Bonni: [00:00:00] Today on Episode 122 of Teaching in Higher Ed, I welcome Keegan Long-Wheeler to the show to talk about game based learning.

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Bonni: [00:00:21] Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to increase our productivity so we can have more peace in our lives and also be more present for our students.

Bonni: [00:00:49] I'm thrilled to be welcoming Keagan Long-Wheeler to the show today. He likes to use his background in science pedagogy and his technical expertise to provide others as he says with holistic solutions to their instructional and technology needs.

Bonni: [00:01:07] And he says that mostly his students are faculty members at the University of Oklahoma, where he works in the center for teaching excellence. He helps those faculty integrate iPads into their teaching use blogging to engage students, encourage students to build games, encourage students in using active learning practices and producing instructional videos and a lot more.

Bonni: [00:01:36] And one of the big projects that we will be talking about today on the show is called Goblin. And Goblin is a game way of learning more about teaching effectively. It's an interactive adventure game that is first and foremost (and I'm reading from their web site which I will be linking to in the show notes) a vehicle to experientially teach pedagogy concepts.

Bonni: [00:02:02] And the topics that are addressed in Goblin are difficulty curves and scaffolding team learning, overcoming failure, game-based learning and gamification. And all of the resources that Keagan will be talking about today

are open educational resources and we can go and see the game and even bring the game to our own communities to talk more about how to improve our own teaching.

Bonni: [00:02:32] I'm so excited to be welcoming Keegan to the show today. Keegan, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

Keegan: [00:02:39] Thanks glad to be here.

Bonni: [00:02:41] One of the first associations I ever had with your name was this creation that you and some colleagues have made called Goblin. Tell us a little bit about Goblin and what it is.

Keegan: [00:02:54] So Goblin is a well really it's a professional development where. We get a bunch of professors together and we play a game that is in the style of Dungeons and Dragons and where this came up. Is it, it originally started out as I wanted to answer the question what do games have to teach us about learning?

Keegan: [00:03:18] And while I was pondering that question and thinking about how I would develop a training around that question I came up with a few topics I wanted to cover game of creation game most learning talking about difficulty curves things like overcoming failure. Having some of these topics that are just you know pedagogy is or just concepts for the classroom kind of practical things and all while I was developing this eventually landed on the idea of well if we're going to teach things related to these concepts then they better be in a game.

Keegan: [00:03:57] So with that started development on Goblin the game with one of my colleagues John Stewart and we produced a much more simplified tabletop roleplaying game that the instructors would come in each session and the first session started out where everybody got to choose their characters whether they were berserkers or different kinds of classes that we had imagined.

Keegan: [00:04:27] And we had used public domain resources so that we could make this this goblin faculty development shareable as well. So basically how each session when as faculty members would come into the session and we would play the Goblin game for about 30 minutes and then that would connect to the discussion we would have for about an hour afterwards.

Keegan: [00:04:53] So I'll give an example of the the first session for instance. So when the first session was about difficulty curves and scaffolding and how that comes into play in the classroom. And so where we started as we played the game and we went through the learning process of how does the battling mechanics work and how do these things operate within the game.

Keegan: [00:05:16] And after after playing the discussion was actually where we would turn kind of that play on its head and talk about well how how was it that we learn to play as a Goblin game and how how did we the facilitators scaffold that experience for you. How did you in fact learn to play. And then relay that through discussion to how do we teach in the classroom? How do we scaffold barge ideas and systems and programs in the in the classroom? And that's kind of that's kind of a in a nutshell of what what Goblin is.

Bonni: [00:05:57] And describe a little bit how you and John even saw there being a need for something like a game based a way of conveying these topics as opposed to the other types of workshops that one might offer through faculty development.

Keegan: [00:06:12] Yeah so I think part of it is is part of it's going to come down to personal preference in the sense that very adamant about the idea of using whatever it is you are teaching in the teacher in the learning and teaching process both so that way the students the faculty members come away with an actual experience not not a conceptual experience but like a concrete example that they can take away from participating in the session. So that's kind of of what led from led us to develop a game to teach these game concepts in general.

Bonni: [00:06:58] And what are some of the ways that through faculty actually experiencing this versus as you say just hearing about teaching more effectively or hearing about helping students overcome their challenges. What are some of the things you're hearing back from faculty that have changed in their classes because of the experience?

Keegan: [00:07:18] Some of the related to Goblin some of the things have happened is I know one. One instructor I'm thinking of has changed her whole grading scheme. So originally it was the the model where you know you come into her class and you start out with 100 percent. Every time you make a mistake in the class or get deducted for a paper or an assignment you're slowly ticking down to that 90 or 80 that you know you're A or B ranges and lower.

Keegan: [00:07:53] And this semester she informed us that she was actually flipping that around to where now students come in and as opposed to losing credit for mistakes on assignment they're now gaining credit for those cliche one of those assignments. And you know doing so that in and of itself has been a big change structurally philosophically in terms of how she is now just letting letting the students basically earn earn their grades in a in a different way and I know I know that seems like it may seem like a very big deal. But I think it is a big psychological difference in terms of how we are assessing our students and learning in the classroom.

Bonni: [00:08:49] Tell me about the people that you have encountered along the way that really have a resistance to this kind of thing where what are some of the common objections that your faculty say I don't want to participate in this because... or I don't want to even think about putting gaming into my classes because.

Keegan: [00:09:05] So I guess the first part of that is John and I were definitely lucky in the sense that we when we put out the application for goblin we definitely got the self-selection of faculty members that were on board with many of these concepts so in our experience with the professional developmental Goblin was quite positive in that sense.

Keegan: [00:09:29] I think where we experienced that resistance is trying to explain what Goblin is and what it's trying to accomplish to two other individuals that weren't necessarily participating. And you know part of that is it comes down to the perspective about what games are and what they do. I mean for for folks that think they are just played play time and time that's not really valuable. You know it's hard to it's hard to communicate the importance of games and what they can do in terms of use use cases in the classroom depending on that perspective.

Keegan: [00:10:12] So it's it's really important that you know we as educators as folks that play games that use games always tackle that that perspective because I think that is where we have an uphill battle in terms of when when and where is this useful.

Bonni: [00:10:34] I used to play Dungeons and Dragons as I was growing up too. But it's funny when I look at Goblin it does look a little bit intimidating to me. I think particularly as a woman since I don't play any games like that any more.

Bonni: [00:10:48] Have you seen any issues as far as gender comes up where maybe some people don't want to use it because they may think they won't be able to figure out how the game works or use their own knowledge and some sort of intimidation around us. I guess the way in which the game is played.

Keegan: [00:11:04] Yeah. So there's there's many different components to this. And actually I would go so back so far back as into the development side of this as well. John and I were very intentional in terms of trying to have the characters be diverse representations of people. And that was a very challenging feat because we had restricted ourselves to open educational resources for building this.

Keegan: [00:11:37] So we're we're actually going to touch upon this Open Ed Conference in the next month from now. Oh man that's almost it's just a month away. But part of that challenge involved a lot more research and even where for some of those characters I actually edited some of them so that they would be able to represent more diversity. So I think that's an aspect of it but but another side of it as well is trying to scaffold the actual learning of how to facilitate it as well.

Keegan: [00:12:15] And that's something that John and I are still working on still working on some of our facilitation pages and how do we how do we communicate this in a way that facilitator could take it and run with it as well.

Bonni: [00:12:28] Talk a little bit more about this because this is not something that is only being used at your institution. Talk about how people who wanted to play Goblin or use Goblin at their institutions how does that all work.

Keegan: [00:12:40] So as the Faculty Development stands it is a it's on a open open license so anybody can take it use it or adapt modify it the one way select is not for commercial use though so you can't take it and sell it. But you know that's you know it's completely fine. So what would be involved for someone to get into using Goblin is that either they would need the pieces that are part of it.

Keegan: [00:13:14] So there are some graphics that come with it that we've worked on and are part of the Web site and built in one of the things that John and I are working on is basically a download one file and you get all of the manuals and all of those pieces. That part is a little bit.

Keegan: [00:13:35] That's where we're focusing in on scaffolding kind of this facilitation of this program because being able to communicate how to set it up

and run it is one of the parts that we we think will be a challenge. So yeah it's between the Web site and what we're working on now are the components for getting getting it set up and rounding.

Bonni: [00:14:00] The other project that I know you're willing and excited to share with us today maybe gives us a little bit more ways that we could dive in. I think I have a perception of it being faster or maybe less intimidating but maybe that's just me. Maybe that's a subject for myself. But tell us a little bit about eXperience Play and then we we can come back to Goblin if we need to clarify anything.

Keegan: [00:14:24] Yeah. So I think that it is that there is some truth to that for sure because Goblin was definitely large in terms of facilitation. There's there's a lot going on there's a lot of moving parts and I've kind of maintained the goal of having a new faculty learning community developed every semester so kind of this time around for the fall semester. Wanted to develop something that had a lot less overhead to get us up and going but also anyone who wanted to use it you know have it much be much more easy or easier to use than just transferable in general.

Keegan: [00:15:03] And anyways. So eXperience Play rather than so Goblin is where you are playing a game experience. eXperience Play is where you're actually developing a game and going through the learning process that's associated with game development. So eXperience Play is is built on using text based games.

Keegan: [00:15:29] So there's a tool that we use for eXperience Play called Twine and it's an open source software that is web based and on Mac Windows and Linux so anybody can get it and play with it and use it.

Keegan: [00:15:45] And besides that it's very accessible from the standpoint of you don't need any programming knowledge to be able to build these games which is phenomenal because that means that we can have you know anyone from any point in their in their life can come in and build something some story some choose your own adventure story or some game using that that type of software.

Bonni: [00:16:11] Could take a couple of examples of text based games that either people have created out of eXperience Play or just that you know that help to tell us a little bit more. I don't really know them. You said Choose Your Own Adventure and I used to read those books as a child and have done some

things in my own teaching in that same spirit. What are some other examples of how faculty are using text best text based games in their teaching?

Keegan: [00:16:37] So I think I'll give a couple of examples of what's being worked on now because those are the ones that are really exciting to me at the moment. So there's there's one individual who she teaches Spanish and she is building a game where the, you as the player play through a piece of literature. Essentially you're playing through the story of literature and you're you're reading how the story plays out and you get to take the role as the main character.

Keegan: [00:17:09] Well what she's planning on doing is having her students also either add to the story itself or build their own stories where they're actually going to have multiple pathways in terms of how the story is going.

Keegan: [00:17:22] And so they're taking a piece of classic literature and they're rewriting the ending over and over and over again. And based on the choices that you make as the main character through this story the you will experience a new ending that's never never been about before.

Keegan: [00:17:41] So taking a piece of literature and augmenting it in that fashion is is one of the text based games that's being built at the moment. Another one that's that I think is pretty interesting is one related to where like so I'll paint the picture.

Keegan: [00:17:59] So the society has broken down and you are the ruler of this post-apocalyptic. I don't know if it's medieval or not but your you're in charge. And the conflict is that you're every day more people come to you with different problems that they're facing in terms of their trade. And you get to decide well you know how did these how do these trades occur. Because there's no currency there's no units of measure at all at the moment because society has collapsed.

Keegan: [00:18:32] So what you do is you get to make some decisions that start to give you feedback in terms of well why is it important that units of measure are standardized and through the decisions you make. You know your society can either fall into more chaos or or start to start to even out and people can start to utilize a currency or a linked system or whatever is being presented that day to basically have a better kingdom in a sense. So those are a couple of projects of several that are being worked on right now.

Bonni: [00:19:14] And how is the experience playing community coming together? What, how do people find out more? How did they start being a part of the conversation?

Keegan: [00:19:25] So I'll probably guess how divided is. Right now we have some in-class sessions face to face sessions as what we have. So every week we have two sessions going right now. And the faculty meet up at that time and together we kind of have some I guess sprints almost in a sense where you know for 30 minutes we're going to try and develop your game as much as you can.

Keegan: [00:19:53] And then we do rounds of feedback where OK now let's let's let's step back let's see what you've added. Let's now play each other's games give each other feedback some positive some points of improvement and start to refine and and make those into those experiences into something that the faculty can use for either their courses or as examples when they want their students to build.

Keegan: [00:20:19] So that's one community the other community is there's a few folks that are actually participating through the eXperience Play program remotely. And those individuals are basically just completing a to do list that's going out each week.

Keegan: [00:20:35] And the To Do List lines up with the content in the face to face group each week but it has a little bit more a little bit more resources so to supplement the lack of the peer to peer interaction and the lack of access to us immediately the facilitators to answer questions.

Keegan: [00:20:56] But we try and do a good job in terms of saying that people can approach us if they want to ask questions and get involved between not and the resources we provide. If you do that to do list each week I mean you'll be in the same spot that the faculty in the face to face group are.

Bonni: [00:21:15] You've coached a lot of faculty you know a lot of different aspects as it relates to gaming. What is the hardest part about it that people don't realize will be hard? They went into it thinking oh I got that part covered and they find out actually it's a lot more difficult than it appears.

Keegan: [00:21:34] I think the easiest answer is always scope and scale. I mean it's the time that it takes to do one of these projects. It always surprises people all the time and effort. But I think part of it is because you know we don't

necessarily know how much we don't know or that we do know in terms of when we're learning to do this.

Keegan: [00:21:58] So because you're actually building a game and simultaneously learning how to build a game. I tell the faculty members you know it's it's not it doesn't have to be your first your first product doesn't have to be perfect like this is an exercise in learning so you can see what is valuable in your experience and that way you can take those experiences and translate those into your classroom if you want to use say game development as a as a method to do some other teaching.

Keegan: [00:22:30] So that is definitely a piece of it is trying to make folks aware that you know don't have to be a big super perfect project the first time. It's more important that it's a small project that gets done and completed that you can share and get feedback on for for what it is you're doing that is very powerful.

Bonni: [00:22:52] So you're constantly having to help people scale it down. Scale it to make it more simple because it's their first time doing it. Otherwise we might have these grand aspirations and then not even reach the finish line.

Keegan: [00:23:05] Yeah and that's definitely important for the eXperience Play as it exists now because it's only five weeks in five weeks. I mean not as not a lot of time to build a game from the ground up especially since the first session is spent playing some of these text based games to give some context before we actually dive in.

Bonni: [00:23:27] I was looking at your play page and for people listening in the show notes you'll be able to go look at the same page that Keegan's referring to and that I'm about to talk about. It looks. I didn't click on it because I'm afraid they'll start like some like one of those things it starts bringing all these bells and whistles.

Bonni: [00:23:47] But so is Escape from the Man-Sized Cabinet by Stephen Colbert. Could you tell me a little about this game that we could all go play and get an experience of of what it's like to play one of these games.

Keegan: [00:23:59] Yeah. So that game is very interesting because it was to my knowledge that was developed in the transition time between Stephen Colbert moving to CBS and it's hosted on CBS's Web site. And it is it's it's a game that's definitely satirical and is filled with humor and it's actually one of the games... we

play two games that I say are quote on quote required so that folks can kind of get an idea.

Keegan: [00:24:31] Because there are too many listed there to play in one session. And that's that's one of the required games. And part of the reason is because a lot of these text based games may be very serious in terms of what their content is. But Dollon is definitely much more lighthearted and sit down and have fun and kind of experience some some jokes and a fan fantastical adventure to a mythical land as well.

Keegan: [00:24:54] So it's something something that each of the faculty. Sometimes they will burst out laughing during our session when other folks are reading very serious things so it's it's quite the scene. Just a word of warning don't stay in the cabinet whatever you do so.

Bonni: [00:25:13] And is it all built around the Dick Cheney that was on his show. Stephen Colbert always would poke fun at Dick Cheney for having a man-sized cabinet I think in his office. So is it all around Dick Cheney or does it go into other topics as well?

Keegan: [00:25:28] So it it definitely goes into other topics. One of the it was brought up during our discussion the first day when we were talking about it. And some people have theorized and discussion that may be coming out of the man's sized closet was part of the transformation that Stephen himself had to go through from his time at as a character and a caricature at Comedy Central into his more serious role at CBS. It's definitely certainly a good one to start with in terms of seeing what's possible in terms of a Twine game, a text based game.

Bonni: [00:26:06] I see. And then would you share a little bit about Healing Words.

Keegan: [00:26:11] Yeah so Healing Words is the that myself and John Stewart built in preparation for the faculty development because you know we wanted to have produced a game before we were teaching others how to produce games. And it's so it is not a comedy one. I will start off by saying that.

Keegan: [00:26:36] It is quite the opposite of the Man-sized Cabinet game. It is actually a game about my experience over the summer where my grandmother passed away and it takes the player through how I felt leading up to the event. And then how I felt when I got the call and when the unexpected

happened and kind of it it even goes into the part of my life where I was trying to deal with that pain and see you know ways of healing.

Keegan: [00:27:16] And if you play it through to completion youll be presented with one of the ways of healing that that really really helped me. So it's it's very dear to my heart kind of story that's for sure. It was kind of hard to produce because one of the one of the moments you get to listen to the last voicemail that my grandmother certainly asked and when I was developing the game like I myself had not listened to that last that last voicemail at the time that I was building.

Keegan: [00:27:52] So like that was really difficult. But you know in so doing that I connected with folks in ways that I never even thought possible. Once the game was out there and you know it's it's been an experience so it's been very very valuable.

Keegan: [00:28:15] I love the name of it, Healing Words. It just is so beautiful and I love through the game but also through the Wordpress Web site that is an associate associated with it just how you were able to help others grieve. I mean you you talk about it helping you grieve and then there were so many people who loved her too.

Bonni: [00:28:35] And it's just wonderful and beautiful to go up there and look at all the expressions of love that you gave people the opportunities we talk pretty regularly about. That in American culture we're really bad at grief. We don't do that well.

Bonni: [00:28:51] And we it's just like get back to work and pretend like nothing's wrong and everyone wants to fix you. Don't be sad and whatever follows that don't be sad will depend on the person's you know perspective on what happens when people die.

Bonni: [00:29:05] But it's just generally something that is said that where someone wants to help you with your grief because your grief is making them uncomfortable. And I love that you avoided all of that and you just allowed yourself to grieve really openly and in such a healthy way and then invited others to participate in that and really taught, you taught people how to grieve and how to come together and just share a memory of such a special person.

Keegan: [00:29:28] Yeah and I I will say that it was definitely very beneficial to me to go back and read some of the stories some of those stories I hadn't even

heard before memories from my my parents memories from other family members from friends from my grandmother students like it was it was intense to go back in and see some of the lives that she had impacted.

Bonni: [00:29:53] Thank you so much for sharing that story and for just again the way in which you have taught about grief and about healing. You know this is the point in the show where we are each going to give recommendations and we've been talking today about more virtual games.

Bonni: [00:30:13] And I wanted to share about a way that you can create your own board game. My students about six or seven years ago created a board game called Bulls and Bears and they there's a company actually there's many companies out there but the one that we used at the time is called The Game Crafter and it's still around.

Bonni: [00:30:33] And you can create your own custom gameboard and they sell already pre-done pieces. Game pieces some of them are types of characters but others of them are just little pegs you know where you have the different colored pegs to use as you move your way around the game and you create your own game in Photoshop or whatever illustration program it is that you use you can draw those.

Bonni: [00:30:57] And it's a relatively inexpensive way to get a custom board game. And I just think it's a nice thing I still am playing the game with my introduction to business students now and they get such a kick out of this. That game was made by students. They would rather play that game than hear me give a lecture about the stock market and what a bull market is in a bear market is.

Bonni: [00:31:22] It introduces some of the key vocabulary that they should know about in terms of stocks and bonds. And it just does it in a creative fun way. The room is always comes alive and it comes out frequently on the Course evaluations as something very memorable and I always try to remember to take lots of pictures because it is something that people look back on as just define this.

Bonni: [00:31:41] It always comes at a time in the semester where there's kind of a lull. It brings a lot of life back into the class and I highly recommend checking out some way of creating some kind of a game and if you'd rather do something on a board game that's quite possible for people to and isn't as pricey as one might think that it is.

Keegan: [00:32:02] It sounds fantastic. I'm going to definitely check it out. So.

Bonni: [00:32:06] What do you have to recommend for us today?

Keegan: [00:32:08] So I think what I would recommend is if you have never built a game at all so I would recommend. Get in get into that. Go through the process of building a game so board game card game tech space game if you want to look at the resources on Twine as a as a platform to build a game. My call is just to to make a game.

Keegan: [00:32:35] And if you want to play a fantastic choice based game I think Life is Strange as is what I would suggest that one is playing through right now and it's phenomenal.

Bonni: [00:32:45] So Life is Strange is one that we can get an experience of what one of these games is like.

Keegan: [00:32:51] It is not a text based game it's more of a 3D graphical one but it's heavily based on choices. And that would be the that would be one that if if you are comfortable with gay things already that's the one I would suggest. And if you're looking for text based ones then I'd probably start off with some of the smaller ones on the eXperience Play website.

Bonni: [00:33:16] Yeah I'll link to that and the show notes. Do you and tell us a little bit more about Life is Strange?

Keegan: [00:33:21] So it's the story of a girl who discovers that she has the ability to rewind time and change her choices. And once she discovers she has that ability her life changes and lots of different things start coming into into play at that point. So it's it's pretty spectacular. We're talking about some choice. Choice driven games.

Bonni: [00:33:50] I love it. Well thank you so much for your time today and sharing all these great resources and Keegan it's just so fun to be subscribed to your blog and follow you on Twitter. I love how generous you are with your expertise and your both your humility but also your credibility comes across so strongly it's just a pleasure to be connected with you and also just to get to have you on the show and share what you're doing with so many other people.

Keegan: [00:34:14] Yeah it's it's been really fun. Thank you for having me.

Bonni: [00:34:18] Thanks so much to Keegan for being on today's show. I hope that everyone listening will go to the show notes at teachinginhighered.com/122 because this one is going to be chock full of links to follow up and play some of these games. Maybe they'll inspire you in some way or even to consider starting creating a game of your own.

Bonni: [00:34:42] And I, one of the things I'll be linking to is Keegan's about page on his blog I'll also be LinkedIn of course to his blog and I am so disappointed in myself because this is what it says in the fun facts part of his blog.

Bonni: [00:34:55] I actively participate in the hashtag #Games4Ed and that's the number four, ed. Twitter chats on Thursdays at 7 p.m. central standard time I play Star Wars battlefront and spitoon with my wife. I've lived in Japan and Mexico and last but not least I really wish I would have asked him about this. I really want a hedgehog. And there's a really cute picture of a hedgehog there so that's a little bit more about Keegan.

Bonni: [00:35:22] And thanks to all of you for listening and learning a little bit about games and gamification in teaching. If you don't want to have to remember to go look at all those shows you could just subscribe to the Teaching in Higher Ed weekly updates. That's an email that comes into your inbox once a week and it brings the show notes right to your inbox along with the same email an article about teaching or productivity written by me.

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