Based Learning as an Intervention to the Curriculum: A Person-Centered Phenomenological Approach to Fostering Teacher and Student Dialogical Identity in Dungeons and Dragons

Jeremy Roberts
Brandon University

Abstract

The purpose of this inquiry is to explore the lived experience of seven participants who played the collaborative role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons. Using a phenomenological research paradigm, we were interested in exploring the relationship between teacher and student and must achieve a balance between the curriculum-in-plan and curriculum as lived experience. From a holistic perspective, games are considered systems of signs and offer opportunities for engagement and intrinsic motivation which can facilitate dialogical identity. Dialogical Self Theory offers an approach to understanding identity as developed through game-based learning. Identity in this regard is dynamically evolving and intrinsically connected with others. The methodological approach taken in this research was in a hermeneutical framework and with others. The dialogic Self in Dialogical Self Theory is central to the dialogical understanding of Self in hermeneutic phenomenology. The methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, employed an interpretative lens to a teacher and student shared experience. The collective imaginative role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons, can offer an experiential format for playing identity, dialogues, to counter dominant narratives of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism, and to engage in a just and reconceptualized community.

The but de cette enquête est d’explorer l’expérience vécue de sept participants qui ont joué au rôle de joueur collaboratif dans le jeu de cartes Dungeons and Dragons à l’Université de Brandon. Le programme Études est conçu pour enseigner ce que l’élève et le professeur doit apprendre. Le but est de développer une compréhension des systèmes de signes et offrir des opportunités d’engagement et de motivation intrinsèques qui permettent de faciliter l’identité dialogique. La théorie de l’identité dialogique offre un cadre pour comprendre l’identité dialogique telle qu’elle est développée par l’enseignement basé sur le jeu. L’identité à cet égard évolue de manière dynamique et est intrinsèquement liée aux autres. Considérer la théorie de l’identité dialogique dans le contexte du dialogique de l’Université de Brandon. La méthodologie herméneutique utilise une perspective interprétative pour une expérience partagée entre enseignant et étudiant. Le rôle de l’immaginaire collectif, Dungeons and Dragons, peut offrir un format expérimental permettant aux joueurs d’explorer l’identité d’une manière dialogique, de contrer les récits dominants de néocolonialisme et de néoliberalisme, et de s’engager dans une société juste et reconceptualisée.

Personal and Professional Contexts for the Study

Ontologically, gaming culture is foundational and integral to my being. My identity is built upon gaming and the relationships I forged with others within gaming realms. It was in high school that me and a group of like-minded friends formed a group that would turn into a club that cared enough to create a safe space for marginalized students. Why can’t learning be fun from the start? This gaming association has formed the basis of the adoption and adaptation of methodologies into my practice as the measured response of a critical pedagogy.

Purpose

This study sought to understand the lived experience within Dungeons and Dragons amongst a group of high school students and educators as an extracurricular game club. Additionally, this study explored the dialogical components of existence present in game play and the influence of personal interests on the implementation of dialogical identity. Student-teachers and peers in the study were facilitated by the engaging platforms of game-based learning and my interest in the development of dialogical identity. An inherent and consequential goal of the education system is identity.

Methods

The results are generated from data collected from audio-recorded interviews and a focus group about the experience of playing the game. There were a total of three interviews, for each participant, one in a focus group, and the remaining participations were conducted via field observations. Informed consent and verbal recorded consent were obtained for each interview and the focus group. This research used Mann’s non-parametric tests to analyze the relationship between variables and to generate theoretical statements that resulted in a phenomenological description that permits us to see the deeper meaning or significance of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1999, p. 122).

Data Source

I limited this research study to the number (7) including the researcher and six former students, participants between the ages of 18 and 22, who have played the role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons in an extracurricular game club at my former high school. Participants were purposefully selected for this study, J. Dylan, Jeffrey, Azazel, and Rhioc were identified as teacher Canadian while Xanapha and Fawo were identified as Canadian. This qualitative research study utilized participant interviews, a focus group, and the observations of the researcher to understand the participants’ lived experience descriptions in pursuit of the nature or essence of the gameplay (Van Manen, 2016, p. 14).

Findings: Key Themes

The positive childhood experiences shared within a game’s narrative of creative freedom and the importance of an internal, imaginative, and integrative identification with attraction to Dungeons and Dragons’ collective imaginative drives narrative. The consequence-free arts of play, outside the consequence-filled world, for other participants, revealed a critical aspect of the engagement. The game space, as Jeffrey found, “was an infinite world.” As participants in this study described how the game a driving force through the narrative, a result of the strengths exclusive to their character and the trust they held for other players. We were able to address real world issues such as colonialism, racism, safe space, bullying, sexism, drag-queer, poverty, marginalisation, identity, death, and bullying problems while playing in the game or the game would evolve into a meaningful conversation. Through the course of the study, participants drew direct lines between the gaming world and the gaming world, indicating a preference for the freedom of the gaming world and the space to be more themselves.

Individuals acted in conviviality as a creative interaction with others and their surroundings to satisfy their need for connection, belonging, fun, and relationships. Conversations within the context of each player’s lived experience was the result of conversations and desires as expressed in conversation with others and later by the participants themselves. In the game, players had the ability to enact new identities based on a number of parameters. All participants detailed narratives of change or escape from their previous contexts. The platform of tabletop role-playing offered people an opportunity to connect through a mutual reliance on each other. Participants unannounced reported an empowerment through the diversity within the group. The uniqueness of each individual, the plurality of perspectives, contributed to the effectiveness of this platform. The in-game playability and in-game experience as a self in the characters they played covered a vast scope of possibilities in game. As the game relied on each individual’s strength, the sum total of all that strength in conjunction with the consequence free areas, gave the group a feeling of near omnipotence and a feeling of near omnipotence from playing both from a god’s eye perspective as a player and within the game itself. The game was reliant on the power of the player to be the mother. Participants consciously asked the question, how will an action impact the story? Are we participating in Dr. Dylan’s Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) was a creative process. Creativity in D&D interrelates Drama, Fine Arts and storytelling in a collective imaginative scale.

The interconnection between self and society creates an extension of self to other humans. The ability of self to gain perspective as a creative thinker as an individual into being creative thinkers together. We were transformed in dialogue. Azazel highlighted an important element of dialogical identity. "Identify oneself through dialogue and the subjectivization of meaning as a whole. Azazel found," You—you start seeing more of yourself as well as at the same time as seeing more of them.

Discussion

My study has demonstrated that the table-top role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) has the potential to become a forum for dialogical consciousness and reconceptualized identity work that confronts intersectional oppression and post-colonial identity discourses. Playing together became a game where the participants sought a better understanding of colonial power relations of settlers and colonized, even shaping the traditional power dynamic of teacher and student. Play creates a magic space in which emotional and personal development is accelerated. The potential of role-playing in D&D to facilitate dialogical interaction through a constructive reality, imaginative, and integrative narrative in an anti-colonial, anti-racist, deconstructionist, and reconceptualized just framework is important for educational practices.

Educational importance of the Study

The themes generated from the collected data, offer an opportunity to re-conceptualize epistemological and pedagogical assumptions concerning the use of Dungeons and Dragons in educational settings. There is also significant literature in the literature concerning the experience of the marginalized high school student in game-based learning. My study has bridged a gap in the literature of the experiences of First Nations students in Dungeons and Dragons. Game-based learning offers an opportunity for all participants, who truly and unrestrainedly engage, an arena in which individuals bring their identity, enter dialogues, and are transformed as a result of the communion.

References


Acknowledgements

I wish to convey my most sincere appreciation to my advisor Dr. Lynne Roussin and Dr. Martin K. Pierson for their invaluable guidance throughout the process. Thank you to my wonderful wife, Louise, who pushes me to keep challenging myself.

Contact

Jeremy Roberts, M. Ed., RobertDM351@brandonu.ca