; with the pressures of the testing passed, we had both the need to address behavioral issues as well as (a limited amount of) time to do it. I also knew that my students would be ready and willing to try something other than the same basic lesson format we had been using all year. After high-stakes testing, the lower-stakes months of the school year provided us opportunities to experiment and play with games for learning.

Perhaps most important, as the three of us discussed the idea we were all simply excited by a game, not just as a means to fill time but as a way to provide students who had just completed high-stakes testing with an alternative classroom experience. This means we were willing to put in the not small amount of work needed to get the game off the ground and to maintain it through the months that it ran. This included using a game as an experience to bring fellow teachers together through brainstorming ideas for changes to the game, as well as tie-in lessons we could implement with our students. The excitement of playing a game with our students that might actually help them was a major motivating force for us.

This, of course, focuses again on our goals as teachers and on our experience as employees of the school. From behavior sheets to the structure and management of the kingdoms to the very notion of using a game itself, we were, as teacher practitioners, focused on our professional tasks and on

9. Gee, J. P. (2003). What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

experiments that would support our continuing to create an equitable and safe learning environment for all students. We (Cook and Duncan) view this experience as one that is not unproblematic, at least in the ways that the uses of games here differ significantly from those used in other instructional environments. But they also reveal ways in which teachers as employees are empowered in certain ways and disempowered in certain ways, perhaps challenging how we consider games and learning in formal instructional environments. In the final section, we will briefly explore some of the ethical considerations of *Kingdoms* that have, so far, been implicit in our discussion, and we will propose a number of insights about the design of the game that reveal potential tensions in the field.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As can be expected, a game such as *Kingdoms of Adarya* might raise a number of conflicting feelings among readers of a volume such as this. For some, including Cook and the other teachers, the game served a pragmatic and useful purpose: to bring a sense of order to an otherwise chaotic learning environment. For others, the game violates one of the central precepts of the recent games and learning movement: that games can provide emancipatory learning spaces for students who are otherwise disenfranchised by the systems of contemporary schooling. And with yet another, more distanced view of the instructional activity, there are questions here about the application of games to this particular classroom, involving the agency of Cook and his fellow teachers, the locus of the instructional task, and inherent labor issues that suffuse the use of *Kingdoms* to reify the behavioral norms of schooling in schooling environments such as these.

In the following sections, we tackle these issues in turn, addressing ethical considerations on the application of *Kingdoms* to the school, labor implications regarding the role(s) of Cook and his fellow teachers, and general conclusions about the ways that the application of games for learning may require different considerations for radically different schooling environments.

Games to Learn Schooling

First off, we need to address the big question head-on: Was it appropriate to use a game as a form of classroom management? A reading of the games and learning literature, especially the literatures focused on explicit advocacy of games for schools (such as many of the chapters in this volume), reveals a clear intent to use games to challenge, not help prop up, the problematic power relationships within school. That is, games are positioned as tools or inspirational examples of situated learning (à la Gee),[10] with which teachers can address problems with standard-space schooling through the adoption of interactional structures drawn from games, or from the applications of games themselves. Games are "things" that are used to upend or provoke traditional approaches to school, to help teachers work toward the betterment of learners, and to provide learners with forms of engagement and motivation that are rarely found in schools such as the one Cook taught in.

From this perspective, of course *Kingdoms of Adarya* is somewhat problematic. One of the reviews of the proposal for this chapter provided strong criticism for the very idea of *Kingdoms*, as if the very idea of the management of classroom behavior was a problem that a new, working teacher should strive to upend. This led to a number of ancillary questions: Was any of the management and discipline at the school ethical in design and conduct? How much of the discipline and management was implemented

10. Gee, J. P. (2003). What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

with students' best interests in mind? Isn't every system that manages behavior a way to institute control, order, and a certain set of behaviors upon a group of students? Any ethical questions about the design of *Kingdoms of Adarya* necessarily leads to a number of questions about the *context* in which it was applied.

Cook has been wrestling with these questions both during and since his time teaching, and they arise not necessarily because of the implementation of a game to incentivize these forms of behavior, but because of the necessity of implementing *some* form of behavior management because of the challenges in the school. It is important to look at the context in which Cook was working and to consider its complexity and his positionality as both a teacher and employee. Between August and the middle of May, his classroom of fewer than 30 students had either earned or been given more than *200* days of suspensions—behaviors that led to suspensions included physical fighting, harassment, patterns of disrespect toward the teacher and other students, cutting class, and repeated refusal to follow directions. This was high for the school, but as they were the oldest students and entering adolescence, not unexpectedly so; the school environment within which Cook and his co-designers worked had pervasive challenges to the project of school itself.

The root causes of these behavior issues are complex and involve much more than this specific classroom, and a full discussion requires much more space than this short chapter can afford. Suffice it to say, however, that means to address these behavioral issues were simultaneously necessary to maintain an equitable classroom for all and problematically positioned the teacher's goals in learning above all others. The conundrum here is that while these behavioral challenges may be endemic to the kinds of teaching contexts where new teachers have little power to change or even affect the systemic problems that come in from outside the classroom, they are still left at the feet of the teacher to handle. Left to these three teachers to solve, they developed an approach that successfully moved problematic behaviors from inside the classroom to elsewhere. It was a marginal success, but a success nevertheless with respect to the teachers' in-class goals.

So, with the reality that suspensions, as a method of discipline, were the alternative, and that suspensions would literally remove students from the class activities, we argue that it was a necessity that behavior management entered the picture in some form. In light of these considerations, using a game as a form of motivation was making the best of a challenging situation, and one that Cook, as a young teacher, was forced to bear the brunt of. In terms of employment as a teacher in the *workplace* that is a school, Cook (and his colleagues) opted to address behavior management using interactional structures from games that might actually be … fun? *Kingdoms* is a sort of token economy that rewards teacher-defined behavior with the ability to play a game (though in future cases Cook would be curious to implement this with behavioral norms agreed upon by teachers *and* students). We (Cook and Duncan) find the game's existing token economy much less problematic than one that gives out dollars to be spent at a school store for candy or trinkets, because it encouraged teamwork instead of everyone's acting primarily for his or her individual gain. *Kingdoms* immersed students in powerful structures for learning that ran parallel to the other schooling activities—it's just that what they learned was that their activities in school could benefit them in ways that were paradoxically less tangible than others, but that were also more socially connected.

As we three teachers redesigned the game, we operationally defined good behavior quite simply—as following directions from the teacher the first time they were given, and not distracting other

students. Of course, it was not a lack of intelligence or inherent ability that was holding these students back from performing well on state and national measures, but a lack of effective adaptation to *school itself* that got in the way of their being able to learn in a traditional schooling environment. We saw it as not only our job, but our responsibility, to equip them as well as possible to be successful within the public education system, despite its flaws. Our students were perfectly capable of behaving to the standards that we, and the school, set forth but they often chose not to do so. We wanted to give them a reason to choose the behaviors that we believe would help them in the future, beyond school, and we could use the structures of a game to help motivate them to do this.

Reflecting on the design of *Kingdoms* and about games for behavior management in general, we are thus conflicted. On one hand, after a year of struggle, Cook was happy to find a system that could help his classroom function better than it had all year long. That system was wrapped in a game, but in the end it was a game that clearly worked as *a different form of token economy* that rewarded students for "toeing the line" that we, as teachers, put into place. On the other hand, the teachers were taking something that can be inherently motivating—gameplay and competition—and co-opted it for use in the classroom to change student behavior. Cook firmly believes that the changes in behavior were ultimately positive, but in the end, Duncan argues that *the teachers* were dictating what those changes would be and were the arbiters of how much reward each student got each day.

If we were to try this again, Cook would involve students more deeply in the decision-making process and have them help define parameters by which they would be assessed. With increased student agency, which we believe should be an integral part of any behavior-management system, many concerns would be allayed. None of the students were given the choice to play the game or not, nor given a voice in how their behavior was to be gauged. It was a teacher-mandated, whole-class activity, which defeats most of the purpose of games as an activity that participants *willingly* enter (e.g., Suits's "lusory attitude").[11] One of the attractions of games is that they are an activity of choice, and we did not give the students a choice of playing the game. We did not have the opportunity to redesign the game because of time constraints, but it is an area ripe for exploration and, upon reflection, is one that is necessary for a system that incorporates student goals and perspectives.

Managing student behavior can be a daily and full-year concern for an entire school and an individual classroom. Cook tried many methods and in the end the teachers found one that worked. By using the *Kingdoms* game, we were able to accomplish much more during the rest of the day, and in that way we saw the game as a success. With the pressures from the administration around behavior management, in this difficult work environment, ultimately Cook would run this game again, taking into account concerns around choice and student agency, and redesigning the game to better accommodate student voices and student goals.

Teaching and Game-Based Learning

Naturally, then, the role of the school as a work environment must be addressed. Cook and his colleagues worked in a challenging environment, one in which they were empowered and tasked with changing classroom instruction, but not empowered to address systemic issues with the school, its administrative policies, or the social context of the part of Washington, DC, where the school

11. Suits, B. (2014). The grasshopper: Games, life and utopia. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

operated. Cook and his colleagues were not just teachers and designers, but also *employees* within the school, and some reflections on their positions with regard to the school reveal other tensions regarding game-based learning and game-based behavioral management. This is perhaps a new spin on a very old problem with regard to teaching—what are teachers given the power to do, and how do the constraints of their *jobs* help us to understand the pressures upon their instructional innovation?

While teaching is often a labor of love, it is, at the end of the day, also a *job*. Cook was no different from many other teachers in this regard; like many new teachers, he relied on the income from teaching, and as such keeping his job was an underlying concern throughout the year. His challenges with classroom management did not go unnoticed by his administration, and his job security was directly questioned on more than one occasion. In a situation where he had to "toe a line" himself and unable to run his classroom in the ways he would have liked to, Cook was eager to try to combine both the behavior-management needs of his classroom with innovative game-based learning approaches. Cook's agency within this workplace was contingent upon a number of factors, not the least being financial and job security itself.

Behavior management, and specifically reducing the degree of problematic behaviors identified by the school's administration, was one of the contingencies for Cook's keeping his job, and it served to focus some of his efforts near the end of the academic year. Cook did not have the social capital within the school to try a game such as *Kingdoms* on his own, but with the support of the other teachers he was able to try something new. Through this process, Cook gained mentorship (from Mr. Marsh, a more experienced teacher), as well as experience in managing behavioral issues in the classroom in creative ways. The work environment was such that the pressures from the school were alleviated through *the collaborative game design process with other teachers*, and the creative solution to behavior management that *Kingdoms* represented was, at least in part, a means for Cook to develop stronger bonds with other teachers at the school.

And we should not forget that Cook was also working in a school that was in transition, and that ultimately closed at the end of the year. By the time *Kingdoms* was a possibility in his classroom, the school had been informed that it would be taken over by another organization. By the end of the year, the school was not only preparing for the end of classes but also was hosting visitors from the new operator. *Kingdoms* can be seen as a tool for the *administration*—a way to show the new operator how innovative the school was, and how, even in the transitional period that the school was in, teachers were still trying new and innovative methods. Before the high-stakes testing there was a laserlike focus on how to improve test scores, but afterward there was time and willingness to try new things, which also served not just the students, nor the teachers, but the *school* itself.

Though we began this section discussing ethical considerations of a game to promote "good behavior" in a specific classroom, we quickly come to considering *teaching as labor*, as well as, in this case, innovative game-based learning in service of school itself. These are not inconsequential factors in understanding the impact of *Kingdoms*, we argue, and while pronounced in this case, are likely not unique to this particular games and learning implementation. Schools are mandated systems of instruction, teachers have affordances and constraints regarding how they instruct, and games can often be used for multiple purposes in a schooling environment. While many of the chapters in this volume focus on the role of the teacher as one who can provide new learning opportunities to

students through games—and we certainly argue that Cook engaged meaningfully and seriously in this practice—it is the ancillary workplace concerns that rarely get discussed in this literature. We consider the impact of the workplace not just as affordances that might allow a dedicated teacher to bring new learning opportunities to students through games, but offer a nuanced view in which the workplace context serves to both afford *and* constrain the implementation of games in the classroom.

Research on games and schooling has, for at least a decade, focused largely on advocacy of games for schools. But we argue that while a focus on workplace context issues (and concomitant issues that we do not have the space to fully explore, including issues of labor and power) may be uncomfortable for us to wrestle with, they are necessary to garner a full understanding of *instruction in context*. As the next decade of games and learning research evolves, we wish to see a wider consideration of the application of games to schools: foci on economic pressures around the implementation of games in schools, the ways that games and learning experiments can serve as professional-development experiences, and, as in the case of *Kingdoms*, how they can be used to reestablish a sort of status quo for a schooling environment.

The Future of Games and Learning

This is all to say that the future of games and learning must move beyond advocacy and toward approaches that value games as more than just educational tools, and teachers as more than the implementers of "interactive learning environments." If the case of *Kingdoms of Adarya* has taught us anything, it is that there are complexities involved in the interactions of game systems, social systems within schools, and even economic/labor systems among the teachers. While the games industry and hobbyist communities are continuing to adapt interesting and exciting games to implement in schooling environments, be they a *Minecraft* or a *Papers, Please* or a *Pandemic* or a *Fiasco*, our task should not be to simply identify interesting games that can be imported into existing educational systems. If we take the early recommendations of Gee seriously,[12] games should provide us with *critical* opportunities to remake and retool the project of school itself.

And yet, these are certainly difficult tasks to conceive of and to implement for teachers "on the ground." With limited social capital, limited resources, limited time, and limited support, it is unsurprising if most teachers thus have limited scope for their game-based learning innovations, advocating for games themselves (to skeptical colleagues, administrators, or parents) rather than advocating for changing school. The acknowledgment that *teaching as labor* has relevance for understanding game-based learning seems long overdue, and it is one that should be wrestled with by the field in a more principled and serious manner than has been conducted to date. We know how systems of power instantiate in schooling environments, but yet we still saddle those with the least power within those systems with the most burden of game-based educational innovation.

Was *Kingdoms* problematic, and did it reify the power of the teacher to shape and control a classroom environment? Certainly, as a "game for schooling," there are issues with whom the game supported and why it was deemed necessary. Regardless, we argue that its application was needed in the specific teaching environment that Cook was working within. And for these reasons, we suggest that *Kingdoms* is a useful case to unpack—as a window into the nexus of design, social, and labor challenges that face

12. Gee, J. P. (2003). What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

teachers who seek to innovate with games in their classrooms. *Kingdoms* and Cook's involvement with its design and implementation reveal that we still have much to study when it comes to game-based learning and so-called "gamification" of schools. While this case reveals that there were challenges in designing such a game to fit the needs of his students and his colleagues, it became clear that a focus on design is only part of the picture.

Researchers and practitioners of game-based learning need to better acknowledge the many reasons for implementing games in schools, the many factors that influence those designs, and the many ways different stakeholders interact with these instructional approaches. As a field, we have painted many rosy pictures about the power of games to provide new opportunities for students, and it is time to muddy up these pictures with real stories of the difficulties in designing for some environments, and of the challenges faced by teachers who seek to innovate. If we truly wish for games and learning to move beyond advocacy toward creating the kinds of radical reimaginings of schooling that Gee and others have envisioned, we need a better understanding of games not in terms of just their design, but in terms of their *implementation*. The needs, challenges, and power position of the teacher must become a greater part of our discourse.